

Satyagraha and Satyagrahis

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One of Gandhiji's great contribution to the world was his method of working. He introduced non-violence as an effective tool of social change. To a world used to the incentives of greed and fear, Gandhiji gave an alternative: the driving force of love. Love had been used earlier too for bringing about change in individual human behavior, but Gandhiji used this for social change. He used it both at the individual level and at the level of wider society. He used it with great success particularly in the political field, in the fight against the injustice of colonialism and imperialism.

Gandhiji called his new tool SATHYAGRAHA which literally meant insistence on or adherence to truth. To Gandhiji his own long and colourful life was an experiment in truth. Love of non-violence came to him as a corollary of his search for truth. This method of Satyagraha was used by him for over half a century in two continents for the liberation of some of the most oppressed people.

Satyagraha may remain for future generations Gandhiji's great legacy to mankind. In one way or the other it has been tried with greater or lesser effectiveness by millions of people in a number of countries in a score of different situations, such as apartheid, struggle for civil liberties, untouchability,

oppression of the rich over the poor, and outbursts of violence among communities. In fact, this new tool of social change has attracted a countless number of people in field as wide and varied as father-son relationship to foreign aggression.

Some of the most notable examples in post-independent India of the practice of Gandhiji's method of change through love have been: the *Bhoodan-Gramdan* (land gift and "villagisation" of land), and Shanti Sena movements initiated by Vinoba Bhave; and the movement for Total Revolution enunciated by Jayaprakash Narayan. What Gandhiji did in the political field Vinoba, in his own gentle way, tried to do in economic field. His movement for *Bhoodan* and *Gramdan* was a novel method of introducing non-violence in the economic life of India, i.e, in the relationship between the landowner and the landless labour. His method was that of persuasion and persuasion alone. Jayaprakash Narayan introduced the element of resistance to evil in his movement for Total Revolution. Thousands of young men and women were willing to undergo all kinds of hardship under Jayaprakash Narayan's leadership to fight corruption, injustice and oppression.

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Satyagraha was the tool that was used by Jayaprakash Narayan in his Bihar movement although in his humility he often refrained from using this term for his method of operation: It is through this method of non-violent direct action that Jayaprakash Narayan is indisputably linked with Gandhiji.

How a Satyagrahi Acts

A SATHYAGRAHI is one who practices Satyagraha. Gandhiji defined Satyagraha as a way of life. It not only includes the active direct action against oppression or injuries, but also the whole lifestyle of the person or persons who practice Satyagraha.

A Satyagraha has a creed, has a value-system, has certain methods or working. But these he/she uses like an artist, not in a set way, but according to the need of situation. Each act of a Satyagrahi therefore, becomes an independent act of art. Gandhiji practiced this art like a master artist. He had his methods but he was never a slave to method. Indeed his whole life was constant process of development. He would easily discard a method if he found it to be useless, and choose a new one without worrying to be consistent in the strict sense of the term. That made it extremely difficult to systematize Gandhiji's method of work.

Self-preparation– SADHANA

Mankind's progress has been in two directions. It has tried to develop its inner faculties through study, inner search, meditation, Yoga, etc. This progress is concerned with the journey within. The other direction has been in the line of social change through reforms, legislations, revolutions, etc. This progress is concerned with the journey without.

A Satyagrahi does not treat these two journeys as distinct or separated from each other. To a Satyagrahi the purification of the self and the change of the society are not only not mutually exclusive, but they are inter-related and interdependent. To a Satyagrahi the individual search for truth must end in social change and the medium of social change should be individual search for truth.

For a Satyagrahi the revolution begins with him/herself. He/she cannot dream of changing the society without changing him/herself. His/her march towards Total Revolution, therefore, begins with him/herself. His/her first lessons are for self-preparation or Sadhana. The self-preparation of a Satyagrahi means the development of his/her total personality. The personality consists of a number of factors. But for the sake of convenience we accept the three broad faculties described in the Gita as *Jnana* or knowledge, *Karma* or action, and *Bhakti* or devotion. A Satyagrahi tries to develop all these three faculties in a way which will create a balance between them and result in harmony of his/her personality. He/she constantly strives to broaden his/her horizons in all these faculties in order to make him/her a more accomplished instrument of Total Revolution. A Satyagrahi will keep his/her windows open to all influences from all directions but would refuse to be swept away by any one of them.

Seeking *Jnana* or Knowledge

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed”, Gandhiji had said in *Young India* (1 June 1921). “I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

In order to keep this noble tradition of openness combined with deep-rootedness

intact, a Satyagrahi must constantly seek knowledge.

There is no age too late for improving your knowledge. Gandhiji started learning the Bengali language only a few months before his death.

A Satyagrahi studies in order to:

- a) Keep one's spiritual base sound. A few minutes of Meditation or Yoga with another few minutes of deep spiritual reading and contemplation may be a good way to maintain a sound base.
- b) Keep one's knowledge about one's own discipline fresh and up-to-date. There are some who in support of their laziness or complacency claim that they have enough of the knowledge of their subject, and they need no more. In an age where knowledge is expanding by leaps and bounds every second, it is self-defeating to make such a claim.
- c) Keep oneself abreast of all the criticisms leveled against one's ideology. There are those who refuse to read the viewpoints of adversaries or critics. They are not Satyagrahis, because a Satyagrahi is willing to accept truth from every corner of the earth and goes all out to understand the viewpoint of one's adversary.
- d) Keep one's cultural heritage intact. The culture that we acquire is not created instantaneously. It is the accumulated heritage of centuries and millennia. All aspects of culture, however, should not be accepted without questioning and critical examination from time to time. To a Satyagrahi only those aspects of his or her culture are acceptable which bring humankind together. To a Satyagrahi that which divides humankind is anti-culture

and that which unites it is culture. A Satyagrahi tries to preserve and cultivate further the accumulated wisdom of the past, as he/she prepares him/herself to be an agent of changing the future.

