
UNIT 7 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON NON-VIOLENCE

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

The career of Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) marked a watershed in the development of non-violent struggle. In leading the struggle first against racial discrimination against Indians in South Africa and then the struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi was the first to combine a variety of tactics according to a strategic plan in a campaign of explicitly non-violent action, and the first to conduct a series of campaigns toward long-term goals. Deeply religious, practical, and experimental in temperament, Gandhi was a shrewd, tireless, and efficient organiser who united cheerfulness with unshakable determination. He was not only a political strategist but also a social visionary. Gandhi's non-violence had three main elements: 1) self-improvement (the effort to make oneself a better person), 2) “constructive programme” (concrete work to create the new social order aimed at), and 3) campaigns of resistance against evils that blocked the way forward, such as the caste system and British colonial exploitation. Gandhi's success in linking mass action with non-violent discipline showed the enormous social power this form of struggle could generate. This was based on Gandhi's understanding of contemporary political trends as well as everyday life.

Aims and Objectives

This unit will try to make you understand:

- Gandhi's meaning of *Ahimsa*, its religious and philosophical roots in his ideology
- Its practical side and how Gandhi used it in conducting his *Satyagraha* and
- How he used it to fight many forms of domination, discrimination, prejudice and subordination.

7.2 MEANING OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

Non-violent action is not simply any method of action which is not violent. Broadly speaking, it means taking action that goes beyond normal institutionalised political methods (voting, lobbying, letter writing, verbal expression) without injuring opponents. Non-violent action, like war, is a means of waging conflict. It requires a willingness to take risks and bear suffering without retaliation. On the most fundamental level, it is a means by which people discover their social power. Non-violence is not the same thing as pacifism, for which there are many words. Pacifism is a state of mind. It is passive; non-violence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than non-violence, which is dangerous. When Jesus said a victim should turn the other cheek, he was preaching pacifism. But when he said an enemy should be won over through the power of love, he was preaching non-violence. The central belief of non-violence is that forms of persuasion that do not use physical force and do not cause suffering are more effectual. Gandhi invented a word for it: *Satyagraha*, from *satya*, meaning truth, broadly meaning it as “holding onto truth.”

Non-violent action takes three main forms: 1) protest and persuasion, 2) non-cooperation, and 3) intervention.

The first category includes such activities as speech-making, picketing, petitions, vigils, street theatre, marches, rallies, and sit-ins. When practised under conditions of governmental tolerance, these methods can be comparatively insignificant; when the views expressed are unpopular or controversial, or go against government policy, even the mildest of them may require great courage and can have a powerful impact.

The second category involves active non-cooperation. In the face of institutional injustice and discrimination, people may refuse to act in ways which are considered “normal”- to work, buy, or obey. This largest category of non-violent action includes refusal to pay taxes, withholding rent or utility payments, civil disobedience, draft resistance, fasting, and more than fifty different kinds of boycotts and strikes. Non-cooperation can effectively halt the normal functioning of society, depending on the type of action employed and how general its use becomes.

Finally, there is non-violent intervention, which can be defined as the active inclusion and unsettling presence of people in the natural processes of social institutions. This can include sit-ins, occupations, obstructions of everyday business in offices, the streets, or elsewhere, and creation of new social and economic institutions, including the establishment of parallel governments which compete with the old order for sovereignty. These methods tend to pose a more direct and instantaneous challenge than the other methods described earlier and to bring either a faster success or sharper repression.

