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Non-violence is the foundation of human progress. If we turn the pages of history we find that man has been marching from violence towards the goal of non-violence. The primitive was a cannibal. From the stage of cannibalism he marched onward and lived on hunting. Hunting was followed by agriculture. Dependence on agriculture made him settle at one place and he gave up the nomadic life. This historical human evolution is a clear proof for the belief that man is on his march to reach the destination of ahimsa. His instinct of violence is vanishing with his progress in developing the non-violent attitude to life.

In this age, we have the example of Mahatma Gandhi who sacrificed his life for the sake of truth and non-violence. He was a human being just as we all are but his zeal to know the truth made him what he became later on. Non-violence found the foremost place in Gandhiji's philosophy of life. For him, it was not only a practicable principle, but 'the breath and the rule of his life'. There are no sources in the current document. Gandhiji practised non-violence for a major part of his life time in every walk of life i.e., domestic social, economical and political. He knew of no single case where it failed. Where it seemed to have failed sometimes, he blamed his own imperfection. He claimed no perfection for himself.

Whatever the origin of non-violence it must be supported by reason. The Buddhist saw clearly that victory by force breeds hatred, for the conquered is always unhappy. Gandhi was inspired by the
great tradition of ahimsa in India but he spent a lifetime elaborating a rational structure for his faith, in which he reasoned: self-sacrifice is superior to the sacrifice of others; if the cause is not right then only the resisters will suffer; non-violence is the aseptic way of permitting the poison to work itself out by letting all the natural forces have full play; non-violence is arouses the best in others; apparent good from violence is temporary, while the evil is permanent; good brought through force destroys individuality, while non-violent non-cooperation preserves individuality.

Gandhi believed that although ahimsa was universally applicable, its exercise had to be exemplified by a few votaries who took vows and underwent a comprehensive moral and spiritual discipline in which they would be made to see the all-embracing and ever-elusive nature of total ahimsa. They would not fall into the ritualism of many Indian practitioners of ahimsa in whose hands the theory had become “a wooden, lifeless dogma,” enabling hypocrisy and distortion to pass under the name of religion. Gandhi held to the Buddhist and Jain view that all sins are modifications of himsa, that the basic sin, the only sin in the ultimate analysis, is the sin of separateness, or attavada. According to the Jain maxim, he who conquers this sin conquers all other and he who does not conquer this central weakness cannot effectively exemplify any virtue. Violence, rooted in this common weakness, can assume subtle forms and is mistaken for something else when it masquerades under a moral disguise. “Whatever there is a clash of ephemeral interest, the desire for personal benefit at any cost, represents the ahimsa arising out of the dire heresy of separateness. When an action is not based on attachment to results, there is no temptation for himsa. True non-violence does not blind itself to the cases of conflict or hatred, but in spite of the knowledge of their existence, operates upon the person setting the causes in motion. Even when this does not actually happen, the votary of ahimsa, as a result of the deliberate observance of ahimsa, experiences a “second birth or ‘conversion.’”

Manifestly the non-violent spirit may be born in and, in some respects, nurtured by the workings of all these forces: one’s heritage, one’s extremity, one’s reason. But non-violence lives and grows also by experimentation. Gandhi’s life was an experiment with truth and the means to truth, non-violence. His life, he said, consisted of nothing more than these experiments. In a sense he was a scientist,
claiming no finality concerning his conclusions, accepting here and rejecting there, seeking always, as he said, to satisfy his reason and his heart.

Second, non-violence is not a single virtue or a single quality of life; it is a congeries of virtues, of qualities; it is a spirit, a way of life, a religion, or as Gandhi would say, the law of one's being. In Gandhi's structure, there are two basic pillars, truth and ahimsa or non-violence or, as he also called it, love. Truth is the end; non-violence is the means. But the end and the means are bound irrevocably to each other, for a vision of truth is dependent upon the realization of non-violence. As truth is God, as also love is God. Love surely is not a single virtue; it is a way of life, it is a religion. His life he considered as one indivisible whole. "What", he asks, "was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached? Gentleness and love." 5

Let us look, then, at those qualities of life which comprise the symbiosis which Gandhi called non-violence. True non-violence is a religion, for it is a total commitment to that which the individual regards as supreme in the world. In Gandhi, however, and in every authentic example of non-violence there is a suspicion of and often a revolt against other worldliness, excessive ritualism, insistence upon theology, and ecclesiasticism. Gandhi, however, was wise. Although he considered himself a true reformer he never permitted his zeal to lead him to the rejection of anything in Hinduism which he considered essential. Nowhere, indeed, was his genius more apparent then in the synthesis he achieved between the history, the language, and certain forms of his religious heritage on the one hand and a radical reinterpretation of religion on the other.

For Gandhi the essence of religion is morality. “I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality.” Unreasonable religious sentiment he could tolerate but not when it was immoral. In his philosophy “there is no such thing as religion overriding morality”. 6

For Gandhi the Golden rule of conduct, the conduct called non-violence, was mutual toleration, for he realized that all men will never think as one and that truth will always appear in fragments.

