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Contents

State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is in fact the definition of a peaceful revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer or any other public officer asks me, as one has done "But what shall I do?" my answer is "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of bloodshed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

— Henry David Thoreau: "Resistance to Civil Government", 1848

The means of non-co-operation were regarded by Gandhi as applicable to social and economic conflicts as well as to political ones. During his stay in London in 1931, some young Communists asked how Gandhi actually proposed to bring the new order into being if he abjured the use of violence. Was it to be by persuasion? Gandhi answered, "Not merely by verbal persuasion. I will concentrate on my means ... My means are non-co-operation."[37]

And m 1940 he wrote, "If however, in spite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find out the solution of this riddle I have alighted on non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means." [39]

Other advocates of the theory that governments and other hierarchical systems can be modified or destroyed by a withdrawal of submission, co-operation and obedience have indicated certain lines along which such withdrawal might be practiced. However, Gandhi was the first to formulate over a period of years a major system of resistance based upon this assumption. We have as yet seen only the initial stages of the political application of this theory.

> Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.
>
> — OSCAR WILDE: "The Soul of Man under Socialism."

> If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them and enable the

[37] Indian National Congress, I, Madras, 1935.

While many of Gandhi's views were constantly developing and changing, his conception of the source of political power remained throughout his active political life essentially the same. It does not appear to have changed basically from the time he developed the political technique of Satyagraha in South Africa until his death. This view was that hierarchical social and political systems exist because of the more or less voluntary submission, co-operation and obedience of the subordinate group. This submission, with its psychological roots and its practical political manifestations, was regarded by Gandhi as the root cause of tyranny.

He granted, as we shall see, that rulers use various means to obtain this submission, and that the price of its withdrawal is often harsh repression and extreme suffering aimed at forcing a resumption of co-operation. This fact, however, did not, in his view, invalidate the theory. It remained true, he felt, that hierarchical systems ultimately depend upon the assistance of the underlings.

The basic idea

This paper has a very limited objective : to present Gandhi's views on this theory largely in his own words; there is no attempt here to analyse or criticise this aspect of Gandhi's thought. Ideas must first be understood. "No Government— much less the Indian Government" Gandhi declared, "can subsist if the people cease to serve it."[1]

Even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent ot the governed, which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone.[2]

I believe, and everybody must grant, that no Government can exist for a single moment without the co-operation of the people, will-

[1] Young India 5/5/1920.

[2] Bose: Selections from Gandhi, Ahmedabad, 1948.

ing or forced, and if people suddenly withdraw their co-operation in every detail the Government will come to a standstill… It remains to be seen whether their [the masses' and the classes'] feeling is intense enough to evoke in them the measure of sacrifice adequate for successful non-co-operation.[3]

The popular saying, as is the king, so are the people, is only a half-truth. That is to say it is not more true than its converse, as are the people, so is the prince. Where the subjects are watchful a prince is entirely dependent upon them for his status. Where the subjects are overtaken by sleepy indifference, there is every possibility that the prince will cease to function as a protector, and become an oppressor instead. Those who are not wide awake, have no right to blame their prince. The princes as well as the people are mostly creatures of circumstances. Enterprising princes and peoples mould circumstances for their own benefit. Manliness consists in making circumstances subservient to ourselves. Those who will not help themselves perish. To understand this principle is not to be impatient, not to reproach Jate, not to blame others. He who understands the doctrine of self-help blames himself for failure. It is on this ground that I object to violence. If we blame others where we should blame ourselves and wish tor or bring about their destruction, that does not remove the root cause of thereof.[4]

As the 1930–31 civil disobedience campaign for Indian independence was about to begin he wrote : "The spectacle of three hundred million people being cowed down by living in the dread of three hundred men is demoralising alike for the despots as for the victims."[5] This concept of the relation between the dominate and subordinate groups, in Gandhi's view, applied to economic exploitation, as well as political domination:

[3] Young India 18/8/1920.

[4] Young India 8/1/1925.

[5] Young India 27/3/1930.