7.3 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The ideas that shaped Gandhian non-violence were drawn both from Western and Indian sources. The trial of Socrates as described in Plato's *Apology* had a deep impact on Gandhi. In 1908 he published a restatement of this work in English and Gujarati under the title *The Story of a Soldier of Truth*. Socrates was a model for all those who would resist non-violently the violence of the state. The moral principles of the *Sermon on the Mount*, as interpreted in Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (1893), had a lifelong sway on him. Another of Tolstoy's writings, *Letter to a Hindu* (1908), made

Gandhi rethink the role of violence in the Indian society. Tolstoy had argued that the British were able to hold India by violence because Indians themselves believed in violence as the basis of society. That is why they submitted themselves to their rajas and maharajas, and treated the 'untouchables' with extreme brutality. Under these circumstances, the complaints of Indians against colonial violence seemed to him to look a lot like the complaints of alcoholics against wine merchants. The removal of colonial violence would not solve India's problems. They would be solved only if Indians made non-violence the basis of a new India. Gandhi was so convinced by the *Letter* that he translated and published it in both English and Gujarati. Gandhi's study of Western jurisprudence made him a lifelong defender of the idea of the rule of law and the legitimacy of the limited, constitutional state. The fight against violence needed such a state as its ally. Here Gandhi departed from Tolstoy's radical pacifism that rejected the state as such. John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860) opened Gandhi's eyes to the veiled structures of violence in industrial capitalism. Gandhi paraphrased and published it in English and Gujarati (1908) under the title *Sarvodaya* (The welfare of all), a title that he later gave to his own economic philosophy. Finally, there was the question of nationalism and how to free it from ethnic or religious or terrorist violence. Here he found help in the liberal nationalism of Giuseppe Mazzini, whose *An Essay on the Duties of Man*, published in 1892, became one of the recommended readings for all those who wanted to understand Gandhi's own basic work, *Hind Swaraj* (1909).

However, it was the Indian philosophical thought that helped Gandhi to assimilate the ideas he had absorbed from the West. Here three philosophical traditions were noteworthy. The first was the pacifist tradition of Jainism, as interpreted by Raichand—businessman, poet and mystic, and a personal friend of Gandhi. His advice was that a non-violent way of life was possible only if one withdrew from politics and concentrated all of one's energies on achieving inner harmony. Gandhi accepted the point about inner harmony but rejected the idea of withdrawing from politics. On the contrary, he sought to link the mission for inner harmony with that of outer harmony in society and polity. The philosophy of yoga as expounded in the classic text, the *Yogasutra* of Patanjali, had also impressed Gandhi greatly. Like Jainism, it too believed in the inappropriateness between maintaining inner harmony and engaging in vigorous affairs of state. However, it had recommended five moral qualities as being compulsory for inner harmony. Non-violence was one of them; the other four were truthfulness, abstention from theft, celibacy, and self-control in the use of material earthly wealth. Gandhi willingly integrated non-violence into his ethical system—with one adaptation. He tailored it from being a moral virtue into a civic virtue, thereby making it suitable for political action. But the philosophy that influenced him most was that of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He interpreted it as teaching the negative lesson of the senselessness of war. On the affirmative side, he interpreted it as teaching that the good life called for the disinterested service of one's fellow human beings, sustained by a deep love of God. Obstacles to the good life came from violence and the unmanageable state of the passions, notably anger, hatred, greed, and lust. Self-discipline, therefore, was the psychological solution to non-violence. The philosophical basis underlying Gandhi's theory of non-violence is adapted from that core underpinning the *Bhagavad Gita*. Humans are composites of body and soul (*atman*). As such, body force and soul force were both seen as dynamic mechanism in human affairs—the first as a fact and the second as a norm. The body was the source of violence and the passions; the soul was the cause of kindness and of the knowledge of good and wickedness. It was because the divine soul was a constitutive aspect of human beings that non-violence remained the model of their behaviour. A materialistic and acquisitive view of human life, in Gandhi's view, could not

justify, much less uphold, a non-violent way of life. The philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* also gave Gandhi's non-violence its ethical pragmatism. Since humans are composite beings, faultless non-violence was possible only in the soul's disembodied state, not in its personified state. In its embodied state, the will to live always brought with it the will to use power in legitimate and genuine self-defence. In the embodied state, one must always abstain from blameworthy violence—that is, disgusting violence used for dishonest gains. Defensive violence used in legitimate self-defence is not judged culpable.