For Gandhi non-violence is inconceivable without self-renunciation. “I must reduce myself to zero”, he said, for “ahimsa is the farthest limit of humanity”. 7 In things material he did reduce himself to all but zero. Wherever I walked or talked with him, morning, afternoon, or evening in a remote village or a great city, it
was always the same nothing of dress, of furniture, of house, of livery of any sort to distract. There was no hurry. When he walked into a woman's home and saw the miserable inadequacy of what she wore, he immediately reduced his own dress next to zero and continued to do this until his died.

Gandhi knew too well that men who are burdened with possessions they love are never really free. He wanted, however, that renunciation of desire is far more important than the renunciation of objects. In abstention as in all other matter he emphasized that the spirit was the matter. "A man", he says, "over-scrupulous in diet is an utter stranger to ahimsa and a pitiful wretch if he is a slave to selfishness and passions and is hard of heart".8

Gandhi's adoption of non-violence as a method of pursuing truth is due to the fact that man, imperfect as he is, can only strive, he cannot command the result. Perfect non-violence, being the attribute of God alone, cannot be practised by human beings. Being a part of society, man cannot but participate in "himsa" that the very existence of society involves. Gandhi, therefore, would consider a person true to his faith if "there is an effort to avoid the violence that is inevitable in life. That is how Gandhi's ideal of non-violence is translated into actual practice. In essence, it consists of allowing others the maximum of convenience at the one has to determine for himself the amount of inconvenience he is capable of putting up with.9 No third party can determine it for him. Gandhi believed that one should rather be conscious of one's imperfection than one should lower one's ideal: this would spur the individual to perfect himself.

At the moment, non-violence is out of fashion. There is a modish tendency to say that it died with Martin Luther King and that the future of radical social change is in the hands of the violent. Spokesmen for this view seldom bother to discuss whether violence is likely to be more effective. It has a mystique, an air of getting things done, which seems to absolve them of the obligation to prove that it actually does.

Our question is not whether society can change without violence. In some ways it obviously can and does. However, that is not the point. We are asking whether there can be such a thing as an effective non-violent strategy of revolution or radical reform. And I would urge in the first place that much of the present lack of faith, and even of interest, is due to the misunderstanding caused by a negative term like 'non-violence'. We are told that South Africans are...
tired of being non-violent. Because Martin Luther King practised non-violence, he was widely spoken of as “the last voice of moderation”. Non-violence is equated with mere abstention from hitting people, peaceable demonstrations, restraint, at most passive resistance. Thus, it is made to sound respectable and futile.

Gandhi described himself as a teacher of truth and non-violence, in that order, and the proper name of his technique is Satyagraha, truth-force. For him the primary virtue is courage-unflinchingly carrying out the demands of truth, or of God, the terms for him being interchangeable. The “non-violence of the brave” \(^{10}\) is always the correct way to do this, but it is better that campaigners should be violent on behalf of a just cause than that they should be cowardly and betray it. This Gandhian firmness-in-truth is a moral and religious act, and Gandhian non-violence is neither a mere abstention not a mere tactic. Whether or not we accept the religious viewpoint in a doctrinal sense, we must think of satyagraha as something that happens at a level of human nature corresponding to the deepest convictions, the level where saints and martyrs are made, the heart of the personality, where the religious believer encounters what he fregards as God. This is the kind of non-violence, not a violence which is merely negative or external or tactical, that we can fairly ask doubters to consider.

There is a certain interpretation of the two approaches to non-violence indicated above that is reflected in the interior problems of each. Here it is consider how this affects the person who embraces non-violence from the viewpoint of a prior commitment to abstain from violence. There is a temptation to think of non-violence as a panacea (and for the realist there is the temptation to reject it as this and nothing more) which, if applied to any situation, is sure to bring the desired solution. But it is possible to reject this view as wishful thinking- without necessarily therefore rejecting non-violence as a commitment. There are two distinct questions involved here. The first is: shall I be non-violent in all circumstances? This is a question of personal commitment, and the possible answers are yes or no. The second is: is non-violent action viable in all circumstances? The answer here has to do with results; it is not a subjective but an objective question, and the answer has to do with facts rather than will or intention. In a given situation, to act in a certain way because of a faith or presupposition that this is the only right or honorable way to act. What constitutes effective, consequential action at that
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moment is another matter. The realist is also affected, if less noticeably, by this. A soldier who may have no compunctions about killing (e.g., torture, killing unarmed civilians) which might effect the solution to his problem but at a moral cost which transcends (or at least morally blocks) any gain that might be perceived.

Moreover, some types of action, whether violent or non-violent, may have so little visible chance of success that they are virtually suicidal and yet are not necessarily contemptible for that reason. On the contrary, we admire the valiant man who risks certain death for the sake of his belief—particularly if we share those beliefs, but even if we are at enmity with him. For this very reason we despise the man who proposes a risky course of action and personally flinches from the consequences—the man who counsels heroism and martyrdom for others but seeks safety for himself. And for the same reason we lack respect for the man who so little values his life or his cause that he will vaingloriously dispose of it to no purpose either of witness or if achievement. Sometimes our attitude may be complex: we can appreciate the personal courage of the man who died in the battle of the Little Big Horn, at the Alamo or at San Juan Hill or in the charge of the Light Brigade—while reflecting that in history these were the wrong places and the wrong causes at which and for which to give one’s life—all imperialist ventures. Our criteria of judgment are not unilateral unless our concern is unilaterally for non-violence at all costs, etc.

