

SPECIAL LECTURES PUBLICATION - I

Gandhiji's Ahimsa : Evaluation of Theory and Practice

(Special Lectures of the Department of Political Science, Karnatak University, Dharwad)

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FOREWORD

Prof. Adi.H. Doctor has delivered recently two lectures on Mahatma Gandhiji and Gandhian thought under the auspices of the Post-graduate Department of Political Science of this University. His speech throws light on the Doctrine of Ahimsa which still fascinates mankind. He took up this study since Gandhiji does have a theory of non-violence and has dealt with its scope, extent and practice in his scattered writings. He has also tried to remove certain misconceptions in his lecture.

Gandhiji holds a teleological view of non-violence. That is to say that Gandhiji postulates that essential nature of man is non-violence. The concept of non-violence is inseparably linked to the concept of Truth. He considered the Truth to be God. Non-violence implies active and universal love.

Non-violence is not only for sages and cave-dwellers. It is universal doctrine. One requires to be kind and gentle towards animals and even vegetables too. Non-violence is Supreme Law of our being. There should not be counter violence for violence. Evil must be fought, though not the evil-doer. Even foreign aggression should be resisted non-violently. Non-violence is made of sterner stuff. It is never conceived as a weapon for the weak, but for the strongest hearts. It is the activest force on earth and it never fails when honestly practised.

To make non-violence effective Gandhiji advocated certain techniques. Satyagraha is one of them. Civil disobedience and non co-operation are two Principal forms of satyagraha. Both go hand in hand, and constitute most effective way of paralysing an unjust or oppressive. The sole aim is to awaken the conscience of the wrong-doer, rouse sense of shame in him and also to educate public opinion. Fasting is also a form of satyagraha, which Gandhiji frequently used for himself, since it lead to intense purification of mind, body and intellect and took one nearer and

nearest to the God. On certain occasion for physically weak persons Gandhiji recommended easiest way of satyagraha known as Hijrat. This means voluntary exile from the place of permanent residence.

Non-violence is an all pervading principal. This can be very effectively applied even to the administration. Concentration of power and police force are known as organised violence. A state is perfect and non-violent where the people are least governed. Where complete non-violence is practised police etc., become superfluous. Gandhiji suggested a state based on maximum possible decentralization and self-reliance. Here maximum power flows to the village panchayats which operates on principle of consensus. Taluqua, District, State and National level panchayats also should be formed to enable village level committee to federate with them to the extent of necessity. This is voluntary federation constituting non-violent administration wherein power is not imposed from above but actually it moves upward from the base.

Prof. Doctor has tried to remove certain misconceptions. War is an un-mitigated evil and it has got to go. Freedom won through blood-shed or fraud is no freedom. Gandhiji preferred violence to cowardice. In the early years of life he participated in the Boer War and supported the First World War. After certain period the theory of nonviolence fully developed with him having an absolute value. It became an universal religion and also the summit of bravery.

Some people thought that Gandhiji lifted the doctrine of non-violence from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, from Thoreau and from Ruskin and that it was unknown to the Hinduism. Obviously it is not correct. He has read all of them. The doctrine is found in Vaishnavism, Jainism, Budhism etc. in fully developed form.

Every one is capable of reform and conversion to the goodness. Self-love and self-sacrifice are two conflicting forces in man. Mankind owes its survival and progress to the surplus of

self-sacrifice over self-love. Individuals can be so trained in the virtues of self-control, self-sacrifice and non-violence that life can become fully self-regulated and the need for even a Government dis-appears.

Gandhiji believes that the man is perfectible. Swami Vivekananda and Bertrand Russell differ from Gandhiji. Gandhiji is right because man is a spiritual being, he is not body but soul which is immortal.

Swami Vivekananda says that we can never have ultimately everything good on this earth and nothing bad. Though a realised vedantin of highest order and an eminent scholar Swami Vivekananda was an enthusiastic young Sanyaasi. Gandhiji had highest regard for Bhagawan Shri Ramakrishna paramahamsa and respected much Swami Vivekananda. But Gandhiji was centuries ahead of his times and therefore in certain matters like perfectibility of man etc., We can not compare his views with the views of others. Bertrand Russell, though a great scholar, cannot be compared with spiritually more advanced persons of India like Gandhiji.

Mahatma Gandhiji spoke of opting for justice based on love and not on Law-Courts, Police and Judges. He preferred non-violent Soldiers of peace to the present day military, though sometimes it may now appear pre-mature. For the present violence should never be our first preference. It can only be a last and reluctant option in a given situation, till a Rama Rajya or the Divine Rule is established!

These things are very ably discussed by Prof. Adi H. Doctor in these lectures. I have no doubt that readers will be very much benefitted by his ideas. Gandhiji and Gandhian thoughts are more relevant even today. He is a great man for all times to come and his thoughts have ever lasting value.

(S. RAME GOWDA)
Vice Chancellor

A word of Respite

Karnatak University has the practice of encouraging its departments to invite eminent scholars to speak on various themes of academic and contemporary relevance. I am happy that the political science department has this year arranged the special lecture on Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence. Prof. A.H. Doctor has shown that Gandhiji not only had a distinct theory of non-violence, but that Gandhiji also opined extensively on how we must go about practising non-violence. While attempting to remove what he calls "some misconceptions" regarding Gandhi, Prof. Doctor shows that atleast theoretically Gandhi was never prepared to have his doctrine of non-violence compromised, while at the same time he realized that he could not violently thrust the doctrine down anyone's throat for that would amount to his violating the doctrine himself. Prof. Doctor also refutes the arguments of Heiler and Underwood that non-violence was an essentially Christian doctrine, unknown to Hindus. Dr.Adi Doctor concludes his lecture by raising questions which clearly help us to debate the limitations of the doctrine of Ahimsa.

Sri. B.P. Kaniram

Registrar

Karnatak University, Dharwad.

A Word About The Publication

This monograph is the product of the two learned lectures delivered in the Department of political Science, Karnataka University, Dharwad, by our esteemed colleague, Dr. A.H. Doctor, Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science, Goa University, Goa. Professor Doctor is a senior political scientist in the country and is an acknowledged authority on the Gandhian thought and practice. These special lectures drew audience from the other departments of the university too and provoked a good deal of discussion. All our colleagues, specially our Vice-Chancellor, Dr.S.RameGowda, felt that the lectures should go in print for the wider benefit of the community of scholars in the university and outside. The two lectures are presented here under the Karnataka University imprint.

Louis Fischer commented that humanity wept when Gandhiji suffered death. This is the second crucifixion in the history of the world. This happened on Friday, the same day, Jesus Christ was crucified. Was it not an irony of fate and situation to conceive that one whose life was devoted to the cause of non-violence should have been snuffed out by the forces of violence? He would be remembered not only on the plains but also on the hills of India and also all over the world!

No less a person than General Smuts, Gandhiji's first political adversary, sent a simple tribute: "A prince among us has passed." Jawaharlal Nehru said that for thousands of years, the light of Gandhiji would still be seen. The like of him would not emerge even once in several centuries. He worked for free and united India and for the emancipation of humanity as a whole. To put it in nut-shell, as a mystic, saint, and moralist, he belongs to all ages. He made a lasting and monumental contribution to politics by advocating the concept of its spiritualisation. He held that there was no politics devoid of religion. His religion consisted in the eternal values of love, truth and non-violence. They are enshrined in the Gandhian thought, ideals and practice. He tried

to moralise politics. This is the dire need of the hour. It was a dire need of the past and it will be the dire need of the future too. Worldwide, social conflicts would be overcome if mankind tries to understand Gandhiji in the true perspective.

These lectures are offered here in print as our humble tribute to the Mahatma. They give us an opportunity to theorise his ever lasting contribution. They are of course intended as an inspiration for the future; the younger generation should have no chance to lose sight of the Himalayan heights Gandhiji scaled.

It is a matter of privilege for me to record our gratitude to our enthusiastic Vice-Chancellor, Dr.S.Rame Gowda, who gave the green light for the publication of this small venture of the Department of Political Science. Our thanks are due to our Registrar, B.P. Kaniram, who has ever encouraged our academic activities. Our Finance Officer, Shri. Ramakrishna Naik, has helped us a great deal in speeding up the grant of finance for arranging the lectures and publishing them in this monograph. Our Printing Press Director (in charge), Shri J.A. Pereira, has promptly attended to the job of publication in spite of some unavoidable delays from our side.