> may, torn from their context, appear to be, to destroy it without delay. It is their clear duty to run any risk to achieve that end.

But it must be equally clear that it would be cowardly for three hundred million people to seek to destroy the three hundred authors or administrators of the system. It is a sign of gross ignorance to devise means of destroying these administrators or their hirelings. Moreover they are but creatures of circumstances. The purest man entering the system will be affected by it, and will be instrumental in propagating the evil. The remedy therefore naturally is not being enraged against the administrators and therefore hurting them, but to non- cooperate with the system by withdrawing all the voluntary assistance possible and refusing all its so-called benefits. Writing in 1920 on non-co-operation, Gandhi said:

> If a father does an injustice then it is the duly of his children to leave the parental roof. If the headmaster of a school conducts his institution on an immoral basis, the pupils must leave the school. If the chairman of a corporation is corrupt the members must thereof wash their hands clean of his corruption by withdrawing from it: even so if a Government does a grave injustice the subjects must withdraw cooperation either wholly or partially, sufficiently to wean the ruler from his wickedness. In each case conceived by me there is an element of suffering whether mental or physical. Without such suffering it is not possible to attain freedom.[36]

Faced with a demand, backed by threat of violence, regarded as unjust, the non-violent man "… was not to return violence by violence but neutralize it by withholding one's hand and, at the same time, refusing to submit to the demand."

[36] flurijan 25/8/1940.

fall. He must, however, be prepared for imprisonment and perhaps even death in the course of the struggle.

Non-co-operation

The main course of action then lay in the field of non-co-operation. Speaking to a group of West African soldiers in 1946 on the means of achieving freedom Gandhi said :

> The moment the slave resolves that he will no longer be a slave, his fetters fall. He frees himself and shows the way to others. Freedom and slavery are mental states. Therefore the first thing to do is to say to yourself: T shall no longer accept the role of a slave. I shall not obey orders as such but shall disobey them when they are in conflict with my conscience.' The so-called master may lash you and try to force you to serve him. You will say: 'No, I will not serve you for your money or under a threat.' This may mean suffering. Your readiness to suffer will light the torch of freedom which can never be put out.[35]

In an article in late March 1930, on "The Duty of Disloyalty", Gandhi wrote:

> It is then the duty of those who have realised the awful evil of the system of Indian Government to be disloyal to it and actively and openly preach disloyalty. Indeed, loyalty to a State so corrupt is a sin, disloyalty a virtue…
>
> It is the duty of those who have realised the evil nature of the system, however attractive some of its features

[35] Young India 16/6/1920.

No person can amass wealth without the co-operation, willing or forced, of the people concerned.[6] The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.[7]

India's subjection voluntary

This basic view about the nature of hierarchical systems was reflected in Gandhi's belief that India's subordination to British rule was basically voluntary. This conception was expressed clearly in his 1908 pamphlet Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule:

> The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not m India because of their strength, but because we keep them. Let us now see whether these propositions can be sustained. They came to our country originally for purposes of trade. Recall the Company Bahadar. Who made it Bahadar? They had not the slightest intention at the time of establishing a kingdom. Who assisted the Company's officers? Who was tempted at the sight of their silver? Who bought their goods? History testifies that we all did this …
>
> … the English merchants were able to get a footing in India because we encouraged them. When our Princes fought among themselves, they sought the assistance of Company Bahadur. That co-operation was versed alike in commerce and war. It was unhampered by questions of morality. Its object was to increase its

[6] Young India 26/11/1931

[7] Bose: op. cit.

