

GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF NON – VIOLENCE

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“Non – violence is not only non – killing or no – injury but an inner feeling of mind and heart, it means the largest love and greatest charity”.

--- Speeches and writings of Mahatma Gandhi, P-346.

“Non – violence is the most active force in the world... and is the supreme law”

--- Harijan, 24 – 12-1938, P-393

The entire theme of the paper is constituted in the above said words of Gandhi about non – violence. The intension of the paper is to high light non-violence as method in the educational system. The goal of education according to Gandhi is moral education or character building of persons. How can we build character? Gandhi had no belief in the existing system of Indian education. He realized that the prevailing system can only impart instructions or makes man literate, but literacy is not education. True education is that which “draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties.”¹

“By education I mean an all – round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit”². He further held that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs. In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. “By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. Proper and all – round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds pari passu with the education of physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole”³

Non-violence is the method to draw out and stimulate the spiritual, intellectual, physical faculties of man. Gandhi’s non-violence as a method of education predominantly structured with eight facets (Astanga) : Humility, Faith, Prayer, Fearlessness, Cleansing heart, Love, Sacrifice, Service. These qualities represent the “largest love and greatest charity” (non-violence), which should be cultivated by each and every individual. Gandhi believed, as there is an element of goodness essentially present in every man, there is the need of a proper education to bring out this element of goodness.

The Essential Principles of Non – Violence**Humility**

The personal character ‘Humility’ should be cultivated basically by pupils and people. “Non-violence is impossible without humility... If one has... pride and egoism, there is no non-violence”⁴. The Quality of humility reduces ego and pride. One can confess his errors only by humility. “ Humility constitute knowledge”⁵. The 13th chapter of Gita proclaims this Truth. From the Holy Bible in the book of Isaiah 57:15 says, “I (God) dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones”. Humility is the pre-requisite to acquire knowledge. Every person needs to cultivate this virtue.

Faith

Faith is not only a precondition to prayer but the first constituent of non – violence. Gandhi described it as “ a power, which can be wielded equally by all..... provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non – violence is accepted as the law of life; it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts”⁶. Non – violence is the law of life but to possess it the first requisite is to have a ‘living faith in the God of love’⁷. Faith is not a delicate flower which would wither under the slightest stormy weather; faith is like the Himalaya Mountains which cannot possibly change. No storm can possibly remove the Himalaya Mountains from their foundations.... And I want every one of you to cultivate that faith in God⁸. Gandhi admitted that, “ My faith has saved me and is still saving me from pitfalls. It has never betrayed me. It has never been known to betray any one”⁹.

Prayer

Prayer requires a living faith in God .¹⁰ Prayer is the precondition to peace. Without prayer there is no inward peace¹¹. Prayer had been the saving of my life. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition. They are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting and walking. Prayer is the first and the last lesson in learning the noble and brave art of sacrificing self in the various walks of life¹². Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening¹³. Prayer is impossibility without a living faith in God¹⁴. Many of the Indian schools start their day – work with prayer to Almighty (not to any personal God). Gandhi proclaimed that, “ That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer; I am not a man of learning, but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer”¹⁵.

Fearlessness

Fearlessness is the first requisite of morality and spirituality. Cowards can never be moral¹⁶. Gandhi analyzed that; fearlessness doesn’t mean arrogance or aggressiveness, which in it self are a sign of fear. Fearlessness presupposes calmness and peace of mind. “Each individual must be educated in the art of self – defense. It is more a mental state that has to be inculcated than that our bodies should be trained for retaliation. Bravery (fearlessness) is not a quality of the body, it is of the soul. I have seen cowards encased in tough muscle, and rare courage in the frailest body..... The weakest of us physically must be taught the art of facing dangers and giving a good account of ourselves”¹⁷.

Cleansing Heart

How can a person possess a clean – heart? Gandhi’s answer is – ‘prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions¹⁸. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.¹⁹ The man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. One with a wicked heart can never be conscious of the all – purifying presence of God.

Love

Gandhi defined Non-violence as the “ greater love” i.e. love in its deep sense; its pure form is Non-violence. It is a synonym of love. However, Gandhi has given a scientific explanation to love. “ The Scientist tells us that without the presence of the cohesive force amongst the atoms the entire universe cease to exist.... And the name for that cohesive force among animate beings is love. We notice this cohesive force between father and son, brother and sister, friend and friend. But we have to learn to use this force among all living beings. For in the use of it consists our knowledge of God”²⁰. Gandhi’s logic of love is that those who “seek after Truth, a follower of the Law of love cannot hold anything against tomorrow... He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment.”²¹ As the man of love does not have greed for anything he never adopt any violent methods for his needs. “Love never claims, it ever gives. Love ever suffers, never resents, and never revenges itself.”²² Hence the logic of Love pre-supposes Non-violence.

