CHAPTER – III

THE CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE
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History of the Concept

The word ‘non-violence’ or ‘ahimsa’ literally means ‘non-injury’. It is an important concept in Indian as well as Western tradition. Ahimsa has been preached and practised in the Indian tradition as a religious and moral virtue for thousands of years. But in the hands of Gandhi, the concept found a much greater connotation and was put into practice in a much wider area and with greater success than it had been achieved in the past. Gandhi himself says that he has nothing new to teach to the world, because truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. But Gandhi was a great synthesizer of ideas. It goes to the credit of Gandhi that he took up certain principles, isolated what is authentic and worthwhile and put them into practice.

Though ahimsa is an ancient concept, yet it has been under constant investigation and development. Non-violence or ahimsa has long been central to the religious traditions of India -- especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religions in India have consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human or animal. Ahimsa has been recognized as a virtue in the Veda. Vedic thinkers prescribe non-injury as a virtue. So the beginning of the concept of ahimsa as non-
injury can be traced back to Vedas. The roots of non-injury, non-killing and non-consumption of meat, are found in the *Vedas, Agamas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Yoga Sutras* and other sacred texts of Hinduism. In the *Veda* we come across the following hymns that clearly preach the virtue of *ahimsa* and love:

Let your aims be common, and your hearts be of one accord, and all of you be of one mind, so you may live well together. (*Rig Veda Samhita* 10.191)

Protect both our species, two-legged and four-legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O Powers! (*Rig Veda Samhita* 10.37.11. VE, 319)

One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others of milk by slaughtering cows, O King, if such a fiend does not desist by other means, then you should not hesitate to cut off his head. (*Rig Veda Samhita*, 10.87.16, FS 90).

Peaceful be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel,
whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us. (*Atharva Veda Samhita* 10. 191. 4)

Those noble souls who practice meditation and other yogic ways, who are ever careful about all beings, who protect all animals, are the ones who are actually serious about spiritual practices. (*Atharva Veda Samhita* 19.48.5. FS, 90)

If we have injured space, the earth or heaven, or if we have offended mother or father, from that may Agni, fire of the house, absolve us and guide us safely to the world of goodness. (*Atharva Veda Samhita* 6.120.1. VE, 636)

You must not use your God-given body for killing God’s creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever. (*Yajur Veda Samhita* 12.32. FS, 90)

May all beings look at me with a friendly eye. May I do likewise, and may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend. (*Yajur Veda* 36.18)

The injunction, ‘*ma himsayet*’ – one should not injure any one, clearly shows the beginning of the concept in the Vedic period.¹ In the later period it was the Upanishadic seers who contributed to the growth of the concept of *ahimsa* in

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the Indian literature. Specially in *Chhandogya Upanishad* we find a verse as follows:

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\text{ath yet tapo dānam ārjavam ahimsā,}
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\[
\text{satya-vacanam iti, ta asya daksināh.}^{2}
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(And austerity, alms giving, uprightness, non-violence, truthfulness, these are the gifts for priests).\(^3\)

*S暂缓印panishad* also mentions *ahimsa* as the first ethical restraint.\(^4\)

Manu's *Dharma Shastra*, 5.55, explains:

The learned declare that the meaning of *mansa* (meat) is, he *(sa)* will eat me *(mam)* in the other world whose meat I eat here.

*Ahimsa* has been recognized as a virtue by many of the systems of Indian Philosophy. For example, in Patanjali’s *Yogasutra* *ahimsa* is interpreted broadly as abstinence from malice towards all living creatures in every way and at all times. *(Sarvathā Sarvadā Sarvabhutānām Anabhidroha).*\(^5\) Patanjali regards *ahimsa* as a yogi's *mahavrata*, the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline, which those

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2 *Chhandogya Upanisad*, III. 17.4.
seeking Truth must follow strictly and without fail. This was not meant merely to cover non-killing, but extended to exclude harm caused by one's thoughts, words and deeds of all kinds -- including injury to the natural environment. Even the intent to injure, even violence committed in a dream, was regarded as a violation of the principle of *ahimsa*. According to Vaisesika thinker, Prasastapada *ahimsa* is one of the universal duties, which is obligatory for all irrespective of caste and conditions of life. In the *Mahabharata* also *ahimsa* has been recommended as a moral duty. The *Mahabharata* contains extensive reference to the idea of *ahimsa*. At various places it has condemned *himsa* in its various forms. The following passages are illustrative:

The very name of the cows is *aghnya*, indicating that they should never be slaughtered. Who, then, could slay them? Surely, one who kills a cow or a bull commits the most heinous crime. (*Mahabharata*, Shantiparva 262.47. FS, p. 94.)

The purchaser of flesh performs *himsa* (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does *himsa* by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing: he who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells or cooks flesh and eats it - all of these are to be considered meat-eaters. (*Mahabharata*, Anu. 115.40. FS, p. 90.)