Place : Dharwad

Date : 2 April 1994.

Dr. N.A. Patil,
Head of the Department
of Political Science,
Karnatak University, Dharwad,
General Editor.

Gandhi's Ahimsa: evaluation of Theory and Practice

A Probe Into The Gandhian Concept of Ahimsa.

Friends, at the outset I would like to thank Dr. N.A. Patil, Chairman, Political Science Department, Karnatak University, Dharwad, for inviting me to deliver two lectures on Gandhi and Gandhian thought. Gandhian thought has been a subject of such extensive study and research that one really wonders if anything very new can be said. If, in spite of this, I have made bold to speak on Gandhi's doctrine of Ahimsa or non-violence, I have done so for very conscious reasons. In the first place, in spite of all the criticism levelled against it, the concept still fascinates man-kind. Secondly, because Gandhi does have a theory of non-violence. He did not sit down to write the theory, but, certainly, it can be gleaned from his manifold scattered writings and speeches. Not only does Gandhi provide us with a theory of non-violence, he also opined extensively regarding its scope, extent and practice. Thirdly, I think it is necessary to remove the misconception that Gandhi was a qualified supporter of Ahimsa. It shall be my endeavour to show that Gandhi's doctrine was an absolute creed. I would also like to remove another, less significant, misconception that Gandhi's doctrine of Ahimsa was exclusively borrowed from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Leo Tolstoy and Thoreau and was a concept unknown to the Hindus. Fourthly, I would also like to address myself to the charge that Gandhi was hypocritical and did not practise what he preached. Finally, I would like to attempt an evaluation of the Gandhian creed, indicating what I find acceptable and what I find unacceptable in the Gandhian thesis.

The Theory of Non-Violence

I shall begin with an attempt to outline the Gandhian theory of non-violence. The first feature of the Gandhian theory

of Non-Violence is that Gandhi holds a teleological view of Non-Violence. The words teleology & teleological come from the Greek word "telos" which means the essential nature of a thing. For example, the essential nature of a knife is to cut, whether for good or bad purpose. A murderer may use the knife to kill, while a surgeon to heal. The use, the knife is put to, does not alter its basic character which is to cut. Now Gandhi postulates that the essential nature of man is non-violence. Man's telos is to live non-violently. Man cannot enjoy living in any other way. Everything that man cherishes, the most worthwhile things that man lives for, namely freedom, equality, fraternity, can only be enjoyed in life, if life is lived non-violently. When one man, or, some men use force against another or other men, their very act of domination constitutes a denial of liberty, equality and fraternity among men. A society ravaged by continuous rioting or sectarian violence, is like the society in Hobbes state of nature, which has been aptly described as one in which life is nasty, brutish and short.

The second feature of Gandhi's theory of non-violence is that the concept of Ahimsa is inseparably linked to the concept of Truth or Satya. Gandhi considered Truth to be God. It is interesting to note here that before 1931 Gandhi used to say "God is Truth", the emphasis being on God; but that after 1931 he began saying "Truth is God", thereby making Truth more important. However, merely saying that Truth Is God, was not enough. The more important question was, how do we realize Truth or God? Now, Gandhi argued that the realization of truth (God) requires chit or true knowledge. It is only when one has realized chit or true knowledge that one enjoys ananda or bliss. But, what is this true knowledge that gives us bliss? This true knowledge according to Gandhi, is the realization by us all, that evil is also within us and not only without or outside us. Hence, to eliminate evil one must first look within oneself. He who was more perturbed by the evil outside, that is the evil in others, and, sought to destroy the evil in others first, neglected, to that extent, the evil within him; and to that extent receded from the object of his quest for truth. The

ancient Rishis too, says Gandhi, were confronted with this question of truth realization. It is only after pondering over the issue that they came to the conclusion that one can make no moral progress if one is obsessed with trying to destroy evil in others. It is in this sense that for Gandhi, Ahimsa becomes the maturest fruit of the search for truth.

In Gandhi's theory of non-violence ends and means are causally connected, that is to say, the means is the cause of the end. Or, to put it differently, the end is organically connected or linked with the means. The end literally grows out of the means, as the tree grows from the seed. We cannot realize God or Truth if we practise violent means. After all, argued Gandhi, the creator gave us control only over the means, none over the ends; and hence if we take care of the means the attainment of the goal is assured.

A third feature of Gandhi's theory is that for him, non-violence is not a mere negative concept implying physical non-injury to others, or, abstaining from physical harm to others. It has significant positive connotations too. First and foremost, it implies active and universal love; it implies love for the wrong-doer and respect for the adversary. From this cardinal definition of Ahimsa as active and universal love, many corollaries follow. Thus, Ahimsa means we must avoid anger, we must never be jealous of another, we must be calm and composed under all circumstances. Ahimsa, says Gandhi, is also violated when we act greedy and hold on to what others need. To live on the earnings of others is also violence. Gandhi used the word "Bread Labour" to emphasise that every person must earn bread by his or her own labour.

Finally, in keeping with the basic feature of every normative theory, Gandhi makes out a case for preferring one value against another. He makes out a case for non-violence as a value, indicating why it is to be preferred to violence. Gandhi makes out his case for non-violence on both religior - moral and practical grounds.

At the religio-ethical level, Gandhi claims that God or the same spark of divinity resides in all. Hence to harm or destroy human life is to seek to injure the Divine itself. One who sincerely believes that God resides in all human beings, argues Gandhi, cannot commit violence unto another. God, according to Gandhi, is Goodness personified. Therefore to admit that God resides in all is at the same time to admit that a spark of goodness resides in every breast. And, if this is so, the possibility of reform even in the case of the meanest of creatures cannot be denied. "The soul is one in all, its possibilities are therefore the same for everyone", wrote Gandhi in the Harijan issue of 18th May 1940. He repeated the idea in 1946 when he observed in the Harijan issue of 17th September 1948: "Given the opportunity, every human being has the same possibility for spiritual growth". In short, for Gandhi, to destroy human life was to deny the existence of God and the capability of reform in others.

It was Gandhi's firm conviction that if we choose willingly to suffer at the hands of the wicked or the oppressor, rather than inflict suffering on him, this act of self-suffering love was bound to evoke or rouse the good within the oppressor's heart and bring about the process of his reform.

A creditable aspect of Gandhi's theory of non-violence is that although he linked Ahimsa to God and soul, he also declared that Ahimsa can be upheld on purely rational grounds without reference to God. At the secular or practical level, Gandhi argued that the coercive method or the method of force could never achieve lasting results because that which is got by force can only be retained so long as the superior force lasts. If therefore one desired a permanent change, whether in the political, economic or social field, one should resort only to the peaceful means of persuasion and conversion. In other words vested interests must be convinced and won over. To forcibly subdue them can only make them go underground, or, they may temporarily pretend submission. At a future date, when the state's power or force weakens the vested interests can again raise their ugly heads. This

explains why revolutions that triumph by force, live in perpetual fear of counter-revolution. Lasting or permanent results/changes can only be brought about by conviction or change of hearts. Further, Gandhi argued that the use of force can only make matters worse since it may make neutral observers go over to the side of the oppressed.

Now it should not be difficult to admit that the Gandhian theory of non-violence does have certain very strong points. Firstly, in it victory does not depend on force and even the weakest party may achieve success. Secondly, in war, even the good points the opponent is making are overlooked, whereas in non-violent resistance it is possible for each side to see and appreciate whatever justice there may be in the other side. Thirdly, the non-violent techniques give rise to less scope for falsehood, deception, treachery and destruction which are common characteristics of violent struggles and conflicts. Finally, violence may incapacitate the enemy but he may survive and awaits an opportunity to strike again; whereas the non-violent techniques, by creating a new moral consensus, permanently resolve the dispute/conflict.

The Practice of Non-Violence

Having outlined the Gandhian theory of non-violence, I would like to turn attention to Gandhi's views regarding the practice of non-violence. Here, we are immediately confronted with such questions as: Is Ahimsa universal? Must everyone practise it? And under all circumstances? Now, it shall be my endeavour to show on the basis of all Gandhi's writings that with regard to human life Gandhi believed that non-violence was not only for the Rishi and the cave-dweller, but a universal doctrine to be practised by each and all and under all circumstances. However, while Gandhi conceived of non-violence as an absolute creed with regard to human life and relations; he was prepared to make exceptions when it came to the animal and plant kingdoms. Let me first discuss Gandhi's views on Ahimsa with regard to the animal and plant kingdoms, before discussing the applicability of Ahimsa towards fellow-humans.