> commerce and to raise money. It accepted our assistance and increased the number of its warehouses. To protect the latter it employed an army which was utilised by us also. Is it not then useless to blame the English for what we did at that time too? The Hindus and the Mahomedans were at daggers drawn. This, too, gave the Company its opportunity and thus we created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. Hence it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost …
>
> The causes that gave them India enable them to retain it. Some Englishmen state that they took and they hold India by the sword. Both these statements are wrong. The sword is entirely useless for holding India. We alone keep them.[8]

In 1921 he still held the view that "It is not so much British guns that are responsible for our subjection as our voluntary co-operation."[9] Twenty-five years later he still insisted : "The only constituted authority is the British. We are all puppets in their hands. But it would be wrong and foolish to blame that authority. It acts according to its nature. That authority does not compel us to be puppets. We voluntarily run into their camp. It is, therefore, open to any and everyone of us to refuse to play the British game."[10]

There is evidence that, while Gandhi may have in some degree come upon this concept independently, he was influenced highly by Henry David Thoreau, especially in his Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience and by Leo Tolstoy both in correspondence and in Tolstoy's A Letter to a Hindu. It is significant that in his introduction to an edition of this essay, Gandhi wrote, in Johannesburg in 1909:

[8] Gandhi : Hind Swaraj (1908) Ahmedabad 1939.
[9] Young India 9/2/1921.
[10] Harijan 19/9/46.

> Gandhi declared, "are intended to create 'disaffection' as such, that people might consider it a shame to assist or co-operate with a government that had forfeited all title to respect or support."[32]

Political implications

In Gandhi's view, if the maintenance of an unjust or non-democratic regime is dependent upon the co-operation, submission and obedience of the populace, then the means for changing or abolishing it lies in the area of non-co-operation, defiance, and disobedience. These forms of action, he was convinced, could be undertaken without the use of physical violence, and even without hostility towards the members of the opponent group. On this basis, he formulated the technique of action, Saiyagraha :

> This force is to violence, and, therefore, to all tyranny, all injustice, what light is to darkness. In politics, its use is based upon the immutable maxim, that government of the people is possible only so long as they consent either consciously or unconsciously to be governed.[33]

He regarded it as both unmanly and immoral to submit to injustice, even though the consequences for refusal to submit were severe punishment. In Hind Swaraj he wrote: "If man will only realise that it is unmanly to obey laws that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him. This is the key to self-rule or home-rule."[34] When the resister was ready to cast off fear, he could then undertake the non-co-operation with the regime which could lead to its down-

[32] Gandhi: op. cit.
[33] Harijan 24/2/1946.
[34] Young India 27/3/1930.

Change of attitude

There must, then, Gandhi insisted, be a psychological change from passive submission and acceptance of the rule of the existing powers-that-be to a determination to be self-reliant and to resist all that is regarded as unjust and tyrannical :

> The way of peace insures internal growth and stability. We reject it because we fancy that it involves submission to the will of the ruler who has imposed himself upon us. But the moment we realise that the imposition is only so called and that, through our unwillingness to suffer loss of life or property, we are party to the imposition, all we need to do is to change that negative attitude of passive endorsement. The suffering to be undergone by the change will be nothing compared to the physical suffering and the moral loss we must incur in trying the way of war.[30]
>
> The bond of the slave is snapped the moment he considers himself to be a free being. He will plainly tell the master: I was your bond slave till this moment, but I am a slave no longer. You may kill me if you like, but if you keep me alive, I wish to tell you that if you release me from the bondage, of your own accord, I will ask for nothing more from you. You used to feed and clothe me, though I could have provided food and clothing for myself by my labour ...[31]
>
> The achievement of this change in attitude toward the existing regime was an important preliminary step in producing social and political change. "My speeches",

[30] Case : Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure, New York, 1923.

[31] Indian Opinion, Golden Number, 1914.

> If we do not want the English in India we must pay the price. Tolstoy indicates it. 'Do not resist evil, but also do not yourselves participate in evil — in the violent deeds of the administration of the law courts, the collection of taxes, and what is more important, of the soldiers, and no one in the world will enslave you', passionately declares the sage of Yasnaya Polyana. Who can doubt the truth of what he says in the following: 'A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising two hundred millions. Tell this to a man set free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what these words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand people, not athletes, but rather weak and ordinary people, have enslaved two hundred millions of vigorous, clever, capable, freedom-loving people? Do not the figures make it clear that not the English, but the Indians, have enslaved themselves?'[11]

One need not accept all that Tolstoy says ... to realise the central truth of his indictment of the present system ...