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He who desires to augment his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures lives in misery in whatever species he may take his birth. (*Mahabharata*, Anu. 115.47. FS, p. 90.)

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of *dharma*. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of *adharma*. (*Mahabharata*, 18.113.8.)

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength and memory should abstain from acts of injury. (*Mahabharata*, 18.115.8.)

*Ahimsa* is the highest *dharma*. *Ahimsa* is the best *tapas*. *Ahimsa* is the greatest gift. *Ahimsa* is the highest self-control. *Ahimsa* is the highest sacrifice. *Ahimsa* is the highest power. *Ahimsa* is the highest friend. *Ahimsa* is the highest truth. *Ahimsa* is the highest teaching. (*Mahabharata*, 18.116.37-41.)

He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is -- immortal in the field of mortality -- he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. Then he goes, indeed, to the highest path. (*Bhagavad Gita*, XIII. 27-28. p. 101.)
Non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all beings, peace from greedy cravings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride -- these belong to a man who is born for heaven. (*Bhagavad Gita*, XVI.2-3, p. 109.)

In the Shantiparva (CCL 39-40) Kapila considers *ahimsa* as one of the ways to attain Brahman. In *Vanaparva* (XXIV 30) it is stated, “The hard and the soft yield alike to the soft; in fact there is nothing impossible for the soft, hence the soft is more powerful than the hard”. In the *Mahabharata*, Bhishma explains to Yudhishtira that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one’s own son, and that the foolish person who eats meat must be considered the vilest of human beings. [Anu. 114.11]. The *sthitaprajña*, the ideal man of the Gita is essentially a non-violent man, for violence has, for its basis, the desire to enjoy the fruit of one’s action. In Puranic literature too, *ahimsa* is prescribed as a duty. “*Ahimsa Paramo Dharma, Ahimsaiva Param Tapah*”. The Hindu outlook is that every existent thing is sacred and divine. Life in all its different forms is to be revered.

However in Buddhism and Jainism we come across special and exclusive emphasis on *Ahimsa*. Buddhism emphasized universal compassion and love. When understood in this way *ahimsa* calls for positive action to do away with sufferings of all beings. In *Dhammapada* it is said:

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7 *Padmapurana*, 1-31-27.
Him I call a Brahmin who is without hostility among those who are hostile, who is peaceful among those with uplifted staves, who is unattached among those who are attached.⁸

(Aviruddham viruddhesu attadandesu nibbutam sādānesu anādānam tam aham brumi brāhmanam).

One can act with such love and compassion only when one is able to cultivate unselfishness by directing one’s mind and heart in right direction of true love and compassion for all. One way to make it possible is to “live delighting in and delighted by non-injury”.⁹

In Jainism, *ahimsa* is the standard by which all actions are to be judged. For a householder observing the small vows (*anuvrata*), the practice of *ahimsa* requires that he should not kill any animal. For an ascetic observing the great vows (*mahavrata*), *ahimsa* entails the greatest care to prevent him from knowingly or unknowingly being the cause of injury to any living substance. Living matter (*jiva*) includes not only human beings and animals, but also insects and plants, and the same law governs the entire cosmos. The interruption of another *jiva*’s spiritual progress increases one’s own *karma* and delays one’s liberation from the cycle of rebirths. Many common Jaina practices, such as not eating or drinking after dark or the wearing of cloth mouth-covers (*mukhavastrika*) by monks are based on the principle of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the leading tenet and is the fundamental ethical

⁹ *Itivattaka*, 38.
virtue of Jainism. All actions are judged and evaluated in accordance with the standard of *ahimsa*. But the Jainas go to the extreme and lay excessive emphasis on *ahimsa*. As all activities involve violence in one from or the other, Jainas insist that their followers should engage themselves in the fewest possible activities. They refuse to take the life of even the smallest insect. It is the extreme application of the negative aspect of a vital principle, and has become “a burden to humanity almost impossible to bear”.\(^{10}\) Gandhi says that this extreme application of non-violence by Jainas is based on a wrong assumption. They think that only death is a form of suffering and life in any form is preferable to death. This is due to undue emphasis given to sacredness of sub-human life in preference to human life.\(^{11}\)

The first vow in *Acharanga Sutra* says:

I renounce all killing of living beings, whether subtle or gross, whether mobile or immobile. Neither shall I myself kill living beings nor cause others to do it or consent to it.

