CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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The work undertakes a study of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. The work will analyze the concept of non-violence, explicate the distinctive features of Gandhian non-violence, explore its application in various areas of human concern, and find out its philosophical presuppositions. The work will try to show that Gandhi's principle of non-violence is very much relevant today.

In the history of philosophy there are two types of philosophers – those who try to understand the world and those who seek to change it. While philosophers belonging to the former group tend to idealize lives of contemplation, the philosophers belonging to the latter group envision lives of action. The nature of man and the world also get differently painted depending upon whether speculation or action is the goal. For the former, a human being is essentially a cognitive being, a knower of the world whose goal is to obtain a clear representation of the world. For the latter, a human being is essentially a practical being, a doer of action, an agent whose goal is to bring about the required transformation of the world. In the cognitive model the world is fixed and given; in the active model reality is plastic enough to be altered. In these two models man's relation to the world vary inversely. In knowledge, in order to be authentic, our representations should conform to the world, whereas in action the world should conform to our representation. According to Gandhi, philosophy is not merely an
academic intellectual exercise. It is primarily a call for action. So the accepted
view would be to think of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as belonging to this
second category of philosophers whose primary objective is to effectively change
the world. However, in order to effectively change the world, one must also have
true understanding of it; and in order to have correct understanding one must
interact with it. To echo Kant, knowledge without action would be empty and
action without knowledge would be blind. So whether one is speculative or
practical, the other aspect cannot be ignored. This integration of knowledge and
action is well demonstrated in the case of Gandhi’s philosophy. For Gandhi, action
and knowledge must always go together. This is reflected in his emphasis on the
close link between non-violence and truth, which he considers to be the core
principles of action and knowledge respectively.

In Gandhian thought, the concept of ‘truth’ constitutes the core of his
philosophy. In Gandhian philosophy, the concept of truth has a rich content of
meaning. Since this concept provides the key to a proper understanding of ‘non-
violence’, the work will explore the different dimensions Gandhi assigns to this
concept. Gandhi points to the essential identity of non-violence with truth. This is a
wonderful insight that has many ramifications, which will be explored in this work.
It points to an essential link between reality and value\. Gandhi’s insistence on the
close link between truth and non-violence brings home the point that true morality
is to be grounded on sound metaphysics. Indian ethics has been philosophical from

\[\text{\footnotesize 1 Gandhi not only identifies goodness (moral value) with truth, but also identifies beauty (aesthetic
value) with truth. Commenting on the commonly held view that Socrates was not a handsome man, Gandhi
says, “to my mind he was beautiful because all his life was a striving after truth”}\]
In the Vedas and Upanishads, ethics has been an integral aspect of philosophical and religious speculation about the nature of reality. It has been noted that in the Vedic philosophy, the basic principle of the universe, the ultimate reality on which the cosmos exists, is the principle of *Ritam*, which is the word from which the Western notion of right is derived. There is thus a belief in a right moral order somehow built into the universe itself. Hence, truth and right are linked; to penetrate through illusion and understand the ultimate truth of human existence is to understand what is right. To be an enlightened one is to know what is real and to live rightly, for these are not two separate things but one and the same. In Gandhi’s philosophy we find the continuity of this tradition.

Gandhi’s understanding of truth is not propositional truth. In general, a proposition or a concept is true only if the facts contained within it are real. Truth, in this sense, is correspondence of a statement or concept with reality. Thus truth is a property of linguistic elements like statements and concepts. This view of truth is an everyday linguistic understanding of the truth. Gandhi’s concern was not with this linguistic understanding of truth. The word ‘truth’ is an imperfect translation of the Sanskrit word *satya*. His use of the concept needs elaborate exploration. It is the most fundamental category from which all other concepts and principles in Gandhi’s philosophy follow. The present work highlights the multifarious dimensions of truth including its ontological dimension. It will be seen that these various dimensions of truth bring out the different facets of the principle of non-violence. The ontological dimension of truth is the most important dimension of truth. Truth, in this sense, stands for ultimate reality on which every thing depends.
Gandhi surely did not invent the idea of non-violence. The idea of non-violence can be traced back to antiquity. All religious traditions have recognized non-violence as a virtue. We find a rich repertoire of conceptions of non-violence in these traditions. Also there have been non-violent struggles and mass non-violent movements prior to Gandhi and he was also aware of many of these. Although Gandhi borrowed this idea from different religious traditions and non-violent struggles, he conferred new depth of meaning to it and applied it to cover new grounds. It goes to the credit of Gandhi that he expanded its scope to meet new situations. So exploration into the history of the concept will be undertaken to understand and appreciate Gandhi’s contribution to the idea of non-violence.

Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence has been immensely influential not only during his lifetime but also after through his illustrious successors. Gandhi considered his life as an experiment with truth; since he identifies truth with non-violence, his life can also be described as a series of experiment with non-violence. In addition to the fact that non-violence has meant different things to different people, Gandhi’s view on the subject has also undergone change and development. The work will explore the range of possible meaning of the concept in order to delineate the sense in which Gandhi used and practised the principle. Gandhi’s view on non-violence has been subjected to diverse interpretations. In this connection several myths have developed which need to be dispelled. Analysis of the concept will be undertaken to find out what it is and what it is not. The

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distinctive features of Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence will be brought to focus.