7.4 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Elements of Gandhi's philosophy were rooted in the Indian religions of Jainism and Buddhism. Both of these advocate ahimsa (non-violence), which is "absence of the desire to kill or harm". The *Acaranga Sutra*, a Jain text, describes the fundamental need for non-violence: "All beings are fond of life; they like pleasure and hate pain, shun destruction and like to live, they long to live. To all, life is dear". *Ahimsa* is a way of living. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* was the expression of the deepest love for all humans, including one's opponents; this non-violence therefore included not only a lack of physical harm to them, but also a lack of hatred or ill-will towards them. Gandhi rejected the traditional dichotomy between one's own side and the "enemy;" he believed in the need to persuade opponents of their injustice and prejudice, not to punish them, and in this way to win their friendship.

Gandhi also firmly believed that if violence was used to achieve any end – even if it was employed in the name of justice- the result would be more violence. He, for instance, discarded the idea of a just war. But such practicality and expediency in matters of non-violence was irrelevant to Gandhi. Thomas Merton writes:

"In Gandhi's mind, non-violence was not simply a political tactic which was supremely useful and efficacious in liberating his people from foreign rule. [. . .] On the contrary, the spirit of non-violence sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself."

Gandhi's main tactic in his fight against the British was what he called *Satyagraha*, which means "Soul-Force" or "The power of truth". Gandhi developed *Satyagraha* as the practical extension of *ahimsa* and love; it meant standing firmly behind one's ideals, but without hatred. *Satyagraha* took the form of civil disobedience and non-cooperation with evil. Civil disobedience involved breaking a specific law if it was believed to be unjust, and then facing the consequences. The Salt March of 1930 was one of Gandhi's greatest successes in civil disobedience. Salt was an essential item and the British monopoly on salt production had led to massive taxes on the vital substance.

The other element of *Satyagraha*, non-cooperation with evil, consisted of pulling out all support for an unjust system, such as the British rule of India. This tactic need not break any law, but might include boycotting British products, refusing to work for British employers, pulling one's children out of British schools, refusing to supply the British with services, and not paying taxes. In 1920, after the British army massacred 400 unarmed demonstrators, Gandhi organised a nation-wide *Satyagraha* which used non-cooperation techniques such as the ones above, as well as public demonstrations, in order to "withdraw Indian support from the vast, monstrous, machine of Empire until it ground to a halt". Sadly, however, at the end of British Empire, Gandhi's dream was not rewarded. Gandhi was horror-struck by the communal conflict in India, and by the resulting calls for the creation of a separate Muslim state of Pakistan. Widespread distrust and hatred was

growing between Hindus and Muslims and, on the eve of India's independence, riots erupted all over India. The country became a bloodbath, in which it was estimated that a million lives were lost. Many believed that Gandhi's non-violence had failed. But had it? In these "months of chaos and terror," Gandhi spent his time in the most violent areas: "Each night he preached Peace and Love and prayed," Writes the Historian Stanley Wolpert, "Gandhi walked from village to village through the heart of that violent madness, preaching *ahimsa*. Mohandas K. Gandhi, the "Great Soul," was anything but a failure. In a world seemingly dominated by violence and hatred, Gandhi reincarnated the ancient idea of *Ahimsa*, non-violence, as the only way of living in peace.

7.5 THE MEANS-ENDS PROBLEM

Gandhi defined Non-violence or *ahimsa* as any 'action based on refusal to do harm'. It was not simply a willingness not to kill only. Gandhi refined the meaning of the word in the following words:

"*Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *himsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody."

