

The Power of Satyagraha*

Victory of Satyagraha

M.K. Gandhi

A clear victory of Satyagraha is impossible so long as there is ill-will. But those who believe themselves to be weak, are incapable of loving. Let, then, our first act every morning be to make the following resolve for the day: 'I shall not fear any one on earth. I shall fear God only: I shall not bear ill-will towards any one. I shall not submit to in justice from any one. I shall conquer untruth by truth and in resisting untruth I shall put up with all suffering'.

There is no time-limit for a Satyagrahi nor is there a limit to his capacity for suffering. Hence there is no such thing as defect in Satyagraha.

It is not because I value life low that I countenance with joy thousand voluntarily losing their lives for Satyagraha, but because I know that it results, in the long run, in the least loss of life and, what is more, it ennoble those who lose their lives and morally enriches the world for their sacrifice.

And when once it is set in motion, its effect, if it is intensive enough, can overtake the whole universe. It is the greatest force because it is the highest expression of the soul.

My experience has taught me that a law of progression applies to every righteous struggle. But in the case of Satyagraha the law amounts to an axiom. As a Satyagraha struggle progresses onward, many another element helps to swell its current and there is a constant

growth in the results to which it leads. This is really inevitable, and is bound up with the first principles of Satyagraha. For in Satyagraha the minimum is also the maximum, and as it is the irreducible minimum, there is no question of retreat, and the only movement possible is an advance. In other struggles, even when they are righteous, the demand is first pitched a little higher so as to admit of future reduction, and hence the law of progression does not apply to all of them without exception.

To me it is one of the most active forces in the world. It is like the sun that rises upon us unfailing from day to day. Only if we would but understand it, it is infinitely greater than a million suns put together. It radiates life and light and peace and happiness.

One True Satyagrahi

If a single Satyagrahi holds out to the end, victory is certain.

Self-sacrifice of one innocent man is a million times more potent than the sacrifice of a million men who die in the act of killing others. The willing sacrifice of the innocent is the most powerful retort to insolent tyranny that has yet been conceived by God or man.

I have maintained that, even if there is one individual who is almost completely non-violent, he can put out the conflagration..... In this age of democracy, it is essential that

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desired results are achieved by the collective effort of the people. It will no doubt be good to achieve an objective through the effort of a supremely powerful individual, but it can never make the community conscious of its corporate strength.

I believe in walking alone. I came alone in this world, I have walked alone in the valley of the shadow of death and I shall quit alone when the time comes. I know I am quite capable of launching Satyagraha even if I am all alone. I have done so before.

Application of Satyagraha

It is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women and children.

It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by violence....

This force is to violence and, therefore, to all tyranny, all injustice, what light is to darkness. In politics, its use is based upon the immutable maxim that government of the people is possible only so long as they consent either consciously or unconsciously to be governed.

I have never claimed to be the one original Satyagrahi. What I have claimed is the application of that doctrine on an almost universal scale, and it yet remains to be seen and demonstrated that it is a doctrine which is capable of assimilation by thousands upon thousands of people in all ages and climes.

The Non-violent Sanction

Satyagraha is a law of universal application. Beginning with the family, its use can be extended to every other circle.

Supposing a landowner exploits his tenants and deprives them of the fruit of their toil by appropriating it to his own use. When they expostulate with him he does not listen and raises objections that he requires so much for his wife, so much for his children and so on. The tenants or those who have espoused their cause and have influence will make an appeal to his wife to expostulate with her husband. She would probably say that for herself she does not need his exploited money. The children will say likewise that they would earn for themselves what they need.

Supposing further that he listens to nobody or that his wife and children combine against the tenants, they will not submit. They will quit if asked to do so, but they will make it clear that the land belongs to him who tills it. The owner cannot till all the land himself and he will have to give in to their just demands.

It may, however, be that the tenants are replaced by others. Agitation short of violence will then continue till the replacing tenants see their error and make common cause with the evicted tenants.

Thus Satyagraha is a process of educating public opinion, such that it covers all the elements of society and in the end makes itself irresistible. Violence interrupts the process and prolongs the real revolution of the whole social structure.

The conditions necessary for the success of Satyagraha are (1) The Satyagrahi should not have any hatred in his heart against the opponent. (2) The issue must be true and substantial. (3) The Satyagrahi must be prepared to suffer till the end for his cause.

Training for Self-defence

I believe that every man and woman should learn the art of self-defence in this age.

This is done through arms in the West. Every adult man is conscripted for army training for a definite period. The training for Satyagraha is meant for all, irrespective of age or sex. The more important part of the training here is mental, not physical. There can be no compulsion in mental training. The surrounding atmosphere no doubt acts on the mind, but that cannot justify compulsion.