When a friend once enquired with Gandhi what behaviour non-violence dictated towards monkeys who regularly destroyed crops and fruits and at times even carried away children, Gandhi's reply in Harijansevak, issue of May 1946, was : "I have no feeling in me to save the life of those animals who devour or cause hurt to man..... I will never sacrifice a man's life to save theirs". And in the June issue of the same year Gandhi spelt out his attitude even more unambiguously. "The sacredness of sub-human life in Jainism is understandable. But that can never mean that one is to be kind to this life in preference to human life....."

Similarly, when on another occassion a Mysore resident informed Gandhi that stray and mad dogs in the city of Bangalore were cruelly hunted down, impounded and often the cruel method of poisoning was resorted to, Gandhi immediately clarified his position thus: "But my advice can never include impounding such dogs and torturing them as those mentioned by the correspondent seem to have been. Humanitarian instinct demands destruction of such animals in an instantaneous and painless manner".

The only other circumstance when Gandhi permitted violence towards animals was when the animal was suffering unbearable pain or suffering from an incurable disease. Once, when Gandhi saw a cow in unbearable pain, he opined that it would be kinder to shoot it than let it suffer unbearable pain.

In all other cases, Gandhi urged, we must treat animals with utmost kindness or gentleness. Once, when a correspondent asked Gandhi, was there not violence even in extracting honey from a bee, Gandhi replied that we must choose the path of least violence. If I must have honey, he explained, I must be friendly to the bee and get it to yield as much honey as it will, without depriving it of all its honey altogether.

In short, Gandhi was opposed to unnecessary violence towards animals. He strongly condemned the sacrificing of animals in the name of religion. In fact he refused to make Calcutta, renowned for its Kali temple and animal sacrifices, the headquarter of his activities, because to quote him, "My soul rises

in rebellion against the coldblooded inhumanity that goes on there in the name of religion" ¹.

With regard to the vegetable kingdom too, Gandhi wanted the maximum possible non-violence to be practised. He once scolded severely some of his Ashram inmates, when they cruelly tore down the branches of a medicinal plant while trying to break a few leaves. Leaves possessing medicinal value were necessary for human health. Their breaking was therefore permissible violence. But to break down branches in the process or pull the leaves with a rougher hand than required was unwanted and unjustified cruelty.

But none of these rules which permit violence in the case of plants and animals, says Gandhi, can apply to human beings. The question may arise, says Gandhi, why these rules should not apply to human beings, and answers, "It cannot because, however bad, they are as we are. Unlike the animal God has given man the faculty of reason" ².

If one studies the numerous statements made by Gandhi on the subject of Ahimsa, it does become clear, that in the background of all his thoughts there had always been the cult of Ahimsa as an absolute value. In 1939, a friend posed Gandhi the question whether fighting with love for the enemy was permissible. Gandhi replied, "We do often have mixed motives. But that would not be non-violence. The constant effort of the votary of non-violence is to purge himself of the hatred towards the so-called enemy. There is no such thing as shooting out of love in the way you suggest." ³. In his book Yerwada Mandir, Gandhi categorically states that non-violence is the supreme law of our being which does not admit of any exception. He even ruled out non-violence for a so-called higher interest or higher good. To quote his exact words, "It will not therefore be a 'Yajna' (sacrifice), much less a 'Mahayajna', to wish or to do ill to any one even in order to serve a so-called higher interest".

An attempt can be made to bring out the absolute character of the Gandhian doctrine of Non-Violence by examining the

advice Gandhi gave regarding how to handle thieves and murderers. Should a murderer attack one with the clear intent to kill, how should the votary of Ahimsa respond. The Gandhian answer is direct as it is simple. "Let your blood be spilt" states Gandhi in Harijan, issue of 9th February 1947, "but do not spill that of the assailant. When it is question of choice between killing oneself and the assailant, I have no doubt in my mind that the first should be the choice". In reply to yet another correspondent, Gandhi clarified that getting oneself killed, without bearing any anger against the murderer, but instead praying to God to forgive him, was the true test of Ahimsa.⁴ When some sixty officers belonging to the Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose, once told the Mahatma that surely it was no breach of Ahimsa to use the sword in self-defence, his response once again showed his unwavering attachment to Ahimsa as an absolute creed. "Even Wavell, Auchinleck or Hitler does not use the sword without necessity", Gandhi told the officers, "But that does not make it Ahimsa. It is himsa whatever its justification".⁵

How is one to tackle a thief non-violently? What should you do if one fine night you suddenly find a robber in your room? Gandhi says you have three options. Firstly, if you have the physical strength to knock him down you may knock him down and then call the police. If you do not have this strength, you may allow yourself to be robbed and then subsequently call in the police. But Gandhi disapproved of both these options, because to meet violence by counter-violence was only to feed the fires of violence. One needs to understand why a man robs. Perhaps he robs because we are holding on to more than what we really need. One must display self-suffering love towards the thief. Self-sufferance, says Gandhi, may even bring the thief to his senses and make us realize that thieves are, after all, no different from ourselves; they are our own brethren, our friends and may not be punished.⁶.

When in the 1940s, goondaism was rampant and women were in constant danger of being molested, several women ap-

pealed to Gandhi for guidance. Gandhi's reply again reveals his absolute commitment to non-violence. In the first place, he tells the women that if they are truly pure, no ruffian would dare or have the courage to harm them. "I believe", he told the women, "implicitly in the proposition that perfect purity is its own defence. The veriest ruffian becomes for the time being tame in the presence of replete purity". When Gandhi was pressed with the question what if the hooligan does not realize his senses, he responded by saying that in that case the woman ought to learn to die before a hair of her head could be injured; and by way of a helping hand, suggested that the woman could put an end to her life by choking or biting her tongue. When Dr. Sushilla, who was then present, protested, saying this was just not possible and that the only effective way for instant self-immolation would be a strong dose of poison, Gandhi retorted by saying that in that case every woman, running the danger of molestation, should carry a small bottle of poison and gulp its contents rather than submit to dishonour. What if the woman's relatives, say her father or brother, are present. Should they just stand by and watch. Of course not, said Gandhi, that would be cowardice or impotence. The evil must be fought, though not the evil-doer. Gandhi advised the brother or father to stand between the assailant and the woman and try to dissuade him or allow himself to be killed in the process. In so doing he would have done his duty and also given new strength to the woman who would now know better how to protect her honour. ?

Finally, says Gandhi, we must even resist foreign aggression non-violently. If a non-violent country is invaded, two courses are open to it, according to Gandhi. Firstly, it could send its, unarmed non-violent army, satyagrahis, to face with bare chests the aggressor's bullets. No doubt this would be inviting death. But then it would have its effect on the opposite ranks too. In an interesting interview with a New York Times correspondent, Gandhi suggested that the Allies (fighting the second World War)

should instantly disarm, and added, "I am certain as I am sitting here that this would open Hitler's eyes and disarm him".⁸ Even if this did not happen, he said, "an army that dares to pass over the corpses of innocent men and women would not be able to repeat that experiment."⁹ When asked whether facing the aggressor unarmed and inviting him to walk over corpses, was not something beyond human endurance, Gandhi replied that he did not think so. Such courage may not come easily to the masses of men and women; he admitted, but then non-violence was made of sterner stuff. It was never conceived as a weapon for the weak, but for the stoutest hearts. When asked why should the defenders (the allies) lose their lives, Gandhi replied, "Did Jesus by losing his life allow the Roman Pilate to win? Not at all. On the contrary Jesus won, for by his death he released in society the forces of good. Like Jesus we must learn to gain life by losing it".¹⁰

The second course available to a non-violent country to resist foreign aggression would be to let the army invade but then subsequently refuse all co-operation. An invasion, Gandhi argued, is planned for a particular purpose, say, either exploiting the land or other natural resources of the country or its man-power. If therefore by a complete and effective programme of non-co-operation, this very purpose of the invaders was defeated, they would have no alternative left but to retreat. It was this second method that Gandhi experimented in applying against the British. He also advised China to adopt it against the Japanese invaders.

