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## UNIT 16 SATYAGRAHA

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### Structure

- 16.1 Introduction
    - Aims and Objectives
  - 16.2 Concept of Satyagraha
    - 16.2.1 Superiority of Satyagraha to Passive Resistance
    - 16.2.2 Satyagraha, a Glorious, Internal Revolution
    - 16.2.3 Satyagraha and Militant Nationalism
    - 16.2.4 Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation
    - 16.2.5 Duragraha
  - 16.3 Sources of the Idea of Satyagraha
  - 16.4 Satyagrahi
    - 16.4.1 Satyagrahi and His Opponent
    - 16.4.2 Discipline of the Satyagrahi
  - 16.5 Satyagraha in South Africa
  - 16.6 Satyagraha Movements in British India
    - 16.6.1 Champaran Satyagraha
    - 16.6.2 Kheda/Kaira Satyagraha
    - 16.6.3 Ahmadabad Mill Worker's Strike
    - 16.6.4 Bardoli Satyagraha
    - 16.6.5 Salt Satyagraha
    - 16.6.6 Individual Satyagraha
  - 16.7 Satyagraha in the French and Portuguese India
  - 16.8 Satyagraha Legacy outside India
  - 16.9 Contemporary Relevance
  - 16.10 Summary
  - 16.11 Terminal Questions
- Suggested Readings

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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I have no doubt that the British Government is a powerful Government, but I have no doubt also that Satyagraha is a sovereign remedy. The acme of satyagraha would be to lay down our lives for the defence of India's just cause.

#### **Gandhi in *Harijan*, September 1946**

'Power' of any state or government is often measured by its military and economic strength and it is always maintained that the country A is powerful enough to convince or coerce country B to take certain measures that are favourable to the former even at the expense of the latter. Against this backdrop, Gandhi's words mentioned above displays his

faith in the philosophy and practice of ‘Satyagraha’, a ‘sovereign remedy’ in the hands of the ‘powerless’ to fight against the most ‘powerful’. Gandhi developed the concept of Satyagraha, which involved a search for *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (Non-violence) and self-suffering. With his Satyagraha, Gandhi not only challenged the conventional notion of power, but showed to the world that the weaker section of society was as powerful in crucial respects as the strong. He trusted the power of the ‘idea’ of Satyagraha to face the ‘might’ of the British imperialism/colonialism. For him, Sarvodaya is life’s goal and Satyagraha - non-violent resistance - is the means to achieve it, while anasakti is a method of training of self-discipline to gain power. Gandhi believed that Satyagraha is an infallible panacea and is the only weapon that is “suited to the genius of our people and of our land, which is the nursery of the most ancient religions ...”

The Indian National Congress (INC) established in 1885 worked for the arousal and consolidation of the national feeling, bringing in a large number of the Indians into the vortex of nationalist political agitation and struggle. Early nationalists offered economic critique of imperialism/colonialism and constantly wrote and spoke about India’s growing poverty and linked it with the British colonial economic exploitation. The nationalists gave full support to the popular struggle for human rights that was being waged in South Africa after 1893 by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Later, by 1915, Gandhi returned to India and plunged into the national politics. The emergence of Gandhi in the Indian political scene and his ‘Satyagraha’ movement turned it into a vigorous and successful mass movement, which eventually freed India from the clutches of the European colonial rule.

### **Aims and Objectives**

After studying the unit, you will be able to understand:

- The philosophy of ‘Satyagraha’ and its political and socio-economic dimensions.
- Satyagraha as an attempt to achieve a silent, non-violent revolution.
- The difference between ‘Satyagraha’ and ‘Passive Resistance’

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## **16.2 CONCEPT OF SATYAGRAHA**

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Having experienced the scornful racist discrimination in South Africa, Gandhi resolved to unite the ‘coloured’ people and to fight for their rights. Gandhi initially called the popular movement against the racist regime as ‘passive resistance’, a term he borrowed from Leo Tolstoy. But ‘Passive resistance’, was not only a foreign term that Gandhi had strong reservations about, but the connotations of the term was also inadequate to highlight the aspect of truth and moral courage that Gandhi associated with non-violent political resistance. Moreover, it put political ends at the forefront, dissociated from deeper ideological values. Gandhi needed an Indian term that could encompass all these aspects of the revolution within it. Gandhi felt that “passive resistance” was “too narrowly” construed and could be interpreted as a weapon of the weak. Maganlal Gandhi suggested the term Sadagraha (sad-truth; agraha-firmness and so, firmness in a good cause).

