CHAPTER - III

PHILOSOPHIC FOUNDATIONS — CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE
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Gandhi’s Satyagraha is based on his identification with non-violence.

The concept of Ahimsa or non-violence has been known to mankind since times immemorial. As a religious or philosophical doctrine, it can be traced as far back as to the Chhandogya Upanishad of ancient Hinduism, the Chinese Tao Te Ching (Sixth Century B.C.) and other ancient texts. The essence of ‘Ahimsa’ is friendship towards all. Its basis has been formulated in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain texts. According to Isa Upanisad, “He who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings, he does not feel any revulsion or hatred”.  

Buddha emphasized the importance of the qualities of non-hatred (avera) and compassion (karuna) which became the philosophical foundations of the concept of non-violence. “For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time” declares the Dhammapada, “hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.”

* Earlier non-violence or ‘Ahimsa’ was interpreted to mean only non-killing or refraining from causing physical injury.

1. Isa Upanisad — 6.
The wise man is he, who is without hatred; the mark of nobility is non-violence towards all. And finally, without non-violence Nirvana is impossible. Jainism popularised the concept of Ahimsa by its strong and continuous faith in it. According to Gandhi, "Jainism teaches compassion towards living creatures and the duty of non-violence". Pyarelal writes that three things in Jainism influenced Gandhi the most, "Ahimsa on the religious side, Anekantavad or Syadvad on the philosophical side and institutions of vows on the ethical side. The concept of non-violence is equally important in Christianity. Jesus whom Gandhi once called, the Prince of Satyagrahas said, "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on they right cheek, turn to him the other also". Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.

3. Ibid., 261, 270.
4. Ibid., pp. 225, 226.
The etymological meaning of Ahimsa is non-harm or inoffensiveness. But it is not merely a negative concept. In its positive form it means friendship towards all. According to Pie Regamey "Ahimsa can be translated into French as amour" (Love). Lanza del Vasto identifies it with caritas (charity - from Caritas, the word for "Love" in the Latin New Testament). Gandhi himself wrote: "Ahimsa means 'love' in Pauline sense and yet something more than the 'love'." In the philosophical speculation of mankind, it has appeared in many forms ranging from an exacting monastic discipline to a vague sort of advice, as in Plato, "to overcome evil by good deeds". If we turn to the New Testament we find a close identification between saintly purity and the practice of enduring attack without fighting back. Some individuals have gone so far in making what they consider non-violence a way of life that they forbid killing even poisonous insects. Though in the virtues such as

9. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
friendliness, compassion were also sometimes referred to as aspects of Ahimsa in the past. It is only recently as a result of mostly Gandhi's efforts, that these virtues have become prominent elements of Ahimsa. However, Gandhi did not deny his indebtedness to ancient traditions and thinkers, both of the East and the West in understanding the meaning of Ahimsa. He was impressed by the moral courage of Socrates who preferred the cup of poison to giving up his pursuit of truth. 13 This appeared to him as non-violent resistance and so he wrote a book on him in Gujarati named "Story of a Soldier of Truth". 14

The modern thinkers such as Tolstoy, Ruskin, Emerson, Kropotkin too, influenced Gandhi in reinterpreting the concept of Ahimsa in terms of modern needs of society. 15 For Gandhi, Tolstoy was the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced. What appealed to him most in Tolstoy's life was that he practised what he preached and reckoned no cost too great in his pursuit of truth. Admitting the inheritance of spiritual influence of

Tolstoy, he wrote: "It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of scepticism and doubt that I came across his book, 'The kingdom of God is within you', and was very deeply impressed by it".  

Acquaintance with Ruskin's book, Unto this last, brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in Gandhi's life. "I believe", he recalled, "That I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life". Determined to change his life in accordance with the ideals of this book he wrote, "I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice". And Gandhi who was as


* The teachings of 'Unto This Last' and understood by Gandhi are as follows:
  i) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
  ii) That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
  iii) That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

good as his word, did reduce these principles to practice. He translated 'Unto This Last', into Gujarati, entitling it Sarvodaya. D.G. Tendulkar, the biographer of Mahatma, records: "Gandhi's three years stay in England (1888-1891) was eventful. Those were the years of great intellectual activity and unhindered freedom of thought and speech. The country as a whole had become a living university ....

