

Gandhi's Non-violence and Jainism

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Abstract:

Peace is an ethical issue and a cause of concern for the entire humanity. In the present time the entire world is going through an extremely serious and notorious stage of terrorism. In recent years we have witnessed violence in many nations but time has come when we have to renew our commitment, politically, economically and culturally, to the wisdom of non-violence. Both Gandhi and Jainism preached the theory of “Live and Let Live”.

Keywords: Jainism, non-violence

INTRODUCTION:

In the context of Gandhi’s non-violence it has been rightly remarked that,

Some men changed their times,
One man changed the world for all times!

Non- violence is an umbrella term for ways of life or conducting of conflict in ways that do not permit any individual to harm any human. For some it provides a coherent and principled philosophy for living in harmony with other humans as a well integrated and grounded person. Gandhi’s non-violence and Jainism in some respect stand as parallel terms. They are not only parallel but are so intertwined that one of it is incomplete without the other.

GANDHI’S NON-VIOLENCE AND JAINISM:

Jainism is one of the heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. It is more known as Jain Dharma by tradition. The followers of this philosophy are called Jain. This word is derived from the Sanskrit word Jina which means victor. In life, one gets victory when he can come over the bondage of Karma and this happens only when he leads a spiritual life. This philosophy is well known and followed for its treatment towards a peaceful life. Non-violence in its deepest form is the key factor of this branch. Over the ages, it has inspired millions and billions of people all over the world. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Indian nation was greatly influenced and inspired by Jainism. Gandhi who led India in its freedom movement applies the teachings of Jain philosophy quite practically. The adaption of the core concepts of Jainism by Gandhi can be seen throughout his life.

To sum, it is observed that most of the doctrines that were being followed in Gandhi’s life were the outcomes of his keen practices of Jain philosophy. Though he was not a Jain by birth he adapted Jainism to great extent. It is the opinion of the Jain philosophy itself that the status of a man’s life is not determined by the family where he gets his birth but by the actions he follows or performs in his life-time. Gandhi thus proved himself to be an ideal follower of Jainism. He superimposed the doctrines of

this philosophy for the social reformation of the greater world. And here lies the supreme utility of any philosophical system.

According to some scholars, Gandhi's mother who was a stern religious woman belonged to Jain family. Gandhi learnt the life shaping teachings right from his childhood. The following incident will show us his mother taught him the lesson of Ahimsa so perfectly:

"One day, Gandhi saw an insect biting his mother's foot. He shouted but his mother asked him to keep quiet and with a slight jerk to her foot allowed the insect to go away. On seeing this, Gandhi asked his mother as to why she did not kill it. The mother replied, "Son! It also has the right to live." It is known to the whole world that Mahatma Gandhi practised Ahimsa, i.e. non-violence. It was the prime mode of all of his freedom movements. Not only theoretically but also practically he followed non-violence from the head and heart. And this practicality of Ahimsa was greatly influenced by Jainism along with other sources like Tolstoy and Geeta.

Jains believe that the only way to save one's own soul is to protect every other soul, and so the most central Jain teaching, and the heart of Jain ethics, is that of ahimsa (non-violence). Jains believe that bad karma is caused by harming living things. To avoid bad karma, Jains must practice ahimsa, a strict code of nonviolence. Jains believe plants, animals, and even some nonliving things (like air and water) have souls, just as humans do.

"Non-violence is an active force of the highest order. It is soul force or the power of Godhead within us. Imperfect man cannot grasp the whole of that essence - he would not be able to bear its full blaze, but even an infinitesimal fraction of it, when it becomes active within us, can work wonders."

With Gandhi, the notion of non-violence attained a special status. He not only theorized on it, he adopted non-violence as a philosophy and an ideal way of life. He made us understand that the philosophy of nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak; it is a weapon, which can be tried by all.

Non-violence was not Gandhi's invention. He is however called the father of non-violence because according to Mark Shepard, "He raised nonviolent action to a level never before achieved." Krishna Kriplani again asserts "Gandhi was the first in Human history to extend the principle of non-violence from the individual to social and political plane. While scholars were talking about an idea without a name or a movement, Gandhi is the person who came up with the name and brought together different related ideas under one concept: Satyagraha.

Gandhi saw violence pejoratively and also identified two forms of violence; Passive and Physical, as we saw earlier. The practice of passive violence is a daily affair, consciously and unconsciously. It is again the fuel that ignites the fire of physical violence. Gandhi understands violence from its Sanskrit root, "*himsa*", meaning injury. In the midst of hyper violence, Gandhi teaches that the one who possess non-violence is blessed. Blessed is the man who can perceive the law of *ahimsa* (non-violence) in the midst of the raging fire of *himsa* all around him

.Gandhi understood non-violence from its Sanskrit root "*Ahimsa*". Ahimsa is just translated to mean non-violence in English, but it implies more than just avoidance of physical violence. Ahimsa implies total nonviolence, no physical violence, and no passive violence. Gandhi translates Ahimsa as love. This is explained by Arun Gandhi in an interview thus; "He (Gandhi) said ahimsa means love. Because if you have love towards somebody, and you respect that person, then you are not going to do any harm to that person. For Gandhi, non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than any weapon of mass destruction. It is superior to brute force. It is a living force of power and no one has been or will ever be able to measure its limits or it's extent.

CONCLUSION:

Gandhi wrote, "No religion of the world has explained the principle of non –violence so deeply and systematically, with its applicability in life as Jainism..." The central tenet of Jainism is Ahimsa (non-violence) and Gandhi's philosophy rested upon it. Today Mahatma Gandhi is commemorated, not only as a freedom fighter but also for giving the world a new doctrine of non-violence which encourages peace and harmony in the society.

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