

Gandhi and Luther Philosophies of Non-Violence

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Abstract

The issue of non-violence considered as a philosophical and educational concept is under-explored. An interdisciplinary and multi-perspective foundation to peace and non-violence is needed in academic research. This paper explored the philosophical underpinnings of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther philosophies of non-violence. It tried to discuss the practical aspect of non-violence through the actions of Gandhi and Luther. It clarified the concept of non-violence, given by Gandhi and Luther in detail. It aims to pave the values of non-violence for the establishment of a society based on love and harmony.

Keywords: non-violence, truth, ethic, love, life, leadership, value

Introduction

The concept of non-violence was not a new one. Before the teachings of Gandhi and Luther, the notion of Ahimsa finds an important place in the Holy Scriptures, the teachings of the Gautama Buddha to Prophet Mohammad and the works of various philosophers. However, it was Gandhi and Luther who converted it into a social and political technique and super humanitarian method of resolution for all types of crisis and problems. Gandhi and Luther firmly believed that non-violence stands out as something inevitable for the reformation of politics. Gandhi and Luther were the real visionaries who through the use of non-violence gave new direction to the freedom struggle. They objected to violence as they considered that it created more problems than it solved and as a result of it was sheer hardness and bitterness amongst peoples. A lack of an interdisciplinary approach to peace and non-violence that fails to include philosophy and education exists in part because the issue of non-violence considered as a

philosophical and educational concept is under-explored. Ideas of non-violence often emerge from action, and therefore it is often thought that non-violence demands a need for action- a demand that many believe is not met by philosophy. M.K. Gandhi never wrote a succinct, complete work of his own ethics. He did not sit in private and create a philosophy that was later to be distributed to the world. Rather, Gandhi used mass media, such as newspaper and radio, to appeal to his audience. His philosophy was created out of his actions in South Africa and subsequent actions in India, drawing on existing philosophies and religions to shape his expression of non-violence. He did not separate ideas of theory from practice; for him, theory and practice emerged out of one another. Philosophers of education, like Suzanne Rice, have shown that a study of the praxis of non-violence can indeed be discussed in philosophical contexts. In her paper entitled "Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Ethic of Love': Virtues Common and Rare" (2004), Rice argued that although King did not express character

development and moral education in traditional philosophical forms, i.e. academic texts, he was indeed concerned “with questions about how one should act (conduct) and the kind of person one should strive to be (character)”.

Gandhi’s philosophy of non violence

Mahatma Gandhi, the pioneer of non-violence was born on 2nd October 1869. His prominent role in India’s freedom struggle fetched him the title of ‘Bapu’ (Father of the Nation). The birthday of this Indian pre-eminent spiritual and political leader is celebrated as “International Day of Nonviolence” throughout the world. Nonviolence was not Gandhi’s invention. He is however called the father of nonviolence because according to Mark Shepard, “He raised nonviolent action to a level never before achieved.” Krishna Kripalani again asserts “Gandhi was the first in Human history to extend the principle of nonviolence from the individual to social and political plane.” With Gandhi, the notion of nonviolence attained a special status. He not only theorized on it, he adopted nonviolence 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. Gandhi understood nonviolence from its Sanskrit root “Ahimsa”. Ahimsa is just translated to mean nonviolence 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. For Gandhi, nonviolence 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 extend. Gandhi’s nonviolence is the search for truth. Truth is the most fundamental aspect in Gandhi’s Philosophy of nonviolence.

According to Gandhi, ahimsa is the greatest force available to human kind, “It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of a man.” His non-violent resistance was a dynamic and spiritually active force, which aimed to destroy the sin and not the sinner. Gandhi was committed to follow this principle and therefore, he made every possible effort to achieve this goal with the help of non-violent action. Gandhi’s concept of non-violence is not restricted merely to disavowing violence; not hurting people in mind and body but it goes beyond and encompasses certain essential values of love, forgiveness and compassion. Gandhi’s philosophy bears the influence of a number of sources, and Ahimsa forms

the basic foundation of Gandhian thought. Apart from Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishad and Bible he was highly influenced by Tolstoy’s ‘The Kingdom of God is Within Us’, Ruskin’s ‘Unto This Last’, Thoreau’s ‘On the Duty of Civil Disobedience’ and Plato’s Dialogues of Socrates.

In his book ‘Social and Political Thought’ of Gandhi J. Bandyopadhyaya stated the following characteristics features of Gandhian Non-Violence.

1. Non-Violence is not the same as non-killing.
2. Non-Violence is not non-resistance born out of cowardice.
3. Non-Violence implies several positive values. These values include love, active, resistance to injustice, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, truthfulness and brahmacharya.
4. Non-Violence implies bread-labour, which Gandhi derived from Ruskin and Tolstoy and ultimately from the Bible. Gandhi defined it as the ‘Divine Law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands.’
5. Non-Violence is a higher value than life. Gandhi regarded Non-Violence to be an ultimate value on three grounds. First, it is universally applicable. Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any. Thirdly, it is unlimited in its application.

For Gandhi to practice non-violence one needs a proper training of strong will, patience and moral courage and all these in turn lead to transformation of mind. Gandhi believed that Non-violence in its absolute form is not realisable in practice. But relative Non- Violence can be realised in practice. Gandhi stated that Just as the perfect straight line as understood by Euclid cannot be drawn. Similarly perfect Non-Violence cannot be attained. But limited Non-Violence can be attained. Gandhi stated that the Divine Spark is present within man and we must constantly endeavour to keep alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded Non-Violence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognised the point that the practice of total Non-Violence in our life is not possible. Gandhi wrote, ‘Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence.’ This violence is directed against life. According to Gandhi Non-Violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. He said, ‘If we can

manage to apply Non-Violence successfully at home, it will in its pure form become an irresistible power in the service of the state.

