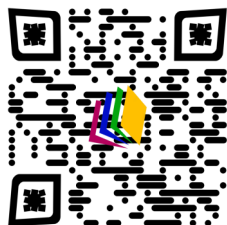




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Satyagraha: An Attitude of Mind

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ABSTRACT:

The Indian freedom struggle is widely discussed and is an area of open interpretations based on new research and new schools of thoughts. The political history of the freedom struggle of India very prominently reflects on the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi and his novel experiments of mobilizing the masses towards the liberation of the country made the entire movement an unconventional in its approach. The following paper looks at the experiment of Gandhiji of Satyagraha and its genesis. The role of Satyagraha in the collective and individual capacity varied and rather the accountability quotient was always higher in the movement. The Gandhian principle of Satyagraha molded the generations of Indians together not only during the pre-independent era, but also post-independence.

KEY WORDS: Satyagraha, Gandhi, Modern India, Non violence
Indian History

Introduction:

History is for the most part a record of armed activities and activities of peace find very little mention in it. A human tendency is that only uncommon activities strike our attention towards it. The Indian freedom struggle has unfolded many areas where the non-application of armed activities has got acknowledgement on the wider scale rather than the armed insurrections. History shows us that all the reforms have begun with one person and carried out by masses eventually culminating into an 'ism'. The freedom struggle of India post 1920 was more or less dominated by Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with truth, non-violence and the most importantly his movement of Satyagraha.

The Concept of freedom:

Freedom for Gandhi was neither a condition granted by some social contract nor a privilege. Freedom was grounded in the moral autonomy of the individual and was thus inalienable. Freedom is a social

necessity. He believed 'the outward freedom, therefore that we shall attain will only be in act proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment'.¹²⁵ The concept of freedom for Gandhi was beyond political means and he was very clear in adopting the path for that complete freedom with minimum loss and overall gain. His advocacy of a non-violent Satyagraha had a defined technique where in he believed that 'the struggle in freedom battle of non violence against violence no matter from what quarters the latter comes, must continue till a single representative is left alive'.¹²⁶

As far back as 1909 he wrote 'For the many ills we suffer in India, passive resistance is an infallible panacea. It is worthy of careful study and I am sure it will be found that it is the only weapon that is suited to the genius of our people and our land which is the necessary of the most ancient religions and has very little to learn from modern civilization – a civilization based on violence of the blackest type, largely a negation of the divine in man and which is rushing head long to its ruin'.¹²⁷ He believed that his thoughts and practices are not unconventional and novel, but they already existed in our tradition and culture. He was only trying to revive it with some fresh guidelines.

Gandhi in South Africa

When Gandhi visited South Africa his experiences there and his attitude and conduct were those of a typical Satyagrahi at Maritzburg when he was unjustly ejected from a first class compartment when he was brutally assaulted by a coach guard at Durban and when his life was threatened by a white mob. He patiently bore the insults and attacks without ill will without retaliation and without recourse to law. These experiences helped him

forge 'Satyagraha into a social weapon'.¹²⁸ It was in South Africa where he coined the word to describe a certain mode of action. For him 'Satyagraha was the definite improvement upon the method of constitutional agitation of petition, prayer and protest'.¹²⁹

Gandhi in India

Gandhiji's entry into Indian politics looked like a hope in otherwise degenerating Congress party. Most of the leaders from both moderates and extremists groups had passed away, leading to a political void. After following the advice of his mentor and political guru, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi tried to infuse in people the real cause of mobilization against the British autocracy in India. As he wrote 'This government is cowardly. We are afraid of imprisonment. The government takes advantage of our fear of jails'.¹³⁰ Even while reacting to the unjust Rowlatt Bills he said 'I think the growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions etc we must give them something effective'.¹³¹

Evolution of the word Satyagraha

Let us try to look into the evolution of Satyagraha from the very inception. There was a invite for entries for certain English words one of them was '*Passive Resistance*' only four entries were received which are as follows.

- a. *Kashtadhin Prativartan*: means resistance through submission to hardship.
- b. *Pratyapaya*: means counter measure opposing good to evil.
- c. *Dvidya Pratipaksha* : firmness of resistance.

Sadagraha: equivalent to Satyagraha which was changed by Gandhiji.