Kropotkin's 'Mutual Aid' was appearing serially in the Nineteenth Century and Kropotkin himself was propagating his ideas in England." Very likely Kropotkin's an anarchist philosopher also influenced Gandhi at the impressionable age.

Though Gandhi never visited America, yet he had great appreciation for the two nineteenth century American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau. 'Indian Opinion' which Gandhi edited for ten years in South Africa, contains many references to Thoreau and Emerson. Gandhi's ideas of self-reliance and self-perfection seem to have been reinforced by his reading

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of Emerson's essays. In a letter to his son (Mani Lal Gandhi) Gandhi writes how he discovered the knowledge of the East through Emerson, whose essays he thought, contained the teaching of Indian wisdom, in a western garb. He found Emerson a pure thinker who was not directly involved in the life of action.

Similarly Gandhi's concept of civil-disobedience found confirmation in Henry Thoreau's essay "On the Duty of Civil-disobedience", which he read in jail in South Africa. Gandhi found it quite close to his view of Satyagraha. But later, on realizing its insufficiency to convey his meaning, he changed over to 'Civil-resistance' and finally to non-violent resistance.

He was also indebted to Edwin Arnold whose famous book The Light of Asia gave a touching impression of the life of Buddha and his English translation of the Bhagavadgita entitled The Song Celestial which introduced to him the teaching of the Gita. He was also subjected to the influence of New Testament. He says, "The New Testament produced a different impression especially 'The Sermon on the Mount' which went straight to my heart".

However, a dispassionate view of the growth of Gandhi's mind from the time he arrived in London to his final return to India as a political leader would reveal that the Western and the Eastern currents of thought had merged in him. The fact that Gandhi cited western authorities in support of his view in *Hind Swaraj* offers to the Indian people a western legitimacy about the rejection of western industrial culture. As a matter of fact, Gandhi's genius lay in his art of synthesizing the best of the Indian and the best of the western Christian humanist thought. Gandhi discovered even in Islam the support for his view of non-violence. In his view, Islam's chief contribution is the brotherhood of man. He believed that the very word Islam means peace, safety, salvation. According to him the *'uran* prefers non-violence to violence.22 Thus, to Gandhi, non-violence is not the peculiarity of one race, creed or country; it is the heritage of mankind. Non-violence is a universal law acting under all circumstances. On one occasion he said, "You might of course say that there can be no non-violent rebellion and there has

been none known to history. Well, it is my ambition to provide an instance, and it is my dream that my country may win its freedom through non-violence. And, I would like to repeat to the whole world times without number, that I will not purchase my country's freedom at the cost of non-violence." Further, Gandhi is convinced that truth can be pursued only through non-violence, for violence in his view, arises out of ignorance. It is untruth. Logically, non-violence is only the means and the truth, goal, but the two, according to him are so closely knit together that they become indistinguishable. They are synonymous. Observance of non-violence is the practical side of the realisation of the truth of the spiritual unity of all mankind. It is the soul-force, the power of God within us. For he observed that "truth and non-violence are as old as the hills." However, the meaning that he puts upon it and the use that he makes of it reveal that the doctrine has undergone considerable transformation at his hand. Formerly, non-violence was only a personal virtue. Gandhi gave it a social content. He applied it for resolving

23. *Young India*, 12.11.31, p. 354.
social disputes. It is an instrument of social, political action and moral force. The religion of non-violence, in his view, is not meant for rishis and saints but for the common man as well. It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals, it is not for the masses of mankind. Non-violence can be practised at all levels, individual as well as collective. "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of brute ... . The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law to the strength of the spirit ... ." 25 When man follows the higher law of his nature he shows himself far superior to the brutes because "non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force". 26 It was Gandhi's belief that if mankind was not habitually non-violent, it would have been self-destroyed ages ago. But in the dual between forces of violence and non-violence the latter have always come out victorious in the

He had full faith that ultimately divinity would transform brutality, human nature would reform animal tendency and non-violence would conquer violence. It would be repeated in social acts of individuals involved as punishment, retaliation and revenge cannot reform those who do evil; forgiveness and love are necessary for redemption.