Positive *ahimsa* finds expression in love, pity, tenderness and impartiality. According to Buddha, even when one’s body is dismembered, one should radiate good will towards all being, and do them no injury even in thought. The *Metta Sutta* brings out clearly the Buddhist ideal of *ahimsa*:


As a mother, even at the risk of her own life protects her son, so let there be good will without measure among all beings.¹²

Though the Hindus and Buddhists never required so strict an observance of ahimsa as the Jainas, vegetarianism and tolerance toward all forms of life became widespread in India. The Buddhist emperor Ashoka, in his inscriptions of the 3rd century BC, stressed the sanctity of animal life. Ahimsa is one of the first disciplines learnt by the student of yoga and is required to be mastered in the preparatory stage (yama), the first of the eight stages, that lead to perfect concentration.

For India's ancient thinkers, life is seen as divine. They further hold that each life form possesses consciousness and energy. In India there has developed an unparalleled concern for harmony among life forms. This has led to the growth of a common ethos based on non-injury and a minimal consumption of natural resources. The virtues of compassion, non-possession, and simplicity are based on the principle of ahimsa.

The Christian Concept of Love

Christianity preaches the path of love and non-violence. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Jesus advises,

¹² Ibid., p. 102.
But I tell you: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those cursing you, pray for those abusing you, so that you may become sons of your Father in heaven.

Usually people try to love their neighbours and hate their enemies, but, Jesus Christ urges, to achieve spiritual oneness, we must love our enemies. By doing good even to those who hate and abuse us, we become like God who loves all. Thus loving everyone unconditionally is a way to realize God. Since hate begets more hate, by loving those who hate you would dissolve the hatred and conflicts.

Jesus Christ was the greatest exemplar and teacher of non-violence. Jesus taught the spiritual life of love, mercy, forgiveness, and charity. He declared that those who really care about justice and making peace are blessed by God. Those who are kind and gentle and pure in heart are the ones living in the kingdom of heaven, even when they are persecuted while working for justice. He went deeper than just outward action to indicate an inner morality which leads to peace of mind and heart. Not only is killing wrong, but even to be angry toward someone can upset this inner peace. Therefore it is better to talk to the person and come to an understanding, so that our love can flow. It is not appropriate to strike back or to punish others, for these actions tend to perpetuate ill feelings and conflict. Therefore, Jesus recommended that we should not resist evil by evil, for by fighting one who does evil, we would fall into that negative game and increase the violence. By not resisting the negativity of others, it can be released and dissolved most easily; our responsibility is to keep ourselves free of negativity.
Tolstoy’s philosophy consists in applying the teaching of the *Sermon on the Mount* to the solution of modern social and political problems. The core of Christ’s teaching and one adequate solution for human problems, according to Tolstoy, is Love. Love constitutes the basis of Tolstoy’s principles of non-resistance and non-cooperation. Tolstoy said,

> Christians do not quarrel with anyone, do not attack anyone nor use violence against anyone; on the contrary, they themselves, without murmuring, bear violence; but by this very relation to violence, they not only free themselves, but also the world from external power.\(^{13}\)

Gandhiji was greatly influenced by Tolstoy. Gandhi’s concept of non-violence is akin to Tolstoy’s philosophy. He had read *The Kingdom of God is within You* when he was in South Africa. Gandhi says that reading Tolstoy’s book cured him of skepticism and made him a firm believer of *ahimsa*.\(^{14}\)

There are striking similarities between the doctrines of these two exponents of non-violence. Both are seekers after truth. Tolstoy wrote, “The heroine of my writings, she whom I love with all the forces of my being, she who always was, is, and will be beautiful, is Truth.”\(^{15}\) Both are opposed to violent methods of fighting evil. Both lay stress on the inner perfection of the individual. Both advocate an ascetic morality and preach simplicity of life.

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15 Quoted by M. Desai in an article in *Young India*, III, p. 830.
But there are important differences between Gandhi and Tolstoy. His concept of non-violence is somewhat different from that of Tolstoy. For Tolstoy non-violence means avoidance of force in all its form. Gandhi lays emphasis on motive and defines *ahimsa* as avoidance of injury or pain to any creature out of anger or from a selfish motive. In certain circumstances even killing may be *ahimsa* according to Gandhi. As life involves some amount of violence, Tolstoy turns away from it. In this sense Gandhi excels Tolstoy in working out the non-violent technique and in devising ways to remove social evils.

Gandhi claimed that his idea of *ahimsa* is basically rooted in Hindu tradition. Gandhi, however, does not use the word ‘Hindu’ in any sectarian sense that excludes other religions from its fold. But he understands by it a belief in an Eternal Law that governs the universe. A religion based on such an eternal law underlies all religions and harmonizes them. Gandhi follows the Gita’s ideal of *niskamakarma*.

**Gandhi’s Notion of Non-violence**

In the contemporary world, it is Gandhi who very strongly asserted the role and significance of *ahimsa* in the individual as well as in social life. Before Gandhi, the term ‘non-violence’ was accepted both in Indian philosophy and religion as a religious virtue. Gandhi can be unquestionably given the credit for extending, rather for widening the scope of *ahimsa*. In other words, Gandhi was mainly responsible for bringing it out from the boundaries of religions and getting
it a place in moral and political thinking. It was due to his theory and practice in the field of politics that the principle of *ahimsa* or non-violent action has won a place in the vocabulary of politics. Gandhi’s principle of *ahimsa* not only governs the relation between human beings, but also man’s relation to the non-human world.