Gandhi changed the word ‘Sad’ to ‘Satya’ - “Satyagraha”, to designate the struggle, he was planning to launch. The word “Sat” implies openness, honesty and fairness: Truth. “The word Satya (Truth), is derived from Sat, which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth (M.K. Gandhi, Young India, July 30, 1931).” Satyagraha literally means insistence on truth. This insistence arms the votary with matchless power.

This power or force is connoted by the word Satyagraha. Gandhi explains: "Truth (Satya) implies love and firmness (Agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement "Satyagraha", that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase "passive resistance" (M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 1928, p. 72).

The term satyagraha expressed the nature of non-violent direct action of the Indians against the racial policy of the Government of South Africa. It is the relentless pursuit of truthful ends through non-violent means. It is an attempt to vindicate truth, not by inflicting suffering on the opponent but on one's own self in an effort to bring in change of heart on the part of the opponent. It postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person. Gandhi maintained: "The hardest heart and the grossest ignorance must disappear before the rising sun of suffering without anger and without malice" (*Young India*, February 19, 1925).

While commenting on the basic characteristic of Satyagraha which implies onward march only and of no possibility of retreat or look back, Gandhi comments: "Since Satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action a Satyagrahi (practitioner of Satyagraha) exhausts all other means before he resorts to Satyagraha. He will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody, who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to Satyagraha. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him and launches out upon Satyagraha he has burnt his boats and there is no receding" (*Young India*, October 20, 1927). Again, he adds: "My experience has taught me that a law of progression applies to every righteous struggle. But in the case of Satyagraha the law amounts to an axiom. As a Satyagraha struggle progresses onward, many other elements help to swell its current, and there is a constant growth in the results to which it leads. This is really inevitable, and is bound up with the first principles of Satyagraha. For in Satyagraha the minimum is also the maximum, and as it is irreducible minimum, there is no question of retreat, and the only movement possible is an advance".

Highlighting the significance of 'Fasting' as a tactic as a part of Satyagraha philosophy, Gandhi points out: "Fasting unto death is an integral part of Satyagraha programme, and it is the greatest and most effective weapon in its armory under given circumstances. Not every one is qualified for undertaking it without a proper course of training (*Harijan*, July 26, 1942). Here, Gandhi tries to convince the detractors of the demonstrative effect of one's suffering on others, for paving way to a positive impact.

### **16.2.1 Superiority of Satyagraha to Passive Resistance**

Satyagraha and Passive Resistance are methods for meeting aggression and settling conflicts. Passive Resistance as practised by non-Conformists in England and the Germans in Ruhr against the French was a political weapon of expediency whereas Satyagraha is a moral weapon based on the superiority of soul-force or love-force over physical force. Passive Resistance is the weapon of the weak, while Satyagraha can be practised only by the bravest who have the courage to die without killing. Passive Resistance aims at embarrassing the opponent into submission, while Satyagraha intends to wean the opponent from error by love and patient suffering. In Passive Resistance there is no place for love for the opponent; in Satyagraha there is no room for ill-will and hatred, since the Satyagrahi is supposed to act against the evil and not the evil-doer. Passive Resistance is static, while Satyagraha is dynamic. Passive Resistance is a negative approach, while

Satyagraha is positive in content and conduct. Passive Resistance does not exclude the possibility of violent methods. Satyagraha does not permit violence in any form or shape and on any eventualities. There is nothing passive about Satyagraha and on the other hand, it is active, pure and simple. It emphasizes internal strength of character, while passive resistance does not lay emphasis on the moral stature of the resistance (M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 1928, pp.73-5).