Several questions arise with regard to the meaning of ‘non-violence’. Does ‘non-violence’ mean only absence of violence or does it designate positive action and love? Does ‘non-violent action’ completely avoid violence? While it is true that Gandhi steadfastly avoided violence toward his opponents, he did not avoid violence toward himself or his followers. Gandhi said that the non-violent activist, like any soldier, has to be ready to die for the cause. According to him, a non-violent activist, while willing to die, should never be willing to kill. Further, he held that violence was better than coward’s way of accepting the wrong. Gandhi also defended euthanasia. He even conceded that tigers, snakes and rabid dogs might have to be killed if they threaten human life. A surgeon operating on a patient would not be considered a violent act. In judging an action one has to take the intention of the agent to account.

Does violence mean only physical violence or it includes psychological violence too? What are the things that count as psychological violence? Should the attitude toward the opponent be relevant? Can non-violence be ever a method of coercion or conversion? Can the opponent be viewed as an enemy? In other words, is non-violence compatible with an attitude of antagonism? Or does non-violence also involve active caring for the opponent? Questions regarding commitment also crop up. Does non-violence apply only to certain conditions and occasion or it is preferable to violence under all conditions? Can non-violence be used as a tactics?
Can it be based on expediency, such as considerations of superior force of the opponent, lack of weapons? Or should it be recommended on practical grounds such as relative human costs and results of non-violent action? Does the practice of non-violence require cultivation of virtues such as tolerance, patience, forgiveness and love? Questions regarding the area of its application can be deliberated. Can the principle be applied to guide man's relation to sentient beings (animals), to non-sentient living beings (plants), or to the whole of nature consisting of both living and non-living things?

The concept of non-violence has a normative content. Most basically it requires that we hold that violence has disvalue. Any analysis of the concept must take into account both the descriptive and normative elements in the concept. Gandhian concept of non-violence exemplifies a unique synthesis of fact and value, 'is' and 'ought', thought and action, which needs to be deliberated. The work will explore how Gandhi establishes essential link between Value (goodness and beauty) and Reality (truth).

Non-violence constitutes the core element in Gandhian philosophy, so much so that in common parlance his philosophy has come to be identified with his philosophy of non-violence. Moreover, all other key ideas in his philosophy such as satyagraha, sarvodaya, swaraj, swadeshi, aparigraha, trusteeship, equal respect for all religions, community living, living in harmony with nature can all be
explicated as applications of the principle of non-violence. The ideas of non-violence and truth give meaning, content, and justification to these ideas.

Gandhi subscribed to an organic view of reality. According to this view a thing is real not in isolation, but in its relation to other things. It is this interrelatedness that bestows meaning. We find that this view about the nature of reality is also reflected in the sphere of Gandhi’s philosophy. In Gandhi’s philosophy we find a unique synthesis of moral, religious, metaphysical, political, social, economic, and ecological thoughts. It will be a mistake to think that one can understand and bring about desired transformation in any one area without taking care of the other areas. The elements of human existence cannot remain separated or compartmentalized. Gandhi cautions that it would result in life becoming fragmented and disharmonious. His views on the interrelatedness of different areas will be explored.

Although there is unity in Gandhi’s philosophy, Gandhi was not a system builder. There is no ‘ism’ in Gandhian thought. There is a fair amount of open-mindedness and tolerance of alternative points of view in his scheme of things. Unlike a philosophical system builder Gandhi does not think in terms of dichotomies. It is generally assumed that a philosopher can be a realist or an idealist, a monist or a pluralist, a theist or an atheist; but he does not and cannot claim to be both. Gandhi, on the other hand, finds no difficulty in appreciating and welcoming these differing points of view. Although he embraces pantheism, he has no trouble in respecting theism and even atheism. Support for non-violence and
truth can be elicited from these diverse sources, which might appear to others to be contradictory and conflicting. Thus we cannot attempt to understand Gandhi in the manner in which other philosophers have been understood. Gandhi was a different type of thinker altogether. The work will explore how Gandhi makes a radical departure from the tradition of argumentation in philosophy for criticism and rejection. Rational discussion is not just exchange of arguments in which one theory is refuted and another is defended. It is a process of deepening and expanding the consciousness of the participants. Adherence to the principle of non-violence in intellectual matters makes him an anekantavadin. But his anekantavada differs from the Jaina anekantavada in several respects. The work will explore and elaborate these features of Gandhian philosophy.

Gandhi is a great synthesizer of ideas. He sees agreement where others see differences. Contrary to popular perception, Gandhi was not a radical thinker. He avoided extreme stands, and followed the middle path. The work will bring to light this aspect of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi avoids the extremes in metaphysics, ethics, politics, economics and other areas of human concern. In addition to this, attempt will be made to show how the principle of non-violence brings about the harmony and coherence among the views held by Gandhi.