I want to realise brotherhood or identity not merely with the beings called human, but I want to realise identity with all life, even with such beings as crawl on earth. I want, if I don't give you a shock, to realise identity with even the crawling things upon earth, because we claim common descent from the same God, and that being so, all life, in whatever form it appears must be essentially one.\(^{16}\)

Gandhi was not satisfied with the literal or popular meaning of *ahimsa*, which is negative in character. Non-killing or non-injury seems to signify merely the absence of violence. One who merely refrains from violence can be regarded as non-violent in the negative sense. The very use of words like *ahimsa* and non-violence with negative prefix creates the impression that the concept of *ahimsa* has no positive content. Gandhi moved away from this popular understanding and maintained that *ahimsa* does have a positive content which is much more important than its negative meaning. He says:

> In its *negative* form it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind, I may not, therefore, hurt the person or any

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\(^{16}\) *Young India*, 4.4.1929
wrong-doer or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrong-doer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill will... Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer.... In its positive form ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would my wrong doing father or son. This active ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.\(^{17}\)

This extension of meaning of ahimsa from mere non-injury or non-killing to love and compassion makes Gandhi's position different from Jaina concept of ahimsa, because there is a marked difference between having an active love and being satisfied with mere absence of injury. Ahimsa, in its negative connotation, will be a set of prohibitions only. Without a positive content the principle of ahimsa is likely to promote inaction. Gandhi was not willing to accept any doctrine that would bring in any kind of inaction in man. Non-violence has absolutely nothing to do with passive acceptance or acquiescence to evil done to a person or nation. Gandhi's non-violence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Even violence and use of force is preferable to passive acceptance. Gandhi declares that vengeance is any day superior to passive, effeminate and helpless submission. Forgiveness is higher still. Vengeance too is weakness. The desire for vengeance comes out of fear of harm, imaginary or real.

A man who fears no one on earth would consider it troublesome even to summon up anger against one who is vainly trying to injure him. In between passive acquiescence and employing violent means of using force, *ahimsa* offers a third and much superior alternative for settling conflicts between individuals and groups, and for bringing about changes in social structures.

Only a sense of love, a sense of identity, the noble intention to protect others from evil and an informed conscience to do good to others will activate a man to practice *ahimsa*. The *ahimsa* in its positive sense here implies self-sacrifice. Further the action of a man who is guided by *ahimsa* will not be based on hatred or ill will for the said person. So Gandhi rightly observes, “humanity consists in letting others live even at the cost of one’s own life”.  

Gandhi was of the view that non-violence does not necessarily exclude violence. The two terms are not opposites. Gandhi held that there are certain forms of violence which should be included within non-violence. Gandhi cites the case of necessary and unavoidable violence which a living being *willy nilly* performs. Howsoever careful a man might be, he cannot completely abstain from committing violence. The very existence as a living organism involves taking food, fighting diseases, protecting oneself from harmful pests and insects. One can minimize violence by avoiding flesh food or even give up taking plants and plant seeds and live on things like milk and honey. But there are microorganisms in such food and these food items naturally belong to other animals and insects. By consuming these

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items man is depriving them of their food. Jainas try to practice strict non-violence. Even they cannot reduce violence to zero. Thus the very act of living involves himsa. To accuse a person who commits such minimal violence that he is not non-violent would render the term inapplicable to any conceivable being.

Gandhi considers another type of violence. A helpless women takes resort to violence to prevent herself from being raped; a man fights single handed against a horde of decoits; a small nation fights valiantly to defend itself against aggression by a much superior nation, people fight against a mad, irrational and oppressive government which resort to violence and torture. There is no utilitarian justification, no calculation of gains or losses for or against undertaking such acts. The adversaries are not evenly balanced. Yet these are spontaneous acts of courage, acts undertaken to protect the dignity of the individual or the community. These are, therefore, heroic acts worthy of moral praise, in contrast to cowardly acts of self-surrender. Gandhi hesitates to consider such a person violent. Gandhi's answer is that non-violence should and must accommodate these acts. Someone who commits such acts can still be called non-violent. Gandhi regards such acts as 'almost' non-violent.

A third type of case is exemplified in mercy killing or euthanasia. Killing is violence. Yet mercy killing has to be included within non-violence. Gandhi treated mercy killing as an act of non-violence pure and simple. Once a sick calf in his ashram was declared incurable by the doctor and the calf was groaning in excruciating pain. Gandhi permitted the doctor to put an end to its miserable life.
Its prolonged existence would have entailed only prolonged suffering. Because such acts are performed out of compassion and love for the suffering creature, though they involve killing, Gandhi declares that these are non-violent acts.