Once one Mrs. White asked an intriguing question to Gandhi: how would you use non-violence against the atom bomb? Fantastic as it may sound, yet in keeping with the general tenor of all his replies, Gandhi answered that he would run into the open field and looking up towards God, pray with folded hands that God may make the pilot see reason; and seeing him in this prayerful posture the pilot would not have the heart to drop the bomb. When Mrs. White objected saying that from high up in the sky, the pilot will not even be able to see Gandhi, the Mahatma replied that in that case his prayer would not fail to reach him and move him.

It was Gandhi's firm belief and conviction that whenever non-violence was genuinely and sincerely practised it would have the effect of converting the oppressor. In 1933, when Gandhi was in Peshawar, a professor frankly asked him whether he honestly believed that if Abyssinia had simply non-resisted and told invading Italy "do your worst", the Italians would have been ashamed and desisted from the design. Gandhi replied that non-violence was the activest force on earth and that it never fails when honestly practised. If the Abyssinians had truly adopted the non-violence of the strong, the non-violence which breaks to pieces but never bends, Mussolini would have had no interest in Abyssinia. Let me quote Gandhi: "If they (the Abyssinians) had simply said 'you are welcome to reduce us to dust or ashes, but you will not find one Abyssinian ready to co-operate with you' what could Mussolini have done? He did not want a desert. Mussolini wanted submission and not defiance and if he had met the quite dignified and non-violent defiance that I have described, he would certainly have been obliged to retire." ¹¹.

But critics were not to be easily silenced. They pointed out to the Jews, who they said, had been practising non-violence for two thousand years. They received a rather harsh retort in the Harijan issue of 17th December 1938. "The Jews so far as I know", Gandhi wrote, "have never practised non-violence as an article of faith or even a deliberate policy. Indeed it is a stigma against them that their ancestors crucified Jesus. Are they not supposed to believe in eye for eye and tooth for tooth? If they do, there is no more non-violence in their hearts. Their non-violence, if it may be so-called, is of the helpless and the weak". ¹².

In short, according to Gandhi, truly non-violent resistance had not been practised yet and Gandhi, who claimed his whole life to be an experiment with truth, argued that he was attempting to practise it. Only the pure and unalloyed non-violence which implies self-invited, self-suffering will succeed in converting the aggressor's heart. Before the heat of non-violence, the hardest metal must melt.

limit to the capacity of non-violence to generate heat.

The Armoury of Non-Violence

In keeping with his desire to make non-violence an operative principle, Gandhi advocated certain techniques of non-violence. I would like to briefly explain the non-violent weapons that Gandhi fashioned and also briefly outline the administrative set-up that Gandhi considered as one in consonance with the doctrine of non-violence. Satyagraha is the first and most obvious weapon that comes to mind when we think of Gandhi's Ahimsa. Gandhi defined satyagraha as "the vindication of Truth by bearing witness to it through self-suffering love". Gandhi conceived satyagraha as the opposite of coercion. To quote him, "Satyagraha is gentle. It never wounds. It must not be the result of anger or malice. It is never fussy, never impatient, never vociferous. It is the direct opposite of compulsion. It was conceived as a complete substitute for violence".¹³ Instead of seeking to force or cow down the opponent, the satyagrahi was to establish spiritual identity with him and "waken in him a feeling that he cannot hurt him without hurting himself". The aim of the satyagrahi, according to Gandhi, is to lift the conflict from the physical plane and raise it to the spiritual, where it would be adjusted by "the union of souls?" or, to quote Gandhi "by the deep calling unto the deep".

In its practical application satyagraha could take many forms, but the two principal forms are civil disobedience and non-co-operation. Civil Disobedience and Non-Co-operation go hand in hand. Non-Co-operation implies a conscious refusal to aid government in its smooth functioning, while Civil Disobedience implies a non-violent refusal to obey laws or pay taxes. Together the two methods constitute the most effective way of paralysing an unjust or oppressive administration. All administration, in fact, involves active co-operation of the people. By refusing to co-operate with a handful of rulers, the people can always bring the wheels of administration to a grinding halt, compelling the government to quit or step down. According to Gandhi, the best thing

to do to an unjust state was to deny its existence, refuse its recognition and co-operation. In brief to live a moral life outside the immoral state.

At the same time, Gandhi emphasised umpteen times that since satyagraha was a "dharma-yuddha", a war on the moral plane, it should never degenerate to cruelty or seek to make capital of the enemy's difficulties. The sole aim of satyagraha was to awaken the conscience of the wrong-doer, to rouse the sense of shame in him and also to educate public opinion. Whenever instances of misdirected application of non-violence were brought to Gandhi's notice, it caused him genuine pain. For instance, when it was once reported to him that in the name of non-violent boycott, the inhabitants of a particular village were denying medical aid to reach a sick man. Gandhi took the villagers severely to task. "Thus depriving a man of the services of a medical man", Gandhi said, "is an act of inhumanity tantamount in the moral code to an attempt to murder.....". Likewise, to deprive a man the use of the only well in the village, in the name of boycott, was to give him notice to quit the village. We cannot make anyone pure, argued Gandhi, by compulsion, nor compel them to respect our opinion by the use of force. The aim of boycott and non-cooperation was not to coerce or compel, but to put to shame the wrong doer by refusing to take part in his social functions, such as marriage, etc., refusing to give him respectability, refusing to accept his gifts, etc.

In his attempt to practise these non-violent techniques, Gandhi did not have smooth sailing. His followers, he lamented, used his weapons but did not share his convictions. Thus when civil disobedience took a violent turn at Chari Chaura, when twenty-one constables and a sub-inspector, were locked in a police station and burnt alive, Gandhi was filled with deep anguish and withdrew the entire civil disobedience movement, much to the annoyance of Pandit Nehru and leading Congressmen. In 1924, when his followers opposed the Bardoli resile and much against Gandhi's wishes openly praised the spirit behind the acts of violence Gandhi is reported to have wept in the open meeting.¹⁴.

Two other forms of Satyagraha need to be mentioned viz. fasting and hijrat. Gandhi considered fasting to be "the highest expression of the prayer of a pure and loving heart" and as such an effective method of conversion. In keeping with the other weapons, in the armoury of non-violence, fasting was never to be coercive. Its aim was self-purification and influencing others in the sense of rousing their sluggish or sleeping conscience. It was meant, not to intimidate but open the eyes of the wrong-doer. "The object" to quote Gandhi, "is always to evoke the best in him (wrong doer). Self-suffering is an appeal to his better nature, as retaliation is to his baser. Fasting under proper circumstances is an appeal par excellence".¹⁵ But precisely, because fasting was intended to be an appeal to the nobler self, Gandhi did not hesitate to advise those who believed the aim of a particular fast to be selfish, to resolutely refuse to yield to it, even if the refusal "may result in the death of the fasting person".¹⁶

Hijrat, is a less known non-violent technique and it was suggested only once by Gandhi to the Sind Hindus in 1939, when under the Muslim League ministry they were subjected to systematic violence and harassment. Hijrat implied voluntary exile from the place of permanent residence as a non-violent protest undertaken with no hatred and rancour for the enemy, with a view to arouse his conscience. However Gandhi did not recommend it like civil disobedience or fasting as the weapon of the truly brave. He seems to have recommended it only to those who lacked the strength of the bravest to face the oppressor, resisting him non-violently and even preferring death at his hands. Thus his first advice to the Sind Hindus was to resist non-violently. It was only if they lacked the courage to do this and make the supreme self-sacrifice of willingly courting death in resistance, that they may practise Hijrat. In other words, Hijrat was the least preferred of the non-violent techniques and was to be practised only by those who lacked the supreme courage of non-violence.

In 1940 when Shamlal Gidwani wrote to Gandhi saying he did not subscribe to non-violent resistance nor to Gandhi's idea of

Hijrat because it would mean the public confession of the failure of the community to protect itself honourably, Gandhi's reply was logically in keeping with his doctrine of Ahimsa as an absolute creed. In an open letter to Sind Hindus published in the Harijan issue of 6th October 1940, Gandhi writes, "But he (Shri Gidwani) would like me to advise them (Sind Hindus) to defend themselves by arms. This is like asking a nature cure physician to prescribe allopathic drugs..... Shri Gidwani should go to a physician who knows the business. If he sincerely believes in the solution he has proposed, he must himself take training at once and lead the terrified Hindus of Sind along the path of armed defence".