- e) Satisfy one's own special interest or hobby. Hobby is not a thing to be looked down upon. Some kind of creative hobby certainly helps in developing the personality. It may also help one in sustaining one's morale in days of extreme difficulties

Besides studying from books and magazines a Satyagrahi also tries to study from the book of life around.

Knowledge to a Satyagrahi is not restricted to the written word alone. It is an accumulation of experiences of life. The knowledge that one acquires outside books and school buildings is more often than not much richer than what one gets from books and schools. There is a vast variety of sources of knowledge. One learns by doing, by communicating with fellow human beings, by observing the forces of nature.

- a) A Satyagrahi tries to study the minds of the people with whom she/he works.
- b) She/he surveys and obtains the relevant statistics about the people with whom she/he works.
- c) She/he particularly tries to understand the aspirations and hopes of the people.
- d) While she/he studies the life around her/him, she/he tries to make the very process of study an educative one.

Cultivating a lifestyle is also part of the education of a Satyagrahi. In her/his day-to-day life, a Satyagrahi:

- a) Devotes some time regularly for some productive labour;
- b) Keeps in touch with mother earth through working on it;
- c) Devotes some time for the sanitation of her/his surroundings.

This she/he may treat as a symbolic gesture against the constant pollution of the atmosphere going on today; and

- d) Devotes some time regularly for her/his own cultural development. Some kind of creative activity may be helpful in achieving this.

Some kind of habit-formation may be of much value to the Satyagrahi.

When acquired knowledge is converted into habit through regular training and exercise it becomes part and parcel of the Satyagrahi's personality. In critical moments this knowledge comes automatically to his or her aid. He or she does not have to make special effort for it. Here are a few habits that may help a volunteer of Total Revolution:

- a) Prayers or meditation: to seek harmony between ourselves and the universe at large; to try to raise the unity in mankind; to try to understand one's own nature dispassionately.
- b) Cultivating habits of cleanliness: to keep one's own body and environment clean and set an example for others to follow suit.
- c) Singing or playing on some musical instruments: to find the harmony within oneself as also to be enthusiastic partners in common programmes of Total Revolution.
- d) Trying to keep a smiling face, even in the midst of adversities.

- e) Listening to people with attention and care. Listening carefully is the first step towards sharing the innermost feelings of others.
- f) Keeping a diary : This not only helps in maintain a record, but it also helps the Satyagrahi by giving her/him a chance to turn the searchlight within.
- g) Maintenance of daily accounts: A habit that can help a Satyagrahi specially when he has to deal with money that has been collected from the public.
- h) Keeping a log-book or note of one's discussions or deliberations with others. Oral messages tend to get mixed up. Written records are usually more reliable.

Karma or Action

A Satyagrahi is essentially a person of action. To him/her an ounce of practice is more than a tone of preaching. She/he, therefore, makes a special effort to develop his/her action faculty as a measure of self-preparation.

A Satyagrahi:

- a) Tries to master a craft. One of the reasons for Gandhi's insistence for spinning was that it was a craft that could be mastered easily by almost everyone. Mastering a craft gives a Satyagrahi self-confidence, which is a very essential need. It also takes him/her nearer to the life of those whom she/he wants to serve, i.e, the labourers.
- b) Tries to have some rudimentary knowledge of several useful crafts and skills. Unlike the proverb, a Satyagrahi is a jack of all trades and master of one.
- c) Acquires the knowledge of first aid and keeps his/her knowledge fresh by frequent practice or rehearsals.
- d) One of the special skills that a Satyagrahi is expected to have is that of fire-fighting.

This applies specially to Shanti Sainiks who may be engaged in quelling riots, arson and loot.

- e) Swimming is another skill which may be of much use to a volunteer who engages him/herself in flood relief work. Besides that, swimming is a hobby that helps in building good health. The Upasnishads have said: “the essential necessity for a person who wants to perform duties well, is to keep the body fit.”
- f) A working knowledge of sewing and stitching, carpentry and cooking may be of tremendous value to a Shanti Sainik working on the border areas, or to Lok Sevaks working in remote villages.

Bhakti or Devotion

Though this is a most essential necessity for a Satyagrahi it is ridiculous to suggest a training course for Bhakti. Basically it is an attitude of life which can be cultivated by conscious endeavour and humility. But here are some suggestions that might help in cultivating an attitude of Bhakti:

- a) Try to understand and realize the insignificant role of man in the working of the entire universe.
- b) Try to see the universal law in nature and consider one’s self to be part of that nature.
- c) Try to see the unity between man and man. Regular readings from religious and devotional literature may also help in cultivating the attitude of Bhakti.

For the Bhoodan workers Vinoba has a very interesting suggestion to make: “The good qualities in a person are like the doors in a house, while the evil; qualities are like the walls. You can enter the heart through the doors, but are likely to break your own head if you try to enter through the walls.”

Thus equipped with *Jnana*, *Karma* and *Bhakti*, a Satyagrahi prepares himself or herself for being a humble volunteer of the Total Revolution.

But the process of self-preparation is a continuing process. It never ends. Even while the Satyagrahi is engaged in the various mundane activities connected with Total Revolution she/he constantly tries to improve her/his own self. _____

It is easy enough to be friendly to one’s friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy, is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.

If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.

To give service to a single heart by a single act is better than a thousand heads bowing in prayer.