### 16.2.2 Satyagraha, a Glorious, Internal Revolution

Gandhi believed that change in the polity or society is to be brought about by changing the hearts and minds of men and not by bloody revolutions. Since every individual has a conscience, Gandhi aimed at its awakening, not through violent means, but, by stressing on self-purification and moral influence. He was convinced that through Satyagraha the change of heart can be made possible. In essence, the idea underlying Satyagraha is to convert the wrongdoer, to awaken the sense of justice in him, to show him also that without the co-operation, direct or indirect, of the wronged the wrongdoer cannot do the wrong intended by him (*Harijan*, December 10, 1938). It seeks to eliminate antagonisms without harming the antagonists themselves, as opposed to violent resistance, which is meant to cause harm to the antagonist. A Satyagrahi therefore does not seek to end or destroy the relationship with the antagonist, but instead seeks to transform or “purify” it to a higher level. Satyagraha is also termed as “silent force” or a “soul force”. It arms the individual with moral power rather than physical power. It is a “universal force” that “makes no distinction between kinsmen and strangers, young and old, man and woman, friend and foe.”

### 16.2.3 Satyagraha and Militant Nationalism

The Indian anarchists living in London at the beginning of the twentieth century and those who were in the field in India were advocating use of force and violence to achieve the right to self-determination and freedom from colonial rule quickly, since they sincerely and seriously believed that strategies of moderates may delay, if not deny, the achievement of freedom. The youth of the country lamented the evil effects of the colonial rule and this helpless and hapless feeling as well as the failure of the moderates in achieving the goal of self-determination, enthused some among them to take recourse to violence as a means to achieve their right.

In his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi criticised the use of force by the Indians as a means to achieve the goal of self-rule. For him, “Swaraj is not English rule without Englishman. Real Home Rule is self-rule or self-control; the way to it is passive resistance that is soul-force or love-force and in order to exert this force, Swadeshi in every sense is necessary” (M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, 1938, Eighteenth Reprint, 2006, p. 90). “Real home rule is possible only where passive resistance is the guiding force of the people. Any other rule is foreign rule”, remained his conviction (*Ibid.*, pp.72-3). Gandhi reiterated that “Brute-force is not natural to Indian soil. You will have, therefore, to rely wholly on soul-force. You must not consider that violence is necessary at any stage for reaching our goal” (*Ibid*, p.84).

Though he accepted and acknowledged the patriotic spirit of extremists and their craving for right to self-determination and admired their spirit of sacrifice for the sake of their mother country, he disapproved of their violent activities and believed that the extremists would complicate rather than clear the mess that the Indians were in under the alien rule. As an alternative, he suggested ahimsa and Satyagraha, non-violent mass movement to

face the all-powerful British Raj. He believed that ahimsa is the weapon of the strong and a true Satyagrahi is handling a more lethal weapon than the extremists were handling.

#### **16.2.4 Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation**

Civil disobedience and non-cooperation as practised under Satyagraha are based on the “law of suffering”, a doctrine that the endurance of suffering is a means to an end. This end implies a moral upliftment or progress of an individual or society. Therefore, non-cooperation in Satyagraha is a means to secure the cooperation of the opponent consistently with truth and justice. Gandhi sincerely believed that “non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good”. Pacifism, civil disobedience, rightful resistance against wrong policies, passive resistance, non-cooperation are some of the forms of non-violent struggles Gandhi brought into practice. All these terms come under the common term “Satyagraha”.

#### **16.2.5 Duragraha**

Gandhi contrasted Satyagraha (holding on to truth) with “Duragraha” (holding on by force), as in protest meant more to harass than enlighten opponents. He wrote: “There must be no impatience, no barbarity, no insolence, no undue pressure. If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one’s cause.”