Satyagraha is always superior to armed resistance. This can only be effectively proved by demonstration, not by argument. It is the weapon that adorns the strong. It can never adorn the weak. By weak is meant the weak in mind and spirit, not in body. That limitation is a quality to be prized and not a defect to be deplored.

One ought also to understand one of its other limitations. It can never be used to defend a wrong cause.

Satyagraha brigades can be organized in every village and in every block of building in the cities. Each brigade should be composed of those persons who are well-known to the organizers. In this respect Satyagraha differs from armed defence. For latter the State impresses the service of everybody. For a Satyagraha brigade only those are eligible who believe in *ahimsa* and *satya*. Therefore, an intimate knowledge of the persons enlisted is necessary for the organizers.

Duragraha

I can see nothing but catastrophe for India from methods of violence. Workmen would be committing suicide and India would have to suffer indescribable misery if workingmen were to vent their anger by criminal disobedience of the laws of the land...

When I began to preach Satyagraha and civil disobedience, it was never meant to cover

criminal disobedience. My experience teaches me that truth can never be propagated by doing violence. Those who believe in the justice of their cause need to possess boundless patience, and those alone are fit to offer civil disobedience who are above committing criminal disobedience or doing violence.

A man cannot commit both civil and criminal disobedience at the same time, even as he cannot be both temperate and furious at the same time, and just as self-restraint is acquired only after one has been able to master his passions, so is the capacity for civil disobedience acquired after one has disciplined oneself in complete and voluntary obedience of the laws of the land.

Again, just as he alone can be said to be proof against temptations who, having been exposed to them, has succeeded in resisting them, so may we be said to have conquered anger when, having sufficient cause for it, we have succeeded in controlling ourselves.

Some students have revived the ancient form of barbarity in the form of 'sitting dhurna'.... I call it 'barbarity', for it is a crude way of using coercion. It is also cowardly, because one who sits dhurna knows that he is not going to be trampled over. It is difficult to call the practice violent, but is certainly worse.

If we fight our opponent, we at least enable him to return the blow. But when we challenge him to walk over us, knowing that he will not, we place him in a most awkward and humiliating position. I know that the over-zealous students who sat dhurna never thought of the barbarity of the deed. But one who is expected to follow the voice of conscience and stand even single-handed in the face of odds, cannot afford to be thoughtless.

There must be no impatience, no barbarity, no insolence, no undue pressure. If we want to

cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want to faith in one's cause.

I have not been able to understand the cause of so much excitement and disturbance that followed my detention. It is not Satyagraha. It is worse than Duragraha.

Those who join Satyagraha demonstrations were bound one and all to refrain at all hazard from violence, not to throw stones or in anyway whatever to injure anybody. But in Bombay we have been throwing stones. We have obstructed tram-cars by putting obstacles in the way. This is not Satyagraha. We have demanded the release of about 50 men who had been arrested for deeds of violence. Our duty is chiefly to get ourselves arrested. It is breach of religious duty to endeavour to secure the release of those who have committed deeds of violence.

I have said times without number that Satyagraha admits of no violence, no pillage, no incendiarism; and still, in the name of Satyagraha, we have burnt buildings, forcibly captured weapons, extorted money, stopped trains, cut off telegraph wires, killed innocent people and plundered shops and private house. If deeds such as these could save me from the prison-house or the scaffold, I should not like to be so saved.

.....Heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause are so much waste of splendid energy and hurt the good cause by drawing away attention from it by the glamour of the misused heroism and sacrifice in a bad cause.

.....Indiscriminate resistance to authority must lead to lawlessness and consequent self-destruction. _____

AMONG CHILDREN

When Gandhiji was in Nandi Hills for a rest cure, one day children from a Girl's School in Bangalore came up the hill to meet him. Miss Robinson, their Principal, told that the girls had started spinning. That pleased Gandhiji. The girls sang for him.

Gandhiji asked: "What is Kahdi? Is it a bird, a toy?"

The girls laughed. One said, "Khadi is cloth."

Gandhiji – "What kind of cloth?"

"Coarse cloth." Now Bapu laughed. He asked, "Why should we wear Khadi?"

One girl – "It lasts longer."

Gandhi – "That is not the right reason. Give me a better reason".

Another girl – "Khadi becomes very white on washing."

Finally Gandhiji had to explain. "Do you know who spins the yarn for making khadi? It is the poor people, who do not have enough food, no milk, no ghee. Such people spin khadi yarn. From this they earn 2 annas (1/8 rupees) per day. That is a treasure for them. They can buy some salt or chillies, milk or fruit with the two annas. Now you know why we should buy khadi."

The time spent with the children was like a tonic for Gandhiji.