The object of all Gandhi's striving was to reconstruct social life on the basis of non-violence. It must permeate every aspect of human life, that is, social, political and economic. As Kasper Mayr has well said, "There are infallibly valid methods applicable to all cases. They must be as various as life itself and at any given time growing out of the situation in which they are to be used". In a famous and seminal article, 'The Doctrine of the Sword' (1920) Gandhi made his position clear. If cowardice meant non-violence then he was for violence, although he preferred non-violent resistance to violence. A weak person is as unknown to non-violence as to bravery. But non-violence presupposes the ability, though not the willingness to strike, said Gandhi.

27. *Young India*, January 2, 1930, p.4.
The core of non-violence is embedded in personal conduct, specifically in the non-violent person's capacity to absorb violence without retaliating. It is out of love for others that one adopts non-violence as the fundamental principle of one's life. It is thus a positive virtue. That is why Gandhi lays down, as an axiom of non-violence, the principle that '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. Therefore, a weak man cannot be said to be truly non-violent. *Ahimsa* is the supreme virtue of the brave. It works in an extreme limit of forgiveness. It means readiness to die but unwillingness to kill.

According to Gandhi, "Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training of violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence. Violence does not mean emancipation from fear, but discovering the means of combating the cause of fear. Non-violence on the other hand, has no cause of fear. The votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order
to be free from fear. He reckons not if he should lose his land, his wealth, his life. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice Ahimsa to perfection. The votary of ahimsa has only one fear, that is of God. He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the Atman that transcends the body; and the moment one has a glimpse of the imperishable Atman one sheds the love of the perishable, body. Training in non-violence is thus diametrically opposed to training in violence. Violence is needed for the protection of things external, non-violence is needed for the protection of the Atman, for the protection of one's honour. 31 Non-violence as an ethical norm is generally considered basic to Gandhi's philosophy - a kind of foundation stone. It is further more a condition for self realization.

Thus, non-violence cannot be learnt by staying at home. It needs enterprise. "In order to test ourselves, Gandhi asserts, "we should learn to dare danger and death, mortify the flesh, and acquire the capacity to endure all manner of hardships. He who

31. Harijan, September 1, 1940, p. 268.
trembles or takes to his heels the moment he sees two people fighting is not non-violent, but a coward. A non-violent person will lay down his life in preventing such quarrels. The bravery of the non-violent is vastly superior to that of the violent. The badge of the violent is his weapon - spear, or sword, or rifle. God is the shield of the non-violent.  

This is the highest, and therefore, the last of level of Ahimsa. Gandhi described it as the enlightened non-violence of resourcefulness. A really non-violent person is he whose non-violence is neither a cover for cowardice nor a pretext for weakness but a direct consequence of his conscious strength. Gandhi reminded his followers that his commitment to non-violence involved belief in the possibility of conversion. It is a selfless creed. However, he was aware that most people would accept Ahimsa or non-violence as a conditionally accepted technique. They compromise this formula when the validity of the issue is raised and their stakes depend upon the threat or use of force. He said, "The moral course of action should not abstract from human conditions while developing and applying alternative means of defending the honour in any sphere."

32. Ibid.
However, he often felt that the success of the non-violent conduct in such a situation might demonstrate to the world the superiority of non-violence and thereby strengthen our faith in the real non-violence which is the non-violence of the brave. However, Gandhi had expected that all individuals in a community would acquire the highest level of non-violence. But they could move toward it by the successful working of the non-violent resistance. So, he practised non-violence as a discipline (in full form) to be used as a force to resist or reckon any evil force. His approach is that a good end can be reached only by good means. In his view, peaceful ends can be secured only by peaceful means. In his philosophy, means and ends are convertible terms. Again, for those who say that 'means are after all means', he propounds the maxim 'as the means so the end'. He, therefore, concentrated on perfecting the means to attain the goal. It does not mean that he did not attach importance to goal. But once the goal is determined one should devote one's attention solely to adopting means consistent with that end. A Quaker, William Penn, said, "A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil
that good may come of it".  