In consequence of this view, Gandhi concluded "It is my certain conviction that no man loses his freedom except through his own weakness."[12]

Obtaining Submission

There were, Gandhi recognised, a number of means which regimes and ruling classes used to obtain and maintain the populace's acquiescence and co-operation. The threat of violent repression and punishment was one of these. This and other needs required the creation of a class of subordinates to assist the regime

[11] Kalidas Nag : Tolstoy and Gandhi, Patna 1950.

[12] Bose: op. cit.

in carrying out its various functions and in enforcing its will upon the populace. He wrote, for example, in 1930:

> From the village headmen to their personal assistants these satraps have created a class of subordinates who, whilst they cringe before their foreign masters, in their constant dealings with the people act so irresponsibly and so harshly as to demoralise them and by a system of terrorism render them incapable of resisting corruption.[13]

As an example of this, Gandhi cited the political function served by Indian lawyers operating within the British system :

> But the gravest injury they have done to the country is that they have tightened the English grip. Do you think that it would be possible for the English to carry on their Government without law courts? It is wrong to consider that courts are established for the benefit of the people. Those who want to perpetuate their power do so through the courts. If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them.
>
> The chief thing … to be remembered is that without lawyers, courts could not have been established or conducted and without the latter the English could not rule. Supposing that there were only English judges, English pleaders and English police, they could only rule over the English. The English could not do without Indian judges and Indian pleaders.[14]

He roundly condemned the behaviour of such an intermediate class of Indians subservient to British interests :

[13] Young India 27/3/30

[14] A.I.C.C. : Congress Bulletin

self-rule which was beyond political independence alone. "When India was ready, neither the British nor the Rajahs, nor any combination of the Powers could keep India from her destined goal, her birthright, as the Lokamanya would have said."[27] In this context Gandhi emphasised moral improvement as a contribution to political change:

> … rulers, if they are had, are so not necessarily or wholly by birth, but largely because of their environment … It is perfectly true that the rulers cannot alter their course themselves. If they are dominated by their environment, they do not surely deserve to be killed, but should be changed by a change of environment. But the environment is we— the people who make the rulers what they are. They are thus an exaggerated edition of what we are in the aggregate. If my argument is sound, any violence done to the rulers would be violence done to ourselves. It would be suicide. And since I do not want to commit suicide, nor encourage my neighbours to do so I become non-violent myself and invite my neighbour to do likewise.
>
> Moreover, violence may destroy one or more bad rulers, but like Havana's heads, others will pop up in their places, for, the root lies elsewhere. It lies in us.[28]
>
> The responsibility is more ours than that of the English for the present state o things. The English will be powerless to do evil if we will but be good. Hence my incessant emphasis on reform from within.[29]

[27] Bose: op. cit.

[28] Young India 20/5/26.

[29] Address to A.I.C.C. : 8/8/1942.

> wrong by passive acquiescence, directly or indirectly, the victim is an accessory to the tyrant's misdeeds[26]

Satyagraha was, then, aimed both at influencing the power relationships between the British Raj and the Indian nation by (1) the introduction of psychological and moral pressures by the determined defiance of the population to British rule, coupled with non-retaliatory acceptance of the repression and suffering imposed by the regime, (2) the political impact of a large section of non-co-operating disobedient subjects on the functioning and maintenance of the regime, and (3) the improvement of the moral stature of the Indian people (through their self-suffering, defiance without retaliation, and their casting off of the attitude of submission which would in the long run contribute to increased selfreliance and reduced submission to the British Raj. The constructive programme for producing social and economic changes without the assistance of the government was also a continuing means for producing self-rule and a weakening of the ties to the British Raj.

Gandhi thus shares Godwin's view that the outward political forms and structure are reflections of and dependent upon certain other qualities of the society, and that if freedom is to be genuine and lasting there must be changes made on a deeper level than that involved in changes in only the constitutional or institutional forms at the top.