For Gandhi, violence consists in selfishness, anger, greed, lust, fear to face danger and the like. These are the main obstacles because of which man fails to act in the spirit of selfless action for the sake of greater benefit to humanity. What is important is the intention to do good to others. As we noted above, Gandhi considered mercy killing an act of *ahimsa* or compassion. *Ahimsa* is active involvement and might involve violence. Gandhi gives two examples to instantiate his point. A surgeon does not commit *himsa* when he uses knife on the patient's body. Similarly, one may kill a person to relieve him from the terrible suffering caused by an incurable disease. The surgeon's operation and the act of mercy killing are instances of *ahimsa*. So non-violence is not opposed to violence. It is opposed to non-commitment and non-participation. From the above instances, it may be concluded that the true test of non-violence does not depend upon the physical commission or omission of an act but upon the motive and intention.

*Ahimsa* simply does not mean non-killing. *Himsa* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is *ahimsa*.

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19 Selections from Gandhi, p. 155.
Gandhi’s understanding of *ahimsa* as love can be traced to the Christian notion of ‘love’ and Buddhist notion of ‘compassion’. Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence has been consciously inspired by the New Testament -- the Sermon on the Mount. However Gandhi’s positive meaning of *ahimsa* as love is much wider than that of the Christian notion of ‘love’ or ‘compassion’ of Buddhism. Both these systems have developed their ideas of love basing on some particular views of their own religious system. In Christianity it is argued that as God loved man first, so it is the duty of man to love Him and His creation. This is an appeal to follow the path of non-violence through a belief in Him by way of accepting the finality of His only begotten son. This implies that Christian notion of love is meaningful only through the belief in Jesus. Thus it becomes a sectarian notion of love. This will not appeal to one who wishes to practise non-violence but is not a believer of Jesus. As such the social ethics behind it is the ethics of fellow feeling of one Christian to another Christian and as a matter of fact, it has narrowed down the scope of the concept of love, and consequently failed to establish the notion of universal kinship irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc. Gandhi’s position is different. By defining *ahimsa* as positive love and self-sacrifice in thought, word and deed, Gandhi overcomes the dogmas of sectarian religion and has embraced the entire humanity within its fold. Religion, as understood by Gandhi, is not intended to separate society and divide it into various sects but it is that which “binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies…”20 His concept of *ahimsa* is not biased by any particular religious doctrine. His concept of

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love is so exhaustive that any follower of a particular sect will fall within its fold if he is a follower of *ahimsa* as the moral law. So he said, “as soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side”.\(^2^1\) In this sense of the term, the sacred and the secular meet.

Gandhi’s view is wider than that of Buddhist notion of compassion also. Though Buddhism preached *ahimsa* as universal compassion amongst all for attaining *Nirvana*, yet there is a discrimination of practice of *ahimsa* between a householder and a monk. Because Buddha believed that strict adherence to *ahimsa* is not possible while performing the worldly duties. He says,

...full of hindrances is household life, a path defiled by passion; free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things. How difficult is it for the man who dwells at home to live the higher life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection; let me than cut off my hair and beard, let me clothe myself in the orange coloured robes, and let me go forth from a householder life into the homeless states’.\(^2^2\)

Gandhi was against maintaining a dual standard of life. One single principle should be the guiding principle of all actions, and there should not be any


discord between private and public life. But it has become a common practice to compartmentalize life with different principles. He, in protest against this system, placed \textit{ahimsa} as the common principle for all to work out. It is not the privilege of saints alone to practice \textit{ahimsa}. It is open to all, that is, even common people and householder should practice \textit{ahimsa}. With a faith in \textit{ahimsa} and right effort \textit{ahimsa} can be applied equally by all -- children, young men, women and grownups. Gandhi believed in Gita's doctrine of renunciation in the sense that one can rise to the height of perfection by not renouncing the worldly life, but by renouncing the selfish desire of enjoying the fruits of one's own action. This understanding of life distinguishes Gandhi from other thinkers such as Tilak. For Tilak, politics was a 'worldly game' of worldly people. Whereas for Gandhi, all activities of man, including politics, are to be performed in a manner a \textit{sadhu} would perform. K.P. Karunakaran rightly observes that it is very difficult to separate in water-tight compartments, Gandhi, the social and religious reformer, from Gandhi, the political leader.\textsuperscript{23} Gandhi's concept of \textit{ahimsa} is wider in scope and connotes a deeper meaning, which eventually includes all other meanings of \textit{ahimsa} as non-injury, fellow-feeling, charity, compassion, etc. \textit{Ahimsa} stands for boundless love for all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, and the like. Its practice demands a paramount duty of protecting others from evil and helping others at the risk of one's own life. This notion of love, in fact, is more in line with the Hindu tradition where self-sacrifice and suffering is practised.