And a Communist, Milovan Djilas says, "As soon as means which would ensure an end are shown to be evil, the end will show itself as unrealizable". The non-violent technique according to Gandhi must be consistent with end-mean relationship. This type of struggle, he was convinced, gave greater power to its users than did violence.

This is quite outstanding coming from a person who in his early youth used to be scared of darkness engulfing him. The journey from a coward of 14 to a brave hero of forty who led a war on behalf of the oppressed of South Africa has not been an easy one. It was a miracle for Gandhi himself when he unfolded a virtue before the world that much of the trifles and clashes which are rampant amongst human beings will disappear if we can cultivate love for all with the aid of truth and justice. This is the positive side of his principle of non-violence which puts us above coercion and scare. However, Gandhi was fully aware that the ideal of non-violence could be realized under ideal conditions. It cannot be observed without self-

34. Ibid.
purification which requires rigorous discipline. So the realization of the ideal depends upon our preparation for it and Satyagraha is the embodiment of it. Gandhi's doctrine and technique of Satyagraha is based on his concept of truth and non-violence.

Satya means "truth", agra means "holding on to something" or determination. Literally, Satyagraha means holding on to truth or insistence on truth.\(^{35}\) The concept is a new compound never before used. According to Gandhi, "It is a movement intended to replace methods of violence and a movement based entirely upon truth. It is, as I have conceived it, an extension of the domestic law on the political field, and my experience has led me to the conclusion that the movement and that alone can rid India of the possibility of violence spreading throughout the length and breadth of the land for the redress of grievances".\(^{36}\) And this brings us back to the principles of love, friendliness and co-operation. Gandhi developed it as a technique for resolving social, political and economic conflicts in society. He himself applied it in South

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36. *Young India*, January 21, 1920, p. 3.
Africa in his fight for civil and political rights of his countryment. In India, he used it against the British to eradicate the evil or menace of imperialism. He adopted it for the settlement of dispute between the capitalists and labourers at Ahmedabad. Similarly, it was used for securing for the untouchables, their rights and proper position in the Hindu society. As an action based on truth this technique strictly absolves violence, untruth, deceit or secrecy, by means of non-violent action such as negotiation, non-cooperation, civil-disobedience, Dharma (sit in) or picketing fasting etc. Many writers have used non-violence as equivalent of a term which Gandhi himself coined, that is, Satyagraha, which is much more than Ahimsa, for it is an approach for direct action. It is "an all sided sword... it bless him who uses it and him against whom it is used".37

Gandhi himself was conscious of the fact that the term Satyagraha was coined by him in South Africa to express the force that the Indians there used it for full eight years. It was selected in order to distinguish

it from the movement then going on in the United Kingdom and South Africa under the name of passive resistance. Satyagraha, in fact, is active and dynamic resistance to overcome retaliation. The passive resister, on the other hand, is really not non-violent for he would be violent if he could, and is non-violent only because he does not for the time being have the capacity for violence. In Gandhi's view there is great difference between passive resistance and Satyagraha. It is not by inflicting injury on his opponent or punishing him that a Satyagrahi can arrive at a settlement with his opponent. It is only by self-suffering that he tries to appeal to the heart of his opponent; for "love never claims, it ever gives, love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself". Love for the Mahatma is "Tapasya and Tapasya means self-suffering". It is not suffering for its own sake but the good or salvation of the one who undertakes it. In Bondurant's view, it is for the moral persuasion of one because of whom it is undertaken. Thus, by adopting