Sacrifice

The human body is meant solely for service never for indulgence. The secret of a happy life lies in sacrifice. Sacrifice is life, indulgence spells death. Therefore, everyone has a right and should desire to live 125 years while performing service without an eye on result. Such sacrificed life must be wholly and solely dedicated to service. Sacrifice made for the sake of such service gives indescribable joy, which sustains life. Without this joy long life is impossible and would not be worthwhile even if possible. This body therefore, has been given us only in order that we may serve all creation with it.²³ Sacrifices can be categorized in many ways. The first and the highest form of sacrifice considered by Gandhi is the ‘bread labor’. He viewed that: “ If all labored for their bread and no more than there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Than there would be no cry of over population, no disease, and no such misery as we see around. Such labor will be the highest form of sacrifice²⁴.” Everybody striving for ‘bread labor’ is lagging behind in all third world countries. This is the basic root cause for poverty and violence. There is a great need to cultivate this aspect of life through education.

Service

Gandhi believed that “... service is not possible unless it is rooted in love or ahimsa... This service is again impossible without bread labour, otherwise described in the Gita as yajna. It is only when a man or woman has done bodily labor for the sake of service that he or she has the right to live.”²⁵

Moreover, service to the helpless is the life mission of Gandhi. The freedom struggle in India was lead by him to help the millions of helpless Indians. He believed that,” God manifests Himself to us in the form of the helpless. Hence the true religion is service of the helpless. I

an endeavor to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in Heaven, nor down below, but in every one.”²⁶

The safest rule of conduct is to claim kinship when we want to do service, and not to insist on kinship when we want to assert a right. This has been called by Gandhi as the golden rule of conduct to maintain relationships. As the character building is the aim of education one should be inculcated with this rule of service.

“Non-violence is an unchangeable creed”²⁷ and is a rule of conduct for society if it is to live consistently with human dignity and make progress towards the attainment of peace for which it has been yearning for ages past.²⁸

How to Train People and Communities in This Difficult Art?

“There is no royal road, except through living the creed in your life which must be a living sermon”.²⁹

Cultivation of non-violence may need long practice. It “presupposes great study, tremendous perseverance, and thorough cleansing of one’s self of all the impurities”³⁰. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice ahimsa (non-violence) to perfection. The votary of non-violence has only one fear that is God. He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the Atman that transcends the body. Training in non-violence is thus diametrically opposed to training in violence. Violence is needed for the protection of things external, whereas non-violence is needed for the protection of the Atman (soul), for the protection of one’s honor.

In order to develop the whole man - the intellectual, physical and spiritual powers of the individual need to be trained and there by we can produce a best citizen of all round development.

Gandhiji believed that, in every man there exists an essential goodness, and a proper education can bring out that essential goodness which is inherent in men. The basic elements of Gandhi’s non-violence would result in the creation of a global human society involving non-violent methods of resisting exploitation. “An all around drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit”³¹ with the technique of non-violence is the Gandhian concept of education. The young generation is neglecting the religious and moral values of the past and has given it a name as “generation gap”. But there exists certainly a link between past and present. The feeling of generation gap is the impact of the absence of proper guidance and lack of training in cultural values. The educational institutions are the authorized agencies in imparting formal education to a child. All round development and character building of child should also take place there at the very beginning itself. A child can become proficient in any subject he likes even without attending class-room teaching, providing efficient and sufficient private coaching in the area chosen is imparted to him. But character building is highly impossible, unless an ideal educational atmosphere is created to the child. The main purpose, therefore, of a school is not just to impart knowledge on different formal subjects but to impart good values in all respect.

It is apt to reiterate a Chinese saying that: “If there is nobility in heart, there will be beauty in character, if there is beauty in character, there will be harmony at home, if there is harmony at home there will be order in the nation, if there is order in the nation, there will be

peace in the world”. Creating a peaceful world, a world of non-violence is possible when all schools of the world integrated the methods non – violence in to curriculum.

Therefore a curriculum on these lines of Gandhian thought needs to be designed to build the culture of non – violence in the world.

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