Out of the four Gandhiji choose the fourth one, sent by Maganlal Gandhi¹³² and Gandhiji felt that Sadagraha can be converted to 'Satyagraha',¹³³ which will be on apt regional translation of Passive resistance. He defined 'Satyagraha as a method for winning one's objective through personal suffering such method was the very reverse of resistance of arms'.¹³⁴

Exercising the values of Satyagraha

For him the doctrine of Satyagraha was a comprehensive social and political application. It actually connoted 'Truth Force', a policy for action and stimulus for social reform. In this sense it was non-violent resistance. However, he also highlighted that through the freedom gained by enacting true Satyagraha assured sublime contentment, it was by no means easily won. 'Men of great physical strength are rare. Rarer still must be those who derive their strength from truth'.¹³⁵ His good oratory skill and influencing writing style exposed the vulnerability of the British and the massive strength of the Indians against them.

As he wrote 'The spectacle of 300 million people being lowed down by living in the dread of three hundred men is demoralizing alike for the despot as for the victims. It is the duty of those who have realized the evil nature of the system however attractive some of its features may, torn from their context appear to be, to destroy it without delay. It is their clear duty to run any risk to achieve the end'.¹³⁶ He tries to affirm his conviction of Satyagraha in following words. 'Those who know the real meaning of Satyagraha should not have the slightest doubt as to what the victory means'.¹³⁷

Application of Satyagraha

The first principle of understanding Satyagraha is that 'anyone who wanted to engage in this kind of struggle should show a special kind of regard for truth, the satyagrahi should have the strength that flows from truthfulness'.¹³⁸ According to Gandhi Satyagraha further was not physical force. It does not inflict pain on the adversary nor seek the destruction. In the use of Satyagraha there were no ill-will, it was a pure soul force.

He advocated that if we learn the use of the weapon of Satyagraha, we can employ it to overcome all hardships originating from injustice. In real terms, 'Satyagraha seeks to express truth in action'.¹³⁹ His Satyagraha over the years became so powerful and impactful that in 1931, Winston Churchill proclaimed that 'he found it nauseating and humiliating that Gandhi a 'Seditious Fakir' should hold talks with the Viceroy of India'.¹⁴⁰ With his new ideology, he was not only able to get mass participation, but rightly justified their active improvement. As he believed 'civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He does not give it up without ceasing to be a man'.¹⁴¹

Traits of a Satyagrahi

The mahatma however was also very meticulous in defining the role, duties, responsibilities and traits of a true Satyagrahi. A satyagrahi according to him was a better non-cooperator or striker. His 'judgment is not clouded by passion anger and hatred. He disarms his opponents and gains more sympathy'.¹⁴² 'A satyagrahi enjoys a degree of freedom not possible for others; he becomes a truly fearless person. Once his mind is rid of fear, he will never agree to be another's slave. Having achieved this state of mind, he will never submit to any arbitrary action'.¹⁴³

He felt that the Satyagrahi should not fear for his body and should not give up what he thinks is Truth. The word defeat should not exist in his dictionary. He was of the opinion that 'a Satyagrahi can never be resorted to, for personal gain, but for good of others.'¹⁴⁴ He should not obstruct in the official duties which are free from the taint of injustice. A Satyagrahi should oppose the intoxication of power and not moral authority.

Satyagraha an Universal phenomenon

Since the theoretical basis of satyagraha was universal in its application it was to be remembered, that what is won by force can be retained by force alone same is the case with love, but what we have gained through Satyagraha can be retained through Satyagraha and if it is given up we may be sure that the gain will also be lost. As Gandhiji stated that 'Personally the social, economic, and political progress of the nation which I see in Satyagraha I can see in nothing else'.¹⁴⁵

He believed that this Satyagraha would not really end till European struggle ended. For me there is no turning back. Whether I have many or very few Satyagrahis. Like many other men in history, Gandhiji held that acting through human agency, god did guide humanity.¹⁴⁶ In brief the significances of Satyagraha consists in the quest for a principle of life.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's originality lay in the way he infused them in both theory and practice the concept of Satyagraha. He was a man of his time and place with a particular philosophical and religious background facing specific political and social situations. He was man of vision, of action who

asked many of the profoundest questions that face humankind as it struggles to live in community. 'It was this confrontation out of a real humanity which makes his stature and which makes his struggle and glimpses of truth enduring significance'.¹⁴⁷

Satyagraha is Gandhiji's greatest gift. As Romain Rolland Says 'Mr. Gandhi's Satyagraha experiment is the sole chance now existing in the world of effecting transformation of humanity without violence. If this fails there will remain no other issue in human history, but violence'.¹⁴⁸ The idea of Satyagraha has been timeless and is used in the contemporary world to resolve the conflicts and project resistance against the arbitrary judgments. Satyagraha is really an attitude of mind and requires more of physical and mental strength and Gandhi was indeed a stronger psychological analyst which helped him in understanding the pulse of masses. Gandhi's experiment has made him immortal in the socio-political and philosophical history of mankind.