39. Ibid., July 9, 1925, p. 240.
this method, the Satyagrahi not only raises himself morally but also purifies his opponents by making him realize his own mistake. This is, in Gandhian term, a more effective way of ending a dispute. For, a settlement arrived at through violence can never be permanent since it is obtained through the suppression or defeat of the opponent, who will be always in search for an opportunity to upset the forced settlement. Satyagraha, in fact, is a moral replacement of war. It cannot be undertaken for the promotion of personal ends. It is undertaken on moral grounds and it is to be judged in terms of moral values. The essential difference between war and Satyagraha is explained by Nirmal Kumar Bose, Gandhi's one time Secretary, "while the former aims at coercion the latter aims at conversion. In war one inflicts punishment upon the adversary, in Satyagraha one draws the maximum suffering on oneself, without a trace of bitterness against the opponent as a human being. He further says, Satyagraha is not a substitute for war, it is a way of conducting
'war' by means of non-violence. As long as men are not very different from what they are now there will be clashes of interest; and it appears desirable that such conflicts should be carried on in the most civilized and effective manner.¹¹ Scholars differ on this point. Writers like Bondurant admits the element of coercion in it. But its non-violent character distinguishes it from the coercion following from violent action. If, at all, it is coercion, it is moral pressure rather than of a material kind whereas the requirements of effective armed resistance are material as well as moral.¹² Moreover, according to Bondurant, Satyagraha allows, at several stages, opportunities of winning over an opponent.¹³ For Gandhi Satyagraha was a universal remedy since he believed that stoniest heart could be melted if the method was applied in a genuine spirit of love. His experiment of it in South Africa where the government controlled by the whites denied not only political but civic rights to Indians as

¹³ Ibid., p. 11.
to Africans. He even believed that it could have been applied by the Jews in Germany against Hitler. He viewed Polish resistance to Hitler's massive invasion as non-violent in spirit because Poland refused to surrender inspite of the fact that the armed resistance was no match to Hitler's army.

Logically, this is not in accord with Gandhi's view of non-violent resistance. For, ideally speaking, a non-violent resister has not to take recourse to arms even when he is facing a powerful adversary. But Gandhi was a great admirer of courage which he considered as the manifestation of the spirit in every human being.

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Gandhi's own description of the Great March is interesting: During the last stages, it (The Satyagraha Movement) took the most unexpected and brilliant turn. At one time, nearly 30,000 men were on strike. They wanted to fill the prisons. After due notice to the government, nearly two thousand of them, men, women and children marched into the Transvaal. They had no legal right to cross the border. Their destination was Tolstoy farm, the distance to be covered was 150 miles. No army ever marched with so little burden. No wagons or mules accompanied the party. Each one carried his own blankets and daily rations, consisting of one pound of bread and one ounce of sugar. This meagre ration was supplemented by what Indian (i.e., Hindesa) merchants gave them on their way. The Government imprisoned the leaders, i.e., those they thought to be leaders. But they soon discovered that all were leaders. So when they were nearly within reach of their destination, the whole party was arrested. Thus, their object (to get arrested) was accomplished. C.F. Andrews, Gandhi at Work, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 317.
It is on this account, he considered a violent act of bravery and preferable to humiliating surrender. His admiration of Polish resistance to massive army of Hitler be viewed from this angle. Moreover, his dedication to non-violence did not prevent him from attributing justice to any party to the conflict.

Evidence of this position is seen in his debates with the western pacifists, and in a number of his comments during the 1930's when he endorsed the cause of the victims of Nazi tyranny and fascist militarist aggression. It is true that he assured the Ex-President of Poland that they would succeed, since their cause was just as God was upholder of justice. His appreciation for justice is clearly seen when he could not withhold his admiration for the brave Kashmiri defenders and the Indian military for the defence of Jammu & Kashmir against aggression of Pakistani raiders.

However, such instances or statements cannot be taken as the model of Gandhi's view of non-violent resistance. For, its acceptance would imply that any violent resistance by a physically weak person or nation to a powerful adversary would be construed and basically

44. The CGM, Vol. LXX, pp. 163-64. (also in Harijan, September 16, 1939).
non-violent. For instance, the resistance of the Vietnam to the United States in the recent times can be interpreted as such. For it was the common saying that Vietnamese fought the war until the Americans were tired of killing them. Such statements cannot be our guide for the development of a non-violent technique for resisting aggression.

The mode of non-violent resistance varies from time to time and place to place for removal of any injustice in society or for the resolution of conflicts. The adoption of any method depends upon the circumstances, traditions of a community and the character of the individuals for dynamism is the hallmark of this approach. Commitment to non-violence depend upon the character of the individuals and the community opting for non-violent resistance. If a large number of persons in that community have not cultivated the discipline of non-violent resistance or do not have full faith in non-violence, this will have its impact on the nature of their resistance.