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### **16.3 SOURCES OF THE IDEA OF SATYAGRAHA**

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‘Satyagraha’ was based on the principles of Ahimsa or non-violence, which was the founding principle of Gandhi’s political ideology that was based on theological tenets of Jainism, Buddhism, Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. The Upanishads declare that the entire world rests on the bedrock of satya or truth. Buddha gave to the mankind the message of Ahimsa or non-violence and maintained that hatred could be overcome not by hatred but by love. Mahavira held ahimsa as the highest form of religion. The Hindu mythology abounds in stories, especially of Raja Harishchandra, extolling the virtue of holding on to truth, through thick and thin. Philosophy of Socrates and teachings of Jesus Christ too are based on perfect Satyagraha. The Christian dictum, “Resist no evil; if anybody smite your right cheek, show him the left also”, remains the guiding principle of the Gandhian Satyagraha.

Gandhi gave this concept a new shape and philosophy and converted it into a new weapon against evil. Gandhi was also influenced by the writings of Thoreau, Tolstoy and Ruskin. They advocated non-cooperation of civilians against the government if it proved suppressive or tyrannical. Their thoughts got a practical shape in Gandhi’s approach, first against the highly unruly administration of colonial Governments in Africa and later in the struggle for Independence in India. It is rather natural when Gandhi maintains: “I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply this eternal principle to our daily life and problems. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills. All I have done is to try experiments on as vast a scale as I could” (*Harijan*, March 28, 1936).

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### **16.4 SATYAGRAHI**

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Satyagraha is fundamentally a way of life, which guides the modes of political activism undertaken by the Satyagrahis. On an individual level, it involves a life committed to truth,

chastity, non-attachment and hard-work. On the political front, Satyagraha involves utilisation of non-violent measures to curb the opponent, and ideally to convert him rather than to coerce him into submission. A Satyagrahi wants to make the evil-doers see the evil that they are indulging into, and realise their injustice. It involves transforming them into acceptance of the right, and if that fails to come around, then at least to stop them from obstructing the right. Picketing, non-cooperation, peaceful marches and meetings, along with a peaceful disobedience of the laws of the land were typical modes of resistance adopted by Satyagrahis. His course is plain. He must stand unmoved in the midst of all cross currents.

Reverence to the opposition was one of the unique features of the Satyagraha preached by Gandhi. Under no circumstance, should the opposition or the flag of the opposition be insulted in a Satyagraha movement. A true Satyagrahi had to resist and bear all hardships, including physical assault with patience, not ever stooping to anger, and to defend the faith even at the cost of life. Satyagrahis had to be extremely strong in inner strength and moral courage in order to do that. Satyagrahis need to maintain a pure and simple life. Gandhi made his own life a veritable example of his teachings, and also turned his ashram at Sabarmati as a haven for individuals who chose to maintain a life based on his teachings. Violence of all forms was to be resisted and refrained from. Abuses and swearing were strictly prohibited and all forms of abstinence from sensual pleasures were highly advocated. Every one was meant to work for his or her food and the clothes, which Gandhi called bread-labour. Wearing Khadi and leading a simple life was prescribed. Absolute secularism and eradication of every shade of untouchability were also distinct characteristics of satyagraha. Through this, Gandhi believed that the Indians would be strong enough to tread the paths of a truly non-violent revolution.

Satyagraha or struggle against injustice could be individualistic or on a mass scale. Gandhi felt that a Satyagrahi had to obey the laws of the society intelligently, and of his own free will. For mass civil disobedience it was necessary to create a band of well tried, pure hearted volunteers who thoroughly understood the strict conditions of Satyagraha. Patience and sleepless vigilance were required for the same. Gandhi was also aware of the difficulties in organising devoted volunteers, in a continued struggle. Gandhi set up Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab with 25 men and women as the first inmates to train Satyagrahis.