The Non-Violent Administration

According to Gandhi since Ahimsa was not merely an individual virtue but an all pervading principle, even administration should as far as possible be non-violent.

Gandhi looked upon the state, with its concentration of power and police force, as organized violence. While state power may do some good, Gandhi argued, by curbing exploitation, it did greater harm by cutting at the very root of all progress, namely individuality and creativity. In the Harijan issue of 21st July 1940 Gandhi observes, "That state is perfect and non-violent where the people are governed the least."

In Gandhi's ideal society, outlined in his classic work "Hind Swaraj" and other scattered writings, all activity is undertaken by voluntarily formed associations.¹⁷ There is no exercise of "danda" or coercive power, only the sovereignty of pure moral authority. Since in the ideal society, everyone would practise "purna" or complete Ahimsa as well as mutual trust and self-restraint, such coercive institutions as laws, law-courts and police would all become superfluous. In the ideally non-violent society, there would be true "swaraj", which Gandhi defined as "disciplined rule from within" and "rule of self over self" (higher self over lower self). Now Gandhi admits that such a society, based on "purna ahimsa", in which everyone rules over himself/herself, is the ideal he is striving for. He is aware that it may not be

immediately realizable. Hence, by way of the first step towards realization of the ideal, Gandhi suggested a state based on maximum possible decentralization and self-reliance. Since the modern state coerces in the name of majority rule and by concentration of power in the central government, Gandhi argued for a system of Panchayati-raj. Maximum power should go to the village communities, which should operate on the principle of consensus and try and live as nearly self sufficient as possible. It is only when a village community finds some function to be beyond its capacity, that it may voluntarily federate with other village communities, to form a taluqa level panchayat and entrust it with that function. Similarly, taluqa panchayats, may voluntarily federate to form a district level panchayat and entrust it with certain functions. Finally, district panchayats may voluntarily federate to form a national level panchayat, and entrust it with a few functions of national character. Gandhi described such a voluntary federation as constituting non-violent administration, because, in it, power was not imposed from above, but actually moved from down, up.

Some Misconceptions Removed

Of the many ethical concepts that Gandhism gave birth to, none has been so deliberately distorted or misunderstood as the concept of Ahimsa or Non-violence.

One popular misconception is that Gandhi never gave unqualified support to the doctrine of non-violence. On the basis of Gandhi's statement that violence is better than cowardly submission to evil, it is insisted that Gandhi lent qualified support to ahimsa. Let us examine this point a little more carefully. It is true that Gandhi did repeatedly say that violence was to be preferred to cowardice. This was because he did not want to encourage hypocrisy. He did not want cowardice, or, non-violent submission to evil, to masquerade as ahimsa. On one occasion the Mahatma openly rebuked the villagers of Berriah who fled leaving their wives, children and belongings to the looters, while shamelessly pleading non-violence. Gandhi told them in very stern terms that

if they lacked the courage to offer non-violent resistance and get killed in the process, if necessary, they would have done better to offer violent resistance. 18. Gandhi was very clear in his view that evil, or injustice, or oppression must be resisted at all cost. He fully agreed with Tolstoy that one should bend the neck, but never the will. His only plea to the people was: you are capable of, and you must summon the courage of the brave to resist evil non-violently, through self-suffering love. But, says Gandhi, if you do not have the courage to resist non-violently, if you do not have the will and the strength to suffer non-violently for the right or just cause, then you should not justify your inaction or submission to evil, in the name of non-violent resistance. Far from being hypocritical, Gandhi was exhorting others not to be hypocritical.

Non-violence in no way implied cowardice. To quote Gandhi, "Non-violence is the summit of bravery. I have had no difficulty in demonstrating to men trained in the school of violence, the superiority of non-violence. As a coward, which I was for years", Gandhi goes on to confess in his Autobiography, "I harboured violence. I began to prize non-violence only when I began to shed violence". In other words, Gandhi was clear that every courageous and moral man's first preference should be non-violent resistance to evil. It is while addressing the coward, who is trying to take shelter behind non-violence, that Gandhi says, "Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence". It is again in the same context that Gandhi asserts, "Hence, also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner, become or remain a helpless witness to her dishonour".

Those who customarily cite these above passages, taken from Gandhiji's famous 1920 article, "The Doctrine of the Sword" to prove that even Gandhi would have supported their acts of violence, ignore the context in which the passages have to be

understood. What is worse, they indulge in deliberate distortion because they ignore what Gandhi says in the immediately succeeding paragraph, they ignore it for the simple reason that what Gandhi says there, challenges the comfortable view that Gandhi supported war and military defence. The very next paragraph reads, "But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I therefore appreciate the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his like. They would tear him to pieces if they could. But I do not believe India to be helpless. I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature. Only I want to use India's and my strength for a better purpose".

The rest of the article, nearly three quarters of it, is a continuous plea for India to practise non-violence because she realizes her strength and because "she has a mission for the world".

In short, in the Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa, the choice between violence and non-violence, exists really for the coward, the one who lacks the supreme courage to face the oppressor non-violently. And, Gandhi's advice to the coward is, at least resist violently but do not shamefully run away or accept oppression. However, for the truly brave, there is no choice. The truly brave must and ought to resist evil non-violently. In Yerwada Mandir, Gandhi observes: "The brave are those armed with fearlessness, not with the sword, the rifle and the like. These are taken up only by those who are possessed by fear". For Gandhi, to carry a sword was a sign of fear. But even if it be considered brave, he, who, swordless chooses to confront the foe, considering him as his misguided brother, willing to die at his hands in the attempt to convert him, was braver still. Vengeance was equally a sign of fear or weakness. "The desire for vengeance comes out of fear of

harm, imaginary or real".¹⁸ Those truly non-violent being truly brave and fearless, says Gandhi, can never speak of vengeance or just retaliation.

To sum up, one may or may not accept Gandhi, but if one has to interpret and understand him honestly, it must be said that Gandhi never compromised his absolute doctrine of Ahimsa and that he was not inconsistent in his preaching regarding Ahimsa.

Let me now turn to another set of critics who argue that Gandhi's advocacy of non-violence was hypocritical. Such critics point to Gandhi's participation in the Boer war in South Africa and to his support to the British in the world war to indicate that Gandhi was either a hypocrite or else a shrewd politician who skilfully played the game of non-violence to win freedom for his country. But fair treatment demands, that instead of imputing motives, we try and understand Gandhi in the light of his own utterances. In the first instance we must note that Gandhi's thought his attitude towards the British empire as well as the concept of Ahimsa evolved over the years. Now, at the time Gandhi was in South Africa, his attitude towards the British empire was very different from his later attitude. At that time, he confesses, he sincerely believed in the "ultimate beneficial character of the British empire". And, Gandhi admits that it was more a desire to help the empire in distress than to promote a war that was responsible for the support given to the British. In the Young India of 5th November 1925, Gandhi notes, "By enlisting men for ambulance work in South Africa and in England and recruits for field service in India, I helped not the cause of war, but I helped the institution called the British empire in whose ultimate beneficial character I then believed". Similarly, explaining his support to the British in World War 1, Gandhi writes in Young India of 15th March 1928, that at that time he had mixed motives. In his own words, "Two things I can recall. Though as an individual I was opposed to war, I had no status for offering effective non-violent resistance... The other motive was to qualify for swaraj through the good offices of the statesmen of the Empire. I could thus not qualify myself except

through serving the Empire in its life-and-death struggle. It must be understood that I am writing of my mentality in 1914 when I was a believer in the Empire and its willing ability to help India in her battle for freedom".