In this wider way, Gandhi tried to relate the concept not as a merely negative state of harmlessness but to his notion of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But this did not mean to help the evil-doer in continuing his mischief or tolerating any form of domination or oppression passively. On the contrary, Gandhi evolved the technique to resist the oppressors by dissociating from him. Gandhi, while identifying love and non-violence, linked it to the problem of means and ends and to his conception of truth. The idea of love and truth were closely related in Gandhi's scheme of things so much so that it was difficult to separate them. For him, *ahimsa* was the means and truth was the end. Gandhi believed that means ought to be practical, within the easy reach of anyone courageous enough to practise it. In other words, only selected few could have arms, but non-violence could be used as a weapon by everybody. Truth, a relative truth, was the goal or the end towards which a person must strive to reach because in Gandhian perception absolute truth as well as absolute non-violence was difficult to achieve. Gandhi believed that perfection was not within human capacity but if we maintain a balance between means and ends, then it was within human reach to attain the goal. The testing ground of truth was, however, and must be according to Gandhi, non-violence or refusal to do harm. The use of violence, from Gandhian viewpoint, would destroy the truth, on whichever side it lay because that was harmful to human needs. Non-violence or *ahimsa* became for Gandhi, the sole criterion, the only determining yardstick by which to judge human action. It was the supreme value that separated brute from a civilised human-being. Gandhi's overall approach in many things was quite flexible, but here was his supreme dogma. Briefly stated, the only test of truth was action based on the refusal to do harm to others. Gandhi realised that he was putting forward a means to fight injustice and any form of domination but this was only an ideal. There were bound to be some limitations to achieve this ideal. But Gandhi emphasised the need to sharpen this means of struggle. How is it to be done? It meant to undergo conscious suffering in one's cause, without submitting to the will of offender or wrong-doer by pitting against the tyrant one's whole soul-force. Self-suffering in *Satyagraha* was neither a kind of 'weapon of the weak', nor was not cowardice but an instrument of moral persuasion. The resort to self-suffering was a kind of substitute for violence to others, one directed it inwards towards self-suffering,

injury to one's own person rather than harming others. Refusing to indulge in violence and inviting suffering upon oneself and yet not submitting to the humiliation and dominance was the basic essence of Gandhi's Non-violent approach to conflict resolution.

Gandhi opposed the utilitarian approach which subordinated means to ends. He argued that if means are completely subordinated to ends then the ends which will be realised would be quite different from the one the human actors initially visualised. Gandhi stressed that as human beings, we cannot control results. Since results or the final outcome was never sure in Gandhian scheme of things, Gandhi focussed only on the means or methods. Emphasising the organic link between ends and means, Gandhi said: "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and ends as there is between the seed and the tree." If the society is a kind of brotherhood of its individual members, how can this brotherhood be maintained and protected by lies and violence? In a similar way, if one paves the road to power with both corpses (however justified that may be) and good intentions, it is likely that with the passage of time good intentions will get diluted and corpses would be more and more numerous. Gandhi never doubted the efficacy of non-violent methods of struggle. Given a just cause, capacity for endless suffering and avoidance of violence, victory is certain, such was his approach. This approach was against the non-active pacifism. Inaction under the conditions of oppression and tyranny, according to Gandhi, was 'rank cowardice and unmanly' and he said that he would rather see someone incapable of non-violence resist violently than not to resist at all. He often argued that violence was any day preferable to impotence.

7.6 THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE IN GANDHI'S OWN WORDS

We here reproduce Gandhi's own article written by him in his Journal *Young India* in 1920. It would give you an idea about the way Gandhi thought about the violence and non-violence problem.

The Doctrine of Sword: M.K.Gandhi

In this age of the rule of brute force, it is almost impossible for anyone to believe that anyone else could possibly reject the law of final supremacy of brute force. And so I receive anonymous letters advising me that I must not interfere with the progress of non-co-operation even though popular violence may break out. Others come to me and assuming that secretly I must be plotting violence, inquire when the happy moment for declaring open violence to arrive. They assure me that English never yield to anything but violence secret or open. Yet others I am informed, believe that I am the most rascally person living in India because I never give out my real intention and that they have not a shadow of a doubt that I believe in violence just as much as most people do.

Such being the hold that the doctrine of the sword has on the majority of mankind, and as success of non-co-operation depends principally on absence of violence during its pendency and as my views in this matter affect the conduct of large number of people, I am anxious to state them as clearly as possible.