The word “non-violence” has both intended and possible meanings. The word is intended to represent types of conduct that are purposively lacking in violence. Within this meaning it is further desirable to distinguish between non-violence of conduct, of attitude, of spirit, etc. There may be some inner ambiguity on these points which the word itself only potentially resolves. This interior range of meaning is a legitimate subject of debate, the a priori assumption being that non-violence per se should (if it does not necessarily) imply the complete configuration of action, attitude, spirit, etc. But at the other extreme, the exterior boundary of meaning, it should be made clear that actions from which violence is gratuitously absent are not therefore “non-violent”. Many people in many situations prefer and often choose responses that do not involve violence. For lack of a better term, let us call this kind of action “unviolent” rather than “non-violent”. Sometimes in making distinctions between the two, in cases where motivation is not clear, we shall have to resort to
empirical and arbitrary choice of words. But let us at least be clear beforehand that there are these two distinctly different types of action which are not violent.

How often have the participant in a non-violent campaign pronounced their efforts a “success” because they received favourable publicity? Sometimes the latter may consist of nothing so much as a local newspaper’s editorial defending their elementary constitutional liberties or commending their motives despite disapproval of the campaign itself. Or it may be that a passer-by smiled or gave a word of encouragement. By what criteria do these evidences of limited support or bare tolerance constitute success for the campaign? Nonviolence is based on “adherence to truth”, by which is meant not only a transcendent metaphysical concept finally, as Gandhi, conterminous with God, but also a very down-to-earth concern for factual accuracy, open dealing with the actual accuracy, open dealing with the actual even when it is unpleasant. Among other things, adherence to truth must mean the absence of any trace of falsification, whether through exaggeration, warped or prejudicial assessment or reporting, excessive modesty or simply tireless in attention to details.

Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Destruction is not the law of the humans. Man lives freely by his readiness to die, if need be at the hands of his brother, never by killed him. Every murder or other injury, no matter for what cause, committed or inflicted on another is a crime against humanity.

The first condition of non-violence is justice all round in every department of life. Perhaps, it is too much to expect of human nature. I do not, however, think so. No one should dogmatize about the capacity of human nature for degradation or exaltation.

Non-violence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. A helpless mouse is not non-violent because he is always eaten by pussy. He would gladly eat the murderess if he could, but he ever tries to flee from her. We do not call him a coward, because he is made by nature to behave no better than he does. But a man who, when faced by danger, behaves like a mouse, is rightly called a coward. He harbours violence and hatred in his heart and would kill his enemy if he could without hurting himself. He is a stranger to non-violence. All sermonizing on it will be lost on him. Bravery is foreign to his nature. Before he can understand non-
violence he has to be taught to stand his ground and even suffer death, in the attempt to defend himself against the aggressor who bids fair to overwhelm him. To do otherwise would be to confirm his cowardly attitude, to seek shelter behind non-violence so called. Not knowing the stuff of which non-violence is made, many have honestly believed that running away from danger every time was a virtue compared to offering resistance, especially when it was fraught with danger to one’s life. As a teacher of non-violence I must, so far as it is possible for me, guard against such an unmanly belief.\footnote{11}

Gandhi was clearly a propagandist for non-violence and directed his message especially to India but also the rest of the world. He said to Dr. Thurman that “It may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of non-violence will be delivered to the world.”\footnote{12} He said message should be given to mankind through that India. He even said that “should India take to the sword, she would cease to be the India of my dreams and I should like to betake me to the Himalayas to seek rest for my anguished soul.”\footnote{13} When the hour of disillusionment came, he did not retire into the seclusion of an anchorite as Ramana Maharshi thought he should, but risked his life among the frenzied rioters in an experiment which he thought might be his last act of ahimsa. When his countrymen betrayed the faith he placed in their non-violent mission, he held fast, content to be alone, in his total devotion to ahimsa. He was not unprepared for this, although he did not expect the enormity of violence that broke out in the last phase of his life. As early as 1924, he had written that if the Indian masses did not respond to his call for ahimsa, “I should be content to be alone and rely upon it a ultimate invincibility to convert the masses.”\footnote{14} Again in 1939 he wrote that the progress of non-violence is seemingly a terribly slow process though violence, even for the vindication of justice, is played out; but “I am content to plough a lonely furrow, if it is to be my lot that I have no co-sharer in the out-and-out belief in non-violence.”\footnote{15} If Gandhi was a propagandist could have shown greater courage and greater faith than he did, or been as lonely in his crowning endeavor for his cause as he was.

It is no longer sufficient for men of goodwill, only to help each other. It is vitally necessary to create a world in which there is law and order based on justice and freedom, and consequently our most urgent task is learn how we can realize this aim, but in a non-violent manner, based on discovering the forces of nature expressed by Gandhi as truth-force.
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