But undoubtedly this is rather weak explanation. Gandhi himself was aware of this and realized that it may not carry conviction with many. Hence to abate the critics' shafts Gandhi admitted his participation to be weakness on his part. With a frankness and courage that merit praise, Gandhi declared that he would rather have himself declared a weak upholder of his own faith, than have the absolute principle of non-violence compromised. In the Young India issue of 13th September 1928 Gandhi wrote, "I know that war is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has got to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom. Would that all the acts alleged against me were found to be wholly indefensible rather than that by any act of mine, non-violence was held to be compromised or that I was ever thought to be in favour of violence or untruth in any shape or form". A year later, in a letter Gandhi wrote to Rev B. delight, he came back to the same theme. "I would urge Mr. B. delight and other fellow war-resisters not to mind my faulty or incomplete argument and still less to mind my participation in war which they may be unable to reconcile with my professions about war. Let them understand me to be uncompromisingly against all wars. If they cannot appreciate my argument, let them impute my participation to unconscious weakness. For I would feel extremely sorry to discover that my actions were used by anyone to justify war under certain conditions".¹⁹

Two things come out clear from these observations of Gandhi, namely, that Gandhi's doctrine of Ahimsa evolved over the years and that he became firmly committed to non-violence as an absolute creed only after the mid nineteen twenties. Gandhi's participation in the Boer war and support to the first world war were events that occurred in the early years of his life in South Africa when his doctrine of non-violence was still evolving. In the

light of my study of Gandhi's statements and writings on Ahimsa, it is clear that the theory of non-violence developed fully after 1925. In all his statements and arguments after 1925, we have no wavering, no confusion, no inconsistency, but a clear, firm and logical commitment to non-violence as an absolute value.

In another very important respect too Gandhi steered clear his doctrine of non-violence from the charge of inconsistency and hypocrisy. Thus in keeping with the principle of Ahimsa, Gandhi refused to force the doctrine down anyone's throat. Ahimsa was a universal religion, Gandhi declared, but it would be the negation of the principle itself if it (that is, Ahimsa) were thrust down someone's throat. A man who believes that fish-eating is against the doctrine of violence cannot force others not to eat fish, he can only persuade them. "The man who coerces another" says Gandhi, "not to eat fish commits more violence than he who eats it".²⁰ And it must be said to the credit of Gandhi that he meticulously safeguarded himself from exceeding the limits set down by his own doctrine.

It is against this background that one must examine the charge made by some against Gandhi alleging inconsistency in his advocating non-violence to the allies, to the Jews and the Chinese but abandoning it when the Congress sent armed forces to Kashmir at the time of the tribal invasion sponsored by Pakistan. In reply to such persistent queries as to the way he had abandoned non-violence when his friends in the Congress sent the Indian army to Kashmir, Gandhi had the following clarification published on his behalf in the Harijan issue of 16th November 1947: "Relying Gandhiji said that he was sorry for the ignorance betrayed by the writer. The audience would remember that he repeatedly said that he had no influence in the matter over his friends in the union cabinet. He could not expect them to act against their conviction and everyone should be satisfied with his confession that he had lost his original hold upon his friends". In other words, it would be wrong to charge or accuse Gandhi of inconsistency or hypocrisy since he never approved of the use of force in Kashmir. The fact

that Gandhi pleads helplessness in the matter of convincing his friends in the cabinet, does not in any way mean that he has compromised his position.

Before I pass on to an evaluation of the Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa, I would like to remove one more misconception regarding the Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa viz., that Gandhi was a wholesale borrower who simply lifted the doctrine from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, from Tolstoy, from Thoreau and Ruskin.

Some foreign authorities like A.C. Underwood, in his book Contemporary Thought of India, claim that Gandhi's Ahimsa was borrowed from the Bible and was a doctrine unknown to Hinduism. Underwood writes, "The Hindu sacred writings abound in instances of men who by self mortification acquired power over gods and men. But in none of these does the thought appear of active benevolence to others. This is a distinctive Christian concept and in so far as Mr Gandhi has incorporated it into his idea of satyagraha, he has derived it not from Hinduism but from the Sermon on the Mount".²¹. Further, Mr Underwood quotes one Mr. Heiler who claims that Gandhi belongs to the great Christian "Passion-mystics" because in his heart there lives a holy love for the cross of suffering such as is completely unknown in Indian religion.

Now, it is true that Gandhi was profoundly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount and the Christian Anarchist philosopher, Leo Tolstoy. It was in 1888-89 when Gandhi was in England, studying law, that a stray bookseller persuaded him to buy a copy of the Bible. The Old Testament with its tales of violent heroism, says Gandhi, bored him, but the New Testament, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, profoundly moved and impressed him. The sentences in the New Testament that made a deep impression on young Gandhi were: "Resist not evil, but who so ever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also", and "Blessed are the meek..... Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you". These sentences, Gandhi later informed Louis Fischer, his biographer, "went straight to my heart".²²

Gandhi was not a profound scholar and read little; but his first biographer, the Rev. J. Doke tells us that he read the bulk of Tolstoy's works in 1893-94, that is, in the first year of his stay in South Africa. This period was a critical juncture in Gandhi's life when he was passing through a crisis of scepticism. Referring to Tolstoy's classic "The Kingdom of God Is within You", Gandhi says that its reading cured him of his scepticism and made him a firm believer in Ahimsa. "I made too an intensive study of Tolstoy's books, Tax Gospel in Brief What To Do? and such other books", confesses Gandhi, "and I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love".²³

However, on the basis of Gandhi's self-confessed indebtedness to the Bible and Tolstoy, to conclude (as Underwood and Heiler have done) that Hinduism preached mere non-injury and sheer passivity and that to the extent the Gandhian doctrine of ahimsa incorporated ideas of active benevolence and self-suffering love, it borrowed a distinctively Christian concept unknown to the Hindus, is not fair or correct. It is not fair or correct because we know that Gandhi as a child was profoundly influenced by the tales of truth and non-violence that his pious mother used to tell him. Gandhi's own religious sect, Vaishnavism, particularly preached returning good for evil. The apostle of Vaishnavism, Chaitanyaadeva, when violently struck by a ruffian, is reported to have exclaimed, "But I shall offer you my love". In addition to Vaishnavism, there was also the influence of Jainism, which preached absolute non-injury and benevolent love even unto animals. Gandhi's early acquaintance with Jainism and to some extent with the Buddhist doctrines of Ahimsa and karuna (compassion for all living beings) was largely due to Jaina and Buddhist family friends who frequented young Gandhi's house and held discussions with Gandhi's father. It is thus a misconception to claim that the Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa is Christian and not Indian or Hindu.

An Evaluation

Finally, I would like to make an attempt to evaluate the

Gandhian doctrine of Ahimsa. The first question that can be raised pertains to Gandhi's understanding of the self or the basic nature of man. Gandhi assumes that man's heart is essentially good at the core. It may get rusted on the surface on account of various factors, but its goodness remains always the same whatever be its outward appearance. Man's heart is like a cabbage whose inner layers always retain their freshness. Hence Gandhi's instructions to Sarvodaya workers that they have firm faith in man's inward core of goodness and strive to reach it undismayed by outward appearances. In short, it is a basic Gandhian premise that man does not lead a good life because it is enjoined on him but rather because it is the immutable and eternal law of his nature. Gandhi once observed, "I believe that the sum total of the energy of mankind is not to bring us down but to lift us up, and that is the result of the definite if unconscious, working of the Law of Love". 24. It is this premise that enables Gandhi to say that everyone is capable of reform and conversion to goodness.

Again, according to Gandhi, in man there are two conflicting forces, self-love and self-sacrifice; but of these two, the latter is by far the more important and says Gandhi, mankind owes its survival and progress to this surplus of self-sacrifice over self-love. Now what Gandhi wants or seeks to do is to release this principle of self-sacrifice from the limited field open to it under the existing social framework and to allow it a gradually increasing sway. By a gradual process of conversion, by rational appeal, Gandhi believes that individuals can be so trained in the virtues of self-control, self-sacrifice and non-violence, that life can become fully self-regulated and the need for even government disappear.

The question before us is: is Gandhi correct in his understanding of human nature? On the answer to this question impinges our acceptance or rejection of his doctrine of Ahimsa. Now, there are quite some natural scientists who tell us that if man by nature is a gregarious animal having the inborn instincts of love for fellow-humans, mutuality and co-operation, then he is also by nature an acquisitive and competitive animal with the inborn lust

for power, acquisition of wealth and status. One may also with profit note here the views of Swami Vivekananda, a well known exponent of Hinduism. Defining "maya", Vivekananda writes, "It (maya) is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, everywhere we have to move through this contradiction, ... that wherever there is good, there must also be evil and wherever there is evil there is good". Vivekananda did not believe in a perfect millennium to come, as Gandhi did. In fact he believed in the perpetual existence of good and evil on this earth. They must go together, he observes, "for they are not contradictory, nor two separate existences, but different manifestations of the same unity, life and death, sorrow and happiness, good and evil.... We can never have ultimately everything good on this earth and nothing bad. This may disappoint and frighten some of you but I cannot help it". And as if he were directly answering Gandhi, Vivekananda goes on to say, "The general argument against my statement and apparently a very convincing one, is that in the course of evolution, all that is evil in what we see around us is gradually being eliminated and the result is that if this elimination continues.... a time will come when all evil will have been extirpated and the good alone will remain. But there is a fallacy in this argument and it is this: It takes for granted that both good and evil are things that are eternally fixed. But is it so? That the evils are being eliminated may be true, but if so, the good must also be dying out....."