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run

away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so called Zulu rebellion and the late war. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.

But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment, forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish, it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. I therefore appreciate the sentiment of those who cry out for the condign punishment of General Dyer and his ilk. They would tear him to pieces if they could. But I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature. Only I want to use India's and my strength for better purpose.

Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. An average Zulu is any way more than a match for an average Englishman in boldly capacity. But he flees from an English boy, because he fears the boy's revolver or those who will use it for him. He fears death and is nerveless in spite of his burly figure. We in India may in moment realize that one hundred thousand Englishmen need not frighten three hundred million human beings. A definite forgiveness would therefore mean a definite recognition of our strength. With enlightened forgiveness must come mighty wave of strength in us, which would make it impossible for a Dyer and a Frank Johnson to heap affront upon India's devoted head. It matters little to me that for the moment I do not drive my point home. We feel too downtrodden not to be all angry and revengeful. But I must not refrain from a saying that India can gain more by waiving the right of punishment. We have better work to do, a better mission to deliver to the world.

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law to the strength of the spirit.

I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self sacrifice. For Satyagraha and its off-shoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The Rishis, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of non-violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness.

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for the empire's fall or its regeneration.

And so I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because it is weak. I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. No training in arms is required for realization of her strength. We seem to need it because we seem to think that we are but a lump of flesh. I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world. What is the meaning of Rama, a mere human being, with his host of monkeys, pitting himself against the insolent strength of ten-headed Ravan surrounded in supposed safety by the raging waters on all sides of Lanka? Does it not mean the conquest of physical might by spiritual strength? However being a practical man, I do not wait till India recognizes the practicability of the spiritual life in the political world. India considers herself to be powerless and paralysed before the machine guns, the tanks and the aeroplanes of the English. And she takes up non-co-operation out of her weakness. It must still were the same purpose namely, bring her delivery from the crushing weight of British injustice if a sufficient number of people practice it.

I isolate this non-cooperation from Sinn Feinism, for, it is so conceived as to be incapable of being offered side by side with violence. But I invite even the school of violence to give this peaceful non-co-operation a trial. It will not fail through its inherent weakness. It may fail because of poverty of response. Then will be one time for real danger. The high-souled men, who are unable to suffer national humiliation any longer, will want to vent their wrath. They will take to violence. So far as I know, they must perish without delivering themselves or their country from the wrong, If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. She is not to copy Europe blindly, India's acceptance of the doctrine of the sword will be the hour of my trial. I hope I shall not be found wanting. My religion has no geographical limits. If I have a living faith in it, it will transcend my love for India herself. My life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence which I believed to be the root of Hinduism.

Meanwhile I urge those who distrust me, not to disturb the even working of the struggle that has just commenced, by inciting to violence in the belief that I want violence. I detest secrecy as a sin. Let them give non-violence non-co-operation a trial and they will find that I had no mental reservation whatsoever.

Source: Young India, Ahmedabad, Wednesday, 11th August, 1920

7.7 SATYAGRAHA AND NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi's Practical tool in implementing his idea of Non-violence was *Satyagraha*. This has been translated as passive resistance, non-violent resistance, non-violent direct action. It literally means '*Eagerness for Truth*' and contains Truth, Non-violence and Self-suffering as basic elements. He had developed this technique of mass mobilisation in the fight against racial policies pursued by the colonial rulers in South Africa with a moderate success. Gandhi repeatedly stressed its essence that Non-Violence was the law of the human race and was infinitely greater than and superior to brute force. He further linked it with his spiritual/moral viewpoint and maintained that in the last resort it does not avail to those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love. He believed that Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove

a better barricade than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts. Individuals and nations who would practise non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all except honour. It was, therefore, inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e. modern colonialism which is frankly based on force for its defence. It was superior to armed struggle because as Gandhi was to demonstrate through his practical political campaigns, non-violence was a power which could be wielded equally by all – children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence was to be accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. Moreover, Gandhi's view was based on the assumption that if lawful activities were good enough for individuals, the collectivity of human beings as community or nations required armed resolution of conflicts. As we have already pointed out, Gandhi's advocacy of non-violence was closely connected to his attitude towards ends and means. He believed that violent methods for achieving a desired social result would inevitably result in an escalation of violence. The end achieved would always be contaminated by the methods used.