In this context one can see why Gandhi emphasised the moral improvement of the Indian people, and the constructive programme as politically relevant. These efforts contributed to increased ability to non-co-operate with the British Raj. In turn, such non-co-operation and voluntary suffering constituted also a means of moral improvement for the Indian people, by making amends for their previous submission to foreign domination.

This combined programme of moral improvement, resistance and constructive work would, in Gandhi's view, lead to genuine

[26] Harijan 21/9/34.

> It is worth noting that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation. Hypocrisy, tyranny, etc., have increased; English-knowing Indians have not hesitated to cheat and strike terror into the people. Now, if we are doing anything for the people at all, we are paying only a small portion of the debt due to them … It is we, the English-knowing Indians, that have enslaved India. The curse of the nation will rest not upon the English but upon us.[15]

A system of education which inculcated respect and attachment for the culture, traditions, and political system of the foreign occupation authority and contributed to the reduced respect and attachment to the Indian counterpart of these, in Gandhi's view increased submission to the British system: 'To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them." A resolution, drawn up by Gandhi, approved by the Congress Working Committee, and then passed by public meetings throughout India on Jan. 26, 1930 included the sentence: "Culturally the system of education has torn us from our moorings, our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us."[16]

Power in political change

Gandhi saw this view of the basis of the regime's power as fully compatible with a recognition of the importance of wielding power of some type in changing relationships between the rulers and the ruled. Some of the clearest statements on this were made during the early days of the 1930–31 independence struggle. In early January 1930, he declared : "England will never make any real advance so as to satisfy India's aspirations till she is forced to it."[17] Later the same

[15] Gandhi : op. cit.

[16] All-India Congress Committee: Congress Rullctin 17/1/30.

[17] Fischer: The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, New York 1950.

month he wrote in Young India, "The British people must realise that the Empire is to come to an end. This they will not realise unless we in India have generated power within us to enforce our will … The real conference therefore has to be among ourselves."[18] In a letter to the Viceroy in March, just before the beginning of the campaign he said :

> It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.[19]

In the same letter, referring to the economic motives for maintaining British rule and the coming resistance he observed, "If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognising our Independence."[20] Commenting on the Viceroy's terse rejection of his effort to find a settlement acceptable to the Indian nationalists without resort to non-violent resistance, Gandhi said, "The English nation responds only to force, and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply."[21] As the movement began, he declared :

> I regard this rule as a curse. I am out to destroy this system of Government. I have sung the tune of 'God Save the King' and have taught others to sing it. I was a believer in the politics of petitions, deputations, and friendly negotiations. But all these have gone to the dogs. I know that those are not the ways to bring this Government round. Sedition has become my religion.[22]

[18] Young India 24/4/30.
[19] Young India 24/4/30.
[20] A.T.C.C. : Congress Bulletin 7/3/1930.
[21] Sitaramayya: op. cit.

Social determinants of political structures

Gandhi thus regarded the existence of genuine and lasting freedom as being based upon "a craving for human liberty which prizes itself above mere selfish satisfaction of personal comforts and material wants and would readily and joyfully sacrifice these for self-preservation."[23] The 1930–31 campaign was in his view aimed not so much at forcing the granting of specific political demands, as it was to raise the quality and stature of the Indian people, so that no one for long could deny them their rights.

The present campaign is not designed to establish Independence but to arm the people with the power to do so.[24]

If they are successful in doing away with the salt tax and the liquor trade from India, there is the victory for Ahimsa. And what power on earth is there then, that would prevent Indians from getting Swaraj! If there be any such power, I shall like to see it.[25]

Gopi Nath Dhawan, one of Gandhi's interpreters, writes :

> The idea that underlies non-co-operation is that even the evil-doer does not succeed in his purpose without carrying the victim with him, if necessary, by force, and that it is the duty of the satyagmhi to suffer for the consequences of resistance and not to yield to the will of the tyrant. If the victim continues to tolerate the

[22] Sitammayya: History of the
[23] Dhawan : The Political Philosophy of Mahatma
[24] Gandhi, Ahmedabad 1946.
[25] Harijan 2/3/47