The eminent English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, in his book, "Human Society in Ethics and Politics", likewise disputes the Gandhian understanding of the nature of self. "The springs of action as they are found in history and in the present day", says Russell, "are very largely such as demand defeat for others. There is love of power, there is rivalry, there is hate, and I am afraid, we must add a positive pleasure in the spectacle of suffering. These passions are so strong that they have not only governed the behaviour of societies, but have caused hatred of those who spoke against them. When Christ told men that they should love each

other, he produced such fury that the mob shouted 'Crucify Him', 'Crucify Him'. Christians ever since have followed the mob rather than the founder of their religion".

In short one can question the Gandhian premise that there is an inevitable law of moral evolution which makes man move from lower to higher, from evil to good, from violence to non-violence. And if one doubts the existence of such an inevitable moral evolutionary process, one will have difficulty sharing Gandhi's optimism regarding the perfectibility of man.

Gandhi, somewhat like Immanuel Kant and William Godwin, argued that human beings are so constituted, that, we need only to acquaint with what is good and worthy, and the passion for attaining it will be excited in man. Gandhi saw vice and weakness as the products of improper education and false indoctrination, and was convinced that moral education was all that was required to make men aspire for perfectibility. Now, quite obviously how enthusiastic you will be about the Gandhian doctrine of non-violence will depend on whether you share Gandhi's belief - unshakeable belief that man is perfectible.

But, the premise of perfectibility apart, many other doubts come to mind when it comes to accepting fully the Gandhian doctrine. Gandhi assumes that man's salvation lies in his preferring self-destruction for the sake of converting evil doers. One may question: is this biologically possible? Willingly dying at the hand of the oppressor, rather than retaliate, is possible only when one has completely discarded the self or ego, in other words, reached the position of "sunyavatha" (complete zero or total elimination of ego). It is possible only when one has developed a sense of complete or total non-attachment (aparigraha), even to one's own body, that one can practise the creed of non-violence which demands that we willingly crucify ourselves and die forgiving the sinner and praying for his redemption.

Now, even if we admit that such supreme self-sacrifice is the highest form of morality (which as I shall show shortly has

been questioned by some) many natural scientists doubt that this is biologically possible. Certain biologists state that self-preservation is the first law of any species. In his book, "This Human Nature", Charles Duff contends that selfishness was the driving force of primeval organic life. The main functions of the proto-zoon, the earliest forms of life, were divided between self-preservation and self-reproduction. It was this pride in self that provided the motive of life, the elan vital of Bergson. A cursory glance at all forms of life, shows one instinct common to them all viz. self-preservation. Even the primitive protozoan, says Duff, when it ran short of its accustomed diet, overcame hunger by consuming part of its own race. Now if one believes that man shares in common with other biological species, the instinct of self-preservation, it does, to that extent, become difficult to accept Gandhi's contention that one should lay down one's own life rather than hurt the assailant even in legitimate self-defence. Perhaps the only thing one can say in defence of Gandhi is that he does not accept man to be just another biological animal. In other words Gandhi's reply to biologists and philosophers like Vivekananda and Bertrand Russell would be that far from being a biological animal, man is a spiritual animal (if one may use such a phrase) who is aware that he lives in the immortal soul and not in the perishable body and who is capable of sacrificing his body in order to redeem the sinner.

The biological question apart, one can also raise the moral question: is it correct for the good to die for the dubious possibility that the wicked may reform? To many, the idea that the good must allow themselves to be destroyed, because of the remote hope cherished by a few that by such willing self-annihilation, the wicked oppressor may one day be made to give up his bad ways, does appear a perversion of ethics. As Arthur Moore comments, "If the individuals composing a nation, having committed no injury, allow an aggressor nation to injure individuals among themselves as much as it likes, their action seems to me unlovely".
25. It is therefore best to adopt the position that power or force, as

such, is, in itself, neither good nor bad. It can be used rightly or wrongly. And, therefore, like most other things so capable of use, it must justify itself. Bertrand Russell drives this point home well, by giving the example of the terrorist, Guy Fawkes. Suppose you had come across Guy Fawkes in the very act of blowing up the train and suppose you could only have prevented the disaster by incapacitating him, then, even most pacifists, argues Russell, would admit that you would have done the right thing using force against him. "We must judge the exercise of power by its effects and we must therefore first make up our mind as to what effects we desire", concludes Russell.

However, even here, in defence of the Gandhian position I would like to make it clear that from his own spiritual and metaphysical point of view, Gandhi does make sense. Gandhi did not believe man to be body but soul which is immortal. In that case Gandhi does not see how the act of sacrificing one's life for the sinner is unlovely. A good man prefers to die at the hands of the assailant, rather than kill him, says Gandhi, because he loves the soul of the sinner more than his own body and believes that the supreme self-sacrifice will touch the oppressor's soul and reform him for which it worth his losing the body. It is similar logic which explains why Jesus preferred crucifixion too. And Gandhi does quote Christ to say, what does a man get, if he gains the whole world but loses his soul.

The fourth question I would like to raise is, is Gandhi correct when he says that love never faileth or that love conquers all? It was Gandhi's abiding faith that man was good at the core and it was this faith that made him make frequent appeals - for instance his Appeal to Every Briton, his Appeal to Hitler etc. Gandhi considered satyagraha, which involved self-suffering, also as an appeal, an extra-rational appeal to the opponent. In the Young India issue of March 1925 Gandhi wrote, "I have found that mere appeal to reason does not answer where prejudices are age long and based on supposed religious authority. Reason has to be strengthened by suffering". Elsewhere Gandhi says, "If you want

something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also". 26

Now we cannot rule out the fact that such an appeal made to a noble foe, who has streaks of humanity and liberalism, may succeed. Gandhi himself cites how he could win over General Smuts, his staunchest opponent and critic in South Africa, by non-violent resistance.

Mr. Diwarkar in his book on Gandhi's Satyagraha (P 104), cites the following passage from a letter received by Gandhi from Gen. Smuts: "I do not like your people and do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands upon you. I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and you never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And this is what reduces us to sheer helplessness". This instance while it shows the merit of non-violent resistance also clearly brings out its limitation. It succeeds where the foe is human. Would a Hitler or a Mussolini's heart be touched?

Again Ahimsa or non-violent self-suffering may succeed on an individual plane (assuming a noble foe of course) because of the face to face inter-action involved, in which the oppressor is personal witness to the suffering of the satyagrahi as in the case of Gen. Smuts cited above. In other words, satyagraha may have a chance to succeed, if it generates an intense personal involvement and relationship. This is quite obvious from Gandhi's account of his first object lesson in satyagraha taught to him by his young wife Kasturba. Gandhi writes, "I learnt the lesson of Ahimsa from my wife Kasturba. I tried to bend her to my will. Her determined resistance to my will on the one hand, and her quiet submission to my stupidity involved on the other, ultimately made me ashamed of myself and cured me of my stupidity in thinking that I was born to rule over her; and in the end she became my teacher in non-violence. And what I did in South Africa was but an extension of

the rule of Satyagraha she practised in her own person." 27.

Both these instances, of Gen. Smut, and his young wife Kasturba, indicate that the 'better self' of the wrong-doer has a chance of being roused when the wrong-doer is made to witness the suffering love of the satyagrahi. But what of groups distantly located, when it is impossible for the oppressor to witness the suffering love of the satyagrahi? Take for instance the case of modern war between two nations involving strikes by missiles from air and sea. Here the barriers of distance and marked differences of culture may prove major hindrances to the development of that sympathy, that pain at seeing the oppressor willingly suffer, which alone can provoke a metamorphosis in the oppressor.