7.8 CRITIQUES OF GANDHI'S NON-VIOLENT STRATEGY OF RESISTANCE

Gandhi's views on non-violence were severely criticised by his political opponents. Many revolutionaries argued that force and armed struggle were necessary to end any regime of oppression. Some believed that as there was a fight back for survival in nature among various species, so there is also a similar kind of struggle among races and nations. Failure to recognise this, they argued, made the Gandhi's model of conflict resolution utopian because the real life was based on the principle of 'survival of the fittest'. In the Indian context, the Leftist leadership thought that Gandhi's principle of non-violence, whose moral force propelled several mass movements forward in their initial phases, repeatedly held back the struggles at key moments. As a result, privileged groups in the urban centres and countryside were able to detach the struggle for political independence from the struggle for radical social change and thus thwarted Gandhi's own goals of social justice. The British were gone, but the bureaucracy and police they built up still functioned with little change and continued to repress workers' and peasants' uprisings. Gandhi's will had been strong, but class forces proved stronger. They further argued that Gandhi never promoted the class forces-workers that could have helped him in his final struggle to unite Hindus and Muslims. Only class struggle could have achieved what Gandhi's purely moral mission attempted. The movement did not have to turn out in such a mess. Potentially revolutionary situations existed in the periods 1919-22 and 1946-47, but no mass party with revolutionary goals had been forged to steer the movements to victory. In the post-Second World War movement, the same social forces that had overthrown the Russian Tsar in 1917 were at the centre of the upsurge-the industrial working class, along with peasants and workers in uniform. But in India's case, the country's only mass party saved the British from being overthrown by taking power "peacefully" themselves-at the price of leaving the class rebellion to be consumed in the fires of communalism. Moreover, the Leftist viewpoint argued that different alignments of class forces were possible, since most classes opposed British rule. The independence movement would have produced a different outcome if industrial workers and the agricultural proletariat had been able to form a revolutionary socialist party-and drawn the middle class and small-holding peasants

behind their class-struggle leadership. Instead, Gandhi's party reversed these relations, with the bourgeoisie included in the leadership with the middle classes of village and city. Gandhi's life was history's longest experiment in non-violent political action. The result of the experiment is fairly clear: an exploitative class structure cannot be broken without violence somewhere along the way. Property rights, defended by state violence, have never yielded to the peaceful pressure of the exploited class. In other words, no exploiting class has ever left the stage of history without being pushed. Revolutionaries often made fun of Gandhi's idea of 'change of heart of the tyrant' as impractical day-dreaming. But one thing is fairly clear that even if non-violence failed to win the heart of enemies, state repression created widespread sympathies among the fellow countrymen and community and was a helpful instrument in mobilising public opinion both at home and abroad.

7.9 SUMMARY

Gandhi faced a problem of evolving practical and viable instruments in his fight for powerful British Empire. The nation had been thoroughly disarmed and any attempt to resist was met with severe repression by the colonial state. Combining contemporary methods of legal but extra-constitutional mobilisations with innovatively used century old notions of non-violence, he was able to 'invent' a unique method of *Satyagraha*. Gandhi's central dogma was *Ahimsa* or Non-violence and this was to be his means of achieving the truth. The radical side of this method was that it can be used by every single individual regardless of age, physical strength and gender if he/she possessed only a moral courage to oppose any form of oppression or dominance. The idea of non-violent resistance to superior force might look utopian and impractical at the surface but it proves to be a potent weapon in Gandhi's age as well as subsequently.

7.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe briefly the intellectual and historical context of Gandhi's idea of Non-violence.
2. What is the meaning of *Ahimsa*? Are its critiques justified?

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