#### **16.4.1 Satyagrahi and his Opponent**

While elaborating on the relationship between a Satyagrahi and his opponent, Gandhi maintained that the former must know that his suffering will melt “the stoniest heart of the stoniest” opponent (*Young India*, June 4, 1925). As such, through self-suffering he appeals to his opponents better nature, as retaliation is to his baser (*Harijan*, July 26, 1942). “It is never the intention of a Satyagrahi to embarrass the wrongdoer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is, must be, always to his heart. The Satyagrahi’s object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrongdoer. He should avoid artificiality in all his doings. He acts naturally and from inward conviction” (*Harijan*, March 25, 1939). A satyagrahi must be willing to shoulder any sacrifice which is occasioned by the struggle which they have initiated, rather than pushing such sacrifice or suffering onto their opponent, lest the opponent become alienated and access to their portion of the truth become lost. He must always provide a face-saving “way out” for the opponents. The goal is to discover a wider vista of truth and justice, not to achieve victory over the opponent. A Satyagrahi bids goodbye to fear. He is therefore never afraid of trusting the opponent. Even if the

opponent plays him false twenty times, the Satyagrahi is ready to trust him the twenty-first time, for an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed.

### 16.4.2 Discipline of the Satyagrahi

The following points were laid down by Gandhi as a code of discipline for volunteers in the 1930 movement:

- Harbour no anger but suffer the anger of the opponent. Refuse to return the assault of the opponent.
- Do not submit to any order given in anger, even though severe punishment is threatened for disobeying.
- Refrain from insults and swearing.
- Protect opponents from insult or attack, even at the risk of life.
- Do not resist arrest nor the attachment of property, unless holding property as a trustee.
- Refuse to surrender any property held in trust at the risk of life.
- If taken prisoner, behave in an exemplary manner.
- As a member of a Satyagraha unit, obey the orders of Satyagraha leaders, and resign from the unit in the event of serious disagreement.
- Do not expect guarantees for maintenance of dependents.

Gandhi envisioned Satyagraha as not only a tactic to be used in acute political struggle, but as a universal solvent for injustice and harm. He felt that it was equally applicable to large-scale political struggle and to one-on-one interpersonal conflicts and that it should be taught to everyone. He asked Satyagrahis to follow the following principles (Yamas described in Yoga Sutra):

- Nonviolence (ahimsa)
- Truth — this includes honesty, but goes beyond it to mean living fully in accord with and in devotion to that which is true
- Non-stealing
- Chastity (brahmacharya) — this includes sexual chastity, but also the subordination of other sensual desires to the primary devotion to truth
- Non-possession (not the same as poverty)
- Body-labour or bread-labour
- Control of the palate
- Fearlessness
- Equal respect for all religions
- Economic strategy such as boycotts (swadeshi)
- Freedom from untouchability

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## 16.5 SATYAGRAHA IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Gandhi's Satyagraha experiment began in South Africa in 1906. The non-white immigrants were expected to register themselves in the Registrar of Asiatics and the government issued a certificate of registration with their identity and fingerprints. Failure to comply with the regulation resulted in forfeiture of their right to live in Transvaal and the defaulter was liable to a fine of 100 pounds and deportation. Gandhi was determined to oppose this black ordinance and goaded the Indians not to submit to the ordinance if it became law. While speaking before 3,000 Indians gathered at a theater in Johannesburg on September 11, 1906, Gandhi organised a strategy of nonviolent resistance to oppose racist policies of the South African Government. Satyagraha was born and since then, it has been adopted by many around the world to resist social injustice and oppression. On July 1, 1907, the ordinance came into effect and the Indians were required to get themselves registered by July 31. Gandhi and his followers stoutly opposed the move. The Transvaal Indian Association organised boycott, dissuaded Indians from registering and as a result only 100 out of 1500 registered in July. Leaders of the movement including Gandhi were imprisoned. General Smuts assured Gandhi that in case the Indians would voluntarily register, the Registration Act would be repealed. On Gandhi's advice, the Indians voluntarily registered by April 1908. However, Smuts went back on his promise and refused to repeal the act. Popular movement was resumed and Gandhi announced his decision to burn the certificates collected earlier. Soon, women, working class and the peasants joined the Satyagraha movement against oppression and injustice meted out by the White rulers towards the coloured people. Gandhi devised and gave concrete shape to his doctrine of Satyagraha and between 1907 and 1914 he initiated a number of civil resistance movements which revealed the effectiveness of organised nonviolent resistance against a more powerful opponent.

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## 16.6 SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENTS IN BRITISH INDIA

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The British Government appointed the Rowlatt Commission for recommendations regarding administration of justice in India. The Committee recommended greater curbs on civil liberties in India. Consequently, the Imperial Legislative Council passed two bills, one provided for the arrest and detention of persons involved in anarchical activities, the other made the possession of seditious literature a crime. The Rowlatt Bills had granted sweeping powers of preventive detention or enforced residence on all suspected political agitators and as such was received with dismay by every section of Indian public opinion.

In opposition to these, Gandhi initially requested the Viceroy to withhold his assent for the 'black bills', but on the latter's failure, he galvanised mass support for this act of defiance; he proclaimed April 6 as Satyagraha Day, a day of *hartal* (suspension of all business), fasting, mass meetings to protest against the hated legislation. The non-co-operation evoked a widespread response. The people were denied of their freedom of expression, freedom of association, right to religion and other such fundamental freedoms. On April 13, 1919, people who congregated in the Jallianwala Bagh for certain religious purpose were fired upon by the British army officer O'Dyer. This massacre, termed by Nehru as "a long horror and terrible indignity", resulted in the loss of 1,202 lives and left 3,600 wounded and some permanently disabled.

Eruption of violence among the masses during the course of the popular movement in different parts of the country made Gandhi to realise the need for teaching the people of

civil disobedience and Satyagraha and launched massive training programme. In *Young India* he called the public attention “to constructive Satyagraha as also sometimes cleansing Satyagraha”.

### **16.6.1 Champaran Satyagraha**

Under the Tinkathia system the peasants of Champaran in Bihar were bound by law to grow indigo on 3/20<sup>th</sup> of their land and sell it to the British planters at prices arbitrarily fixed by the latter. They were liable to unlawful extraction and oppression by the planters. Gandhi went into a systematic enquiry into their grievances and took up their cause. His activities forced the local administration to appoint a committee of inquiry and as a result, Champaran Agrarian Bill and subsequently Act was passed protecting the interests of the poor peasants.

### **16.6.2 Kheda/ Kaira Satyagraha**

The crops had failed in Kaira district of Gujarat in 1918 but the officers insisted on full collection of land revenue. Gandhi organised the peasants to offer Satyagraha and goaded them to refuse to pay taxes and to suffer all consequences. Even those who could afford to pay declined to pay as a matter of principle, on the face of all threats of coercion and attachment. The government was forced to yield to the pressure and to arrive at a settlement with the peasants.

### **16.6.3 Ahmedabad Mill Worker’s Strike**

Gandhi led the mill-workers of Ahmedabad in a strike against the mill-owners who had refused to pay them higher wages and exploited them severely. He rallied behind them by under-taking a fast and this united all so firmly that the mill-owners gave in on the fourth day of the fast and agreed to a 35 per cent wage increase.

### **16.6.4 Bardoli Satyagraha**

The Bardoli Satyagraha, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel with undisputed zest, marks an important movement with non-violence as its hallmark. In 1928, the taluka contained 137 villages with some parts of it rich in crops like cotton, rice etc. The peasants of the region were incensed by a large increase in land revenue announced by the British government. The non-violent movement started after two years of petitioning and protesting, with the peasants moving a resolution on non-payment of taxes until the government considered withdrawing the increase in revenue. Large number of men and women participated in this Satyagraha movement wherein they were threatened by the government that their land would be forfeited. An iron will is said to have prevailed in Bardoli with mass resignations from the village headmen and the subordinate officers. After a four-month battle and a spate of observations, threats of arrests and continuous assessment of situation, peace was opted for and led to the reinstatement of the headmen and talatis and release of arrested Satyagrahis. Following a careful scrutiny of official records and taking stock of the situation, the government annulled the increase which they tried to enforce at any cost. The leadership acumen of Patel was recognised by one and all and earned him the credit of being a true disciple of Gandhi. Sarojini Naidu, a prominent leader, noted that Patel ‘translated Gandhi’s teachings into practical, dynamic action’ (cited in Rajmohan Gandhi, Patel, pp.168-9).

### **16.6.5 Salt Satyagraha**

The British had decided to take the Indian salt back to Britain and refine it and