Another thing one must remember about self-suffering love is that it may arouse irrational sympathy by emotionalizing the issue, instead of creating rational conviction. Let me illustrate this point with an example from Gandhi's childhood. You must be familiar with the incident of the young Gandhi, once, in league with his elder brother, stealing twentyfive rupees from his father's coat pocket in order to repay a debt. The guilt, however, sat heavily on young Gandhi and finally unable to bear the torment, he wrote a letter of confession to his father. Gandhi tells us, he stood trembling all over, while he handed the letter to his father. At that time his father was suffering from fistula and was confined to bed. With some difficulty he sat up on the bed to read the letter. After having read the letter, he did not get angry or shout at young Gandhi. He merely closed his eyes and then wept, silently for a minute or two. He then again lay down. Gandhi says he was profoundly moved. He too silently wept. In his autobiography Gandhi recollects, "I also shed tears when I saw my father's agony. Those pearl drops of love cleansed my heart and washed my sin away. This was for me an object lesson in Ahimsa".

I think this incident clearly indicates the power of love, of silent suffering love, to move another person. However, it does not prove that Gandhi was rationally convinced of the wrong-doing. To be emotionally swayed to respond is one thing, to be rationally

convinced of one's error is another. It is a moot or debatable point whether emotionalizing the issue and thereby seeking to convert hearts is morally superior to rational conviction.

A related question following from what I have said above, comes to my mind. The satyagrahi may be convinced that he is acting out of love for the wrong-doer or oppressor, but what if he fails to emotionalize the issue? In other words what if his self-suffering love fails to move the wrong-doer and change his heart.? Now this is not just a hypothetical question. It has a basis in stark reality. As you well know, Gandhi went on an indefinite fast to protest against the policy of separate electaorates for the Harijans, which Dr.Ambedkar strongly advocated. Now Gandhi's love for the Harijans is not in question, nor his regard or respect for Dr.Ambedkar. Yet, his fast unto death against separate electorates, did not appear to Ambedkar as an act of suffering love. He thought Gandhi was acting shrewd, if not hypocritical. He did finally give up his demand, because he did not want to be responsible for taking Gandhi's life, but till the last day of his life Ambedkar was not convinced that Gandhi was correct in opposing seperate electrorates. The Ambedkar-Gandhi episode, clearly shows a serious limitation of satyagraha viz. there is nothing inherent in an act of self-suffering love that can convince the opponent that the Satyagrahi's stance is morally correct.

In this context, I would like to point out what I perceive as a slight confusion in the Gandhian approach to understanding the ends-means relationship. Gandhi considered ends and means to be causally connected, arguing that the end always grows out of the means. But ends can be understood in two ways. Firstly an end can be understood subjectively as the purpose or blueprint in the mind of a person. Secondly it can be understood objectively as the actual result emerging from the means adopted. Thus when Gandhi says that if we adopt the non-violent means, even the stoniest heart of an oppressor will melt and he will be reformed, he is perceiving the end subjectively. Actually, the adoption of the non-violent means may not melt the stoniest heart. Gandhi's non-

violent satyagraha did not convince or change Ambedkar's attitude towards separate electorates. In other words, the hope that his satyagraha would convince and change Ambedkar was Gandhi's subjective perception of the end flowing from his means; the objective end, however, was that Ambedkar remained unconvinced and instead felt compelled or coerced by Gandhi's fast to give up his demand in order to save the Mahatma's life. In view of the fact that the end perceived is an ideal, subjectively desired, may differ from the end as actually or objectively realized, the social scientist has a right to enquire whether the means selected would in fact realise the end.

A last word regarding the non-violent state and I will have ended. Gandhi wanted not only that every individual practise the maximum possible non-violence, he desired the re-structuring of the polity and the economy as well, to reflect this basic principle of life. For instance Gandhi spoke of opting for Justice based on Love and not on law-courts, police and judges. He preferred to see baton wielding policemen to be replaced by a Shanti-Sena (Non-violent soldiers of peace). But quite clearly, we cannot build political institutions on the spiritual or metaphysical assumptions of Gandhi, unless of course we accept unreservedly Gandhi's understanding of the self as essentially good, and, capable of perfectibility. For quite a long time, it will be necessary for us to work on the assumption that man's nature is intricate; that man's reason may goad him to see the merits of non-violent resolution of conflicts, but at the same time he has instincts and sentiments which fortify the fallibility and frailty of reason. Hence political institutions must be built on the intricate nature of man and not any idealized version of man. In short, it would be premature and unwise to build institutions on the premise or assumption of the perfectibility of man.

Now this does not mean that I am blind to the obvious merits of non-violence in social life. People who accept violence as a cultural norm (the way in which the French philosopher Frantz Fanon does) and praise violence for its cleansing and purifying

role, do debase themselves. Those who continually use violence to fight an oppressive system are likely to internalize violence. Once the victims of oppression internalize violence, the norm on which the oppressive system itself is built, they are not likely to give up violence after achieving their goal of removing or replacing the oppressor by their own rule. It is this internalization of violence, that explains why dictatorships never end and those who fought to remove one dictator, end up themselves establishing a dictatorship. History is fully of examples of revolutions that have devoured their own children in this way. The Bolsheviks who violently removed the oppressive regime of the Czars, ended up with setting up their own dictatorship. It was the same story, earlier, with the French revolutionaries. Hence the important lesson to learn from Gandhi is that violence should never be our first and hasty preference. It can only be a last and reluctant option in a given situation. I am one of those who believe that war or violence does not lead to a permanent solution or resolution of conflict. A war generally escalates a conflict and the enemy may be incapacitated but may survive and strike again. A permanent or lasting solution can only be the non-violent resolution of the conflict, which creates a new moral consensus regarding live and let live.

Notes :

1. This was Bapu, Navjiwan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1959, pp. 57-58.
2. M.K.Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, Navjiwan, Ahmedabad, Vol:2 1949 p.143.
3. M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, Navjiwan, Ahmedabad, Vol 1,1941, .190.
4. M.K. Gandhi, Truth is God, (A compilation by R.K. Prabhu), Navjiwan, pp. 34-35.
5. M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, Navjiwan, Ahmedabad, Vol 2 p. 39.

6. For these views of Gandhi see *The Art of Living* by M.K. Gandhi (Edited by T.A. Hingorani), Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, pp.18-19; *Yerwada Mandir*, by M.K. Gandhi, Navjiwan, pp. 6-7; and *Non-Violence in Peace and War* (M.K. Gandhi), Navjiwan, Vol 1, pp.278-279.
7. Vide M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, Op. Cit., Vol 2 pp. 152-153, 329; and Vol 1 p 42.
- 8. Radhakrishnan (Ed), *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays & Reflections*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1939, p.38.
9. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, Op. Cit, Vol 1, p. 109.
10. *Ibid.*
11. M.K. Gandhi, *Non Violence in Peace and War*, Op. Cit, Vol 1, p. 143.
12. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, Op. Cit, Vol 1, p. 167.
13. M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, Compiled by R.K. Prabhu, Navjiwan, Ahmedabad, 1959, p. 83.
14. M.K. Gandhi, *Essays and Reflections* (ed. by Radhakrishnan) Op. Cit, p. 219-220.
15. M.K. Gandhi, *The Ethics of Sating* (ed. by Jag Pravesh Chander), Indian Printing Works, Kacheri Road, Lahore, 1944, p.82.
16. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, Navjiwan, Ahmedabad, p.102.
17. People will form voluntary associations to fulfil their many aims. Since coercion is ruled out, membership will be optional. If a member finds a rule irksome or objectionable he is free to leave the association and form another but while he is in it he may never disobey. Vide Harijan, 13-7-1940.
18. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, Op. Cit., Vol 1 p. 59.

19. Young India, 9-5-29.
20. Harijan, 24-3-46.
21. A.C. Underwood, Contemporary Thought of India, William and Northgate, London, p. 185.
22. Louis Fischer, Mahatma Gandhi, London, 1951. p. 15
23. Kalidas Nag, Tolstoy and Gandhi, Pustak Bhandar, Patna p. 31.
24. N.K. Bose, Selections From Gandhi, p.23.
25. Cited in Radhakrishnan (Ed), Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections, Op.Cit., p.195.
26. Cited in Pantham and Deutsch, p. 241.
27. M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, Op. Cit., Vol 1, p 288.