

The Bases of Satyagraha in Gandhi's Philosophy:

The term "satyagraha" was coined by Gandhi in South Africa to express the force that Indians there used. It was conceived as a weapon of the strong and excluded the use of violence and hatred in any shape or form. Satyagraha is a relentless search for truth and a determination to teach truth through nonviolent means. It literally means holding on to truth. So it is a truth-force. Gandhi calls it the soulforce.³ It can be used by individuals as well as communities. It is also a law of universal application. It is not based on the force of arms, but on the force of truth and love. We are usually aware of two kinds of forces—physical force and spiritual force. We are generally acquainted with the physical force. It consists of violence. It is a weapon of the brutes. Man is more familiar with the physical force which Gandhi was opposed to. The spiritual force is an invisible one. So he described it as truth-force. Therefore, satyagraha pre-supposes self-discipline, self-control, and self-purification.

According to Gandhi, a Satyagrahi is a fearless person. He will never submit to any arbitrary action. He who has attained the Satyagrahi's state of mind will remain victorious under all conditions. So it is belief in the power of spirit, the power of truth, the power of love by which man can overcome evil through self-suffering and self-sacrifice. His Satyagraha related to two things; it enjoins upon man the duty to eradicate evil and, positively, it reminds him of his obligation to serve the community.

Satyagraha is a very powerful nonviolent method of direct action. A satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to satyagraha. He also uses it as his last weapon against injustice after having exhausted all other possibilities of persuasion and conciliation. It emphasizes four basic ideas: (i) it is essentially the use of soul-force, (ii) it eliminates the use of physical-force for him, the practice of Satyagraha was an evolving science. He preached and practiced it for over three decades. We know Satyagraha is still evolving gradually.

According to Gandhi, it is a philosophy of life. It is the religion by which he lived. It is also the religion where he wanted all men to live by it. The veteran Gandhian, Dr R.R. Diwakar, says: "Satyagraha is a new way of life. It has several features. For him, Truth and Nonviolence are as hills. But truth through nonviolence alone is really a new feature. Secondly, the application of this principle to every walk of life and all human affairs, and to fight evil and injustice to establish truth and justice, is also one of the new features.

Satyagraha as a weapon of social control is eternal and creative. Its creativity is inherent in its basis of ahimsa and moral persuasion. The Satyagrahi would adopt satyagraha as a weapon and insist on truth being established. He resists all unjust authority and the source of evil. But the aim of Satyagraha is destruction of evil, not the evildoer; sin, not the sinner, whom actually a satyagrahi loves to liberate from the grip of evil or sin. A satyagrahi does not crave or indulge in for personal gain or glorification, or to humiliate anyone. The entire social life is impossible without satyagraha which is a true religion.⁵ It is not only employed against rulers and ruled,⁶ but also society and government.⁷ It is a practical philosophy. It is a weapon with a spiritual and ascetic temper. In fact, it is the

soul force attainable by self-purification. It can be utilized in any situation to reach one's goal through nonviolent means. It implies adherence to truth and love. So also the term 'self-purification' signifies the need for a proper education to create such an attitude of mind.

It is a sin to suffer unjust behaviour at the hands of another person or organization or society. Hence he did not hesitate to carry on tireless crusade against injustice, both in South Africa and India. Therefore Satyagraha may be understood as a technique for resolving conflicts and a method for fighting evil. As been explained by Joan V Bondurant: "Satyagrah became something more than a method of resistance to particular legal norms; it became an instrument of struggle for positive objectives and for fundamental change..."⁸

According to Gandhi, Satyagraha is practicable in every situation. The satyagrahi becomes mentally strong by enduring physical suffering. In this context Gandhi wrote: "I see that Satyagraha is assured of divine help, and that in testing a Satyagrahi, the creator imposes on him at every step only as much burden as he can bear".⁹ There are no limitations to self-sacrifice. It may stretch to the extent of imprisonment or even death. So great suffering is highly correlated to great relief. The suffering is undergone in the purest form of Satyagraha. There are different forms of satyagraha. These forms may be employed in a satyagraha campaign. These were most commonly employed during the freedom struggle in India under leadership of Gandhi. There are three forms of Satyagraha, namely: (a) non-cooperation, (b) civil disobedience, and (c) fasting.

Non-cooperation means renunciation of the benefits of a system with which we are associated. It involves voluntary suffering in the process of resisting evil. Secondly, it consists of civil disobedience which involves direct contravention of specific laws like non-payment of taxes and so on. The spirit of civil disobedience consists in defying all those laws which are considered unjust. It is an act of civility since it is opposed to all forms of violent and uncivilized behaviour. It is an act of civility since it is opposed to all forms of violent and uncivilized behaviour. It involves disobedience to the unjust. But, it involves obedience to a higher moral law, truth and justice.¹⁰ It advocates civilized way of life. It opposes all uncivilized acts uncivil and violent. On the other hand, disobedience is to be civil. Finally, fasting is the most potent form of Satyagraha. It is suffering and Self-inflicted. There is a distinction between satyagrahi fasting and duragrahi fasting. Fasting is the highest expression of the prayer of a pure and loving heart. It is a means of resisting injustice and converting the evil-doer. A living faith in God is indispensable. There is no room for lack of faith, anger, impatience or selfishness. These make the fast violent. Gandhi said: "...in addition to truth and nonviolence, a satyagrahi should have the confidence that Good will grant him the necessary strength and that, if there is the slightest impurity in the fast, he will not hesitate to renounce it at once. Infinite patience, firm resolve, singlemindedness of purpose, and perfect calm must of necessity be there. But since it is impossible for a person to develop all these Qualities at once, no one who has not devoted himself to following the laws of ahimsa should undertake Satyagrahi fast",¹¹ Thus these three important forms of satyagraha should act in the application of Satyagraha.

Philosophy is defined as the pursuit of truth. This is par excellence a succinct and sufficient definition of philosophy and accepted by all. Satyagraha is also relentless search for truth. So it is both truth-force and soul-force. We may

observe in this 'truth', there is a great force in it, since Gandhi called it God. It can be used by individual as well as communities. It is also known as the law of universal application. But it is not based on the force of arms but force of truth and love.

The philosophy of satyagraha is a new way of life. For Gandhi, truth and nonviolence areas old as hills, whereas truth through nonviolence is really a new way of life. It is a weapon of social control and is eternal and creative. Its creativity is inherent in its basis of ahimsa and moral persuasion. The satyagrahi would adopt Satyagraha as a weapon and insist on truth being established. That is why he resists all unjust authority and source of evil.