The Gandhian concept of Non-Violence is dharma in action, and truth translated. It is not a static code of morality ready for adoption. According to Gandhi 'Ahimsa or Non-Violence' is the means; Truth is the end. They are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. They are the two sides of a coin. Ahimsa or Non-Violence should practice in the mental level. It means barring no ill-will against others. Gandhi is of opinion that 'Killing or Injury to life can be an act of violence only under certain conditions. These conditions are anger, pride, hatred, selfish consideration, bad intention and similar other consideration. According to Gandhi, love is the energy that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc. Gandhi believed that without the practice of Non-Violence Truth cannot be realised. Gandhi employed a curious argument to establish this point. Gandhi stated that God and Truth are identical. At the same time Gandhi accepted a pantheistic conception of God. He argued that God pervades all beings. All beings are united by God and the act of unification is made possible through love or Non-Violence. So Non-Violence is ultimately the cementing bond of the Universe that has its origin in God or Truth.

Martin Luther Philosophy of non violence

Martin Luther King also known as MLK was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in the year of 1929. He was brought up in a religious home, his father was a pastor. Martin followed in his father's footsteps and was ordained and became a minister of a Baptist church in the city Montgomery, Alabama. Montgomery was a place of great racism in the South. Martin Luther saw this racism and felt something needed to be done. As for him being the newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). He felt he needed to do something, so in 1st December, 1955 when Rosa Parks didn't give up her seat on the bus for a white passenger and was arrested. Martin made the decision to organize a boycott against the bus transportation. This was the great leadership that Martin Luther King Jr. started. Martin set goals for himself and for his people. The goals he set for himself was that "I will not rest until all black men, women, children are free of segregation". Martin Luther King showed great leadership by his demonstrations of non-violence acts all of his

organizations all the speeches he gave and all the letters he wrote.

Martin Luther was a man of intelligence, determination and integrity. Intelligent because in his demonstrations, if he would have fought back he and many others would have been killed or seriously injured and it would be his fault and he would have let his people down. So by using his brain he was able to show that the use of violence would result in violence. King showed his determination through getting thrown in jail, being hit with sticks, fists, and being called a 'Nigger'. All of which hurt him but he would not let that stop him from getting his people free. He did not want to show that he was scared of the white community. He wanted to show his people no fear. So he faced these obstacles head on and didn't back down. He showed his dedication and determination to achieve his goals and the goals of his people and to show no fear, and to make his people feel no fear in the white community. By this Blacks became unafraid of white and helped them get there desegregation. Martin showed his integrity by taking responsibility for his actions, shown by him going to jail. He showed the most integrity when he was killed. He showed that he would give his life to have desegregation and to have his people have their freedom from all whites. Martin Luther King, jr.'s principles of nonviolence were:

1. *Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.*
 - It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.
 - It is assertive spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.
 - It is always persuading the opponent of the justice of your cause.
2. *Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.*
 - The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.
 - The purpose of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community.
3. *Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.*
 - Nonviolence holds that evildoers are also victims.
4. *Nonviolence holds that voluntary suffering can educate and transform.*
 - Nonviolence willingly accepts the consequences of its acts.
 - Nonviolence accepts suffering without retaliation.

- Nonviolence accepts violence if necessary, but will never inflict it.
- Unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.
- Suffering can have the power to convert the enemy when reason fails.

5. *Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.*

- Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as of the body.
- Nonviolent love gives willingly, knowing that the return might be hostility.
- Nonviolent love is active, not passive.
- Nonviolent love does not sink to the level of the hater.
- Love for the enemy is how we demonstrate love for ourselves.
- Love restores community and resists injustice.
- Nonviolence recognizes the fact that all life is interrelated.

6. *Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.*

- The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s steps of non-violence were:
- Learn all you can about the problems you see in your community through the media, social and civic organizations, and by talking to the people involved.
- Armed with your new knowledge, it is your duty to help those around you, such as your neighbors, relatives, friends and co-workers, better understand the problems facing society. Build a team of people devoted to finding solutions. Be sure to include those who will be directly affected by your work.
- Accept that you will face many obstacles and challenges as you and your team try to change society. Agree to encourage and inspire one another along the journey.
- Talk with both sides. go to the people in your community who are in trouble and who are deeply hurt by society's ills. Also go to those people who are contributing to the breakdown of a peaceful society. Use humor, intelligence and grace to lead to solutions that benefit the greater good.

- This step is often used when negotiation fails to produce results, or when people need to draw broader attention to a problem. It can include tactics such as peaceful demonstrations, letter-writing and petition campaign.
- Keep all actions and negotiations peaceful and constructive. Agree to disagree with some people and with some groups as you work to improve society. Show all involved the benefits of changing, not what they will give up by changing.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi is the symbol of non-violence. He is truly the man who changed the course of history and paved way for India's victory through his indestructible weapon of non-violence and taught the world human society that only non-violent action can pave the way for peaceful co-existence, goodwill love and sympathy and can work global peace. . This ahimsa preached by Gandhi holds a great relevance in today's society where the world is in the grip of crisis whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Palestine or India and only non-violence advocated by Gandhi can help us to solve critical problems of our times and can come out to remove the dirty spots of terrorism, exploitation, racial discrimination, injustice and hatred from the face of humanity. One particular leader in the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr, fought for their freedom, with the non violent philosophy in hand. They used non violent ways to persuade the people of their intentions for freedom and to let their oppressors know their pleas. The non violent actions such as the Bus Boycott in Montgomery were among the ways they used in their struggle.

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