Gandhi not only argued that non-violence is a positive concept but also a theory of action. He gave non-violence a much more significant place by saying that non-violence is the law of our being, as opposed to violence, which is the law of jungle. He said, "non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force". As a law of human race, *ahimsa* turns out to be the condition of human existence. Whether conscious of this law or not, man is in constant progress, according to this law, from cannibalism to a state of civilized nation. Gandhi said, “had it been otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now even as many of the lower species have disappeared”. Gandhi by 'existence' does not mean the physical existence of man which undergoes changes and annihilation like all other species. Man as a living organism is no doubt subject to many laws such as law of gravitation and different biological laws. These laws men share with the animal kingdom. Apart from these laws men share another basic characteristic with animal world i.e. the exercise of 'brute force' or 'violence'. So Gandhi said, “we were perhaps, all originally brutes. I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute”. Here Gandhi, did not mean biological evolution of man, but the moral growth of man. Because, according to Gandhi, *ahimsa* is the *law of life*. It is by nature a moral law in human life. As such it is essentially different from other laws i.e. legal, religious, social, physical, biological etc. in the sense that these laws operate within specific areas of life. *Ahimsa* being the manifested form of the

eternal moral law (Truth) operates and is intended to regulate every sphere of human life without any exception. It implies that human life, apart from biological and physiological aspects, as a whole is within the purview of one single law i.e., *ahimsa*. Consequently, all other laws directing human behaviour should be derived from the law of *ahimsa*. The principle of non-violence is, thus, foundational and axiomatic.

Gandhi holds that though an element of brute force is present in man, yet he is expected to struggle to follow moral law and thereby reduce the intensity of brutality in him. It automatically leads to an increase of the moral character in his life. Hence, to the extent a man has succeeded in eliminating violence or brute force from him, he has grown in his moral character. In other words, to that extent he has moved away from animal world.

Observation and experiments show that, man yields to love more naturally than to violence. The distinguishing feature of man from animals is not his physical peculiarities or the exercise of the law of violence, but the practice of higher law than this. Since the practice of *ahimsa* brings about a radical change in man, Gandhi calls it ‘soul force’. Normally there is no surprise if a man exercises ‘brute force’ because it is his heritage from animal world. Animals could be said to be in need of a law of violence to maintain their existence. If we wish to distinguish ourselves from animal world, the only way is by giving up the law of violence and by accepting the law of non-violence as a creed. Gandhi observes:
Human nature will find itself expressed when it fully realized that to be human it has to cease to be beastly or brutal. Though we have the human form, without the attainment of the virtue of non-violence, we still share the qualities of our remote reputed ancestors, the Ourang-outang.27

The nature and importance of *ahimsa*, thus understood, makes it obligatory on us to accept it as a creed and not merely as a policy. It should become the basic principle of individual as well as social life. To elaborate the practice and the principle of *ahimsa*, Gandhi laid down five axioms.

1. Non-violence implies a complete self-purification as is humanly possible.

2. Man for man the strength of non-violence is in exact proportion to the ability, not the will, of the non-violent person to inflict violence.

3. Non-violence is, without exception, superior to violence, i.e. the power at the disposal of a non-violent person is always greater than that he would have if he was violent.

4. There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence. The end of violence is surest defeat.

The ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory – if such a term may be used of non-violence. In reality where there is no sense of defeat, there is no sense of victory.\textsuperscript{28}

These axioms if analyzed, could be seen as a coherent whole wherein one step leads naturally to the next.

The first step is individual’s self-effort for abnegation of selfish desires, and sacrifice of selfish inclinations for bringing oneself close to others. To be non-violent means to be benevolent as much as possible and readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others. The achievement of these as personality traits requires the following of rigorous ethical discipline in life. Unless one purifies oneself from one’s own selfish desires, anger, hatred, by strictly following an ethical discipline, one will never be able to identify oneself with the rest of mankind. The principle “All men are brothers” will not stand internalized. In Gandhian thought, self-purification and altruism goes hand in hand. ‘Good of all’ can only be achieved by purifying oneself. Frank Buchman comes very close to Gandhi when he says,

Unless we deal with human nature thoroughly and drastically on a colossal scale nations will still follow their historic road of violence and destruction. The successful way of dealing with human nature is to bring a change in their nature. But while doing this we should remember two things, that we cannot expect others to be what we

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., October, 1935.
ourselves are not and if we really want a change in others, we must put that change first in our lives.\textsuperscript{29}

The two factors i.e. love and sacrifice, according to Gandhi, acts as a force which can break through the walls of isolation which man builds around him by becoming excessively egoistic. Formm also makes the same point. He says:

Love is an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls which separates man from his fellow men which unifies him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness, yet it permits him to be himself, to retain his integrity. In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two.\textsuperscript{30}

Gandhi went a step ahead and emphasized that identification with everything that lives is possible through love and a pure heart without which the observance of the law of \textit{ahimsa} will remain as ‘an empty dream’. However, the path of self-purification is the most difficult one. One has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action. One has to rise above the sense of attachment and repulsion. “To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder, far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms”.\textsuperscript{31} Thus to overcome these most difficult things, one has to undergo a strict discipline and

\textsuperscript{29}P. Howard, \textit{Frank Buchman's Secret}, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1962, pp. 95-96.


train one’s mind. Here comes in the idea of *tapas* in Gandhi’s thought. Gandhi shared the generally accepted meaning of the term *tapas* or *tapasya* in the Indian tradition. Indian thinkers maintained that in order to achieve the higher ends of life one has to learn to work in accordance with conscience and not to be a slave of bodily comforts or passion. Several methods of putting body under check and allowing the rule of conscience or soul, have been recommended. In Gandhian thought such *tapasya* or self-purification is necessary to be able to put non-violence into actual practice i.e. in the life of a *tapasvi*, non-violence is not merely a theory but it is his life-style. This leads to the second axiom of Gandhi’s account of non-violence.

One’s belief and acceptance of non-violence does not consist in one’s will to be non-violent but does consist in his ability of acting non-violently. This dismisses the possibilities for a coward to take the path of non-violence. The credit and honour goes to a person who in spite of his own ability to act violently stands firmly on principle of non-violence as a law of life and acts accordingly in all circumstances. To such persons, non-violence becomes a creed rather than a policy. A creed has to be all-pervasive and would not accept exceptions, because “laws to be laws admit no exceptions”.32 Gandhi thus argued for the acceptance of non-violence as a creed and not as a policy.

In the third axiom it is stated that, the power at the disposal of a non-violent person is always greater than that of the power of violent person. Firm adherence

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to the principle of *ahimsa* and the requisite *tapasya* or observance of rigorous ethical discipline produces a moral power in man. The impact and change provided by the moral power is bound to be more lasting than the changes produced by violence. In fact, we can say that violence does not produce any change in the real sense of the term. It only suppresses. Hence, as long as violence continues, suppression will also continue. The moment violence ceases to exist, the old problems will reappear. It only succeeds in changing the direction of one’s action by force, but not the very desire of violence from his heart. Non-violence, as a moral power, aims at changing the heart of the opponent with love and helps him to realize the value of *ahimsa* as a mode of action. This way of bringing a change in human nature is far more effective. It is in fact a genuine conversion. A social change is possible only when real conversion takes place at the individual level. The structural changes might marginally affect the situation but a genuine as well as a permanent society is possible only through the method of self-purification of individuals. With more and more purification, the individuals will become capable of following the path of non-violence as a creed. The non-violent method of change is preferable as it is not a threat to individual dignity, freedom of will and creativity. Thus non-violence is conducive to an integrated personality and social harmony.

The successful exercise of violence or brute force is relative to the abilities of the opponent to exercise brute force. Non-violence, on the other hand, is in no way dependent on the opponent’s abilities. It is only up to the individual to fail or succeed in exercise of non-violence. The failure means, he has not adequately
developed moral power in him. Hence, the failure should be taken as a measure of one’s deficiency in the process of self-purification. Gandhi was of firm conviction that an adequately developed moral power is bound to achieve success.

The natural corollary of the above axiom led Gandhi to say that there is no such thing as defeat in non-violence, whereas the force of violence always ends up in defeat. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that non-violence is a superior power to force. Violence inherently contains the idea of competition. Competition is likely to result into a mutual quarrel, hatred and jealousy. In other words it increases the distance between individuals. They become more and more self-centred. However, individual and society could grow and live happily if they learn the principle of togetherness. Ahimsa is the principle that brings closeness between man and man. The self-destroying nature of violence should count as a good reason for its rejection and the self-sustaining character of non-violence provides the good reason to adopt it. Consequently, violence as a theory of action is bound to be harmful for society. On the contrary, a believer of non-violence neither wants to overpower others nor to compete with others to achieve anything for himself. He rather acts out of a sense of moral duty to help each member of the society. It is possible only when one learns to cooperate and not to compete. Only through the principle of cooperation, which is underlying the concept of non-violence, one can aim at the universal well-being i.e., the good of all (Sarvodaya). Any society which will fail to guarantee the good of all will breed violence and therefore, unjust according to Gandhi. Its implications are that Gandhi did not accept Marxism, utilitarianism, hedonism and the like as adequate theories of social change.
Given the above analysis, it is obvious that Gandhi makes a conceptual and logical point that there is no defeat in non-violence. The question of defeat and victory in terms of violence is always relative and conditional. The defeat and victory of one person necessarily involves the reverse for the other. Accordingly the victory or defeat, whichever occurs in relation to violence, is treated as victory or defeat of the person concerned.

Secondly, the question of defeat or victory in exercising violence always involves two parties. Because one cannot exercise violence and win over or lose the battle until and unless the other party also responds in the same way. The moment this relationship of exercising violence ceases, the relative balance of defeat and victory also collapses. It proves that defeat and victory in relation to violence are relative and conditional.

On the other hand, in case of non-violence this relativity of defeat and victory never occurs. Firstly, the power of exercising non-violence does not depend on any external agency. It is also not dependent on the response of the other man. It never involves two parties as quarrelling parties. Thus in the usual sense of the term, the term victory and defeat are inapplicable in the Gandhian framework. In case, in a given situation, the exercise of non-violence has not been able to yield the desired results, it is not because the opponent has more power but because the virtue of non-violence has not grown sufficiently in the person. He ought to develop more time to discipline himself and become more and more non-violent. The method of non-violence makes a person humble.
Gandhi tells us that the way of love is also the way of freedom, because no one but ourselves directs us how to express our love. This is in contrast to military service where individuals take orders from superiors. In the non-violent movement all are free and equal, each listening to his own inner guidance and sharing his concerns with the group. Then the group can freely decide, based on all individuals' considerations, how the group wishes to act. Thus first we must recognize our own freedom of choice and equal right to participate.

Even more important is that we realize the equality of all human beings and respect the liberty of others just as we want our own freedom respected. The non-violent way of love is not possessive of others nor does it attempt to control others or use force against them. If we love others, we respect their autonomy to make their own decisions. We certainly can communicate with them, and we may even confront them with our presence to pressure them non-violently to make a specific choice, if we believe that what they are doing is wrong and harmful to people. A follower of *ahimsa* should never try to physically or violently force others to do what he wants. Non-violent protests do not hurt people, they are meant as a direct communication of one's concern for the well-being of those involved in the situation.

In exercising the power of non-violence, cooperation is inevitable. Firstly, it does not involve two opposite parties and secondly, non-violence as universal love cannot entertain the idea of competing with each other. It is a process of mutual love and understanding. Being so, all persons at a time can exercise the
power of non-violence without losing anything. It is the greatest advantage of non-violence over violence. The strength of non-violence is greater than violence as it involves one single cooperative party working in the same direction instead of fighting a losing game. Hence, non-violence is the only proper and most appropriate method to be followed for organizing individual life as well as social life. Non-violence being a creed and not a policy must find its expression in all activities or aspects of individual life and social life. On the strength of this Gandhi propounded an ethical theory for the transformation of human nature. Each individual should start practicing \textit{ahimsa}. The practice of \textit{ahimsa} will automatically take care of the different aspects such as domestic, religious, political, social, and so forth. These, instead of remaining as isolated elements, will be woven into a whole. The whole at the root will be seeking constant guidance from the principle of \textit{ahimsa}. Thus the law, which governs the individual life, ultimately gains significance at the level of society. Thus \textit{ahimsa} has a widest possible scope. It begins with individual and encompasses not only individuals and societies, but also the mankind and the non-human animals as a whole. Interdependence is and ought to be as much the ideal of man as self-sufficiency. Man is a social being. Without inter-relation with society, he cannot realise his oneness with the universe or suppress his egotism. His social interdependence enables him to test his faith and to prove himself on the touchstone of reality. If man were so placed or could so place himself as to be absolutely above all dependence on his fellow-beings, he would become so proud and arrogant as to be a veritable burden and nuisance to the world. Dependence on society teaches him
the lesson of humility. And if one may take help from one's own family, why not 
from one's neighbours? Or, otherwise, what is the significance of the great saying, 
'The world is my family'?33

Gandhi makes the following recommendations for the practice of non-violence:

1. Humiliating or deliberately provoking your opponent invites violence.

2. Knowing your facts and arguments well helps avoid violence.

3. If you are open about your cause your opponent is less likely to be violent.

4. Look for common ground between you and your opponents to promote 
   trust and understanding.

5. Do not judge others.

6. Trust your opponent. They will sense this trust.

7. Compromise on inessential items to promote resolution.

8. Sincerity helps convert your opponent.

9. By making personal sacrifice you show your sincerity.

10. Avoid exploiting weakness in your opponent. Aim for integrity, not 
    simply to win.

The following is a summary of the implications of Gandhi's non-violence:

33 Young India, 21.3. 1929
1. Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.

2. In the last resort it does not avail to those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love.

3. Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence, in the very nature of things, is of no assistance in the defense of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.

4. Individuals or nations, who would practice non-violence, must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all except honour. It is, therefore, inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e., modern imperialism, which is frankly based on force for its defence.

5. Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all—children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have, therefore, equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.

6. It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals it is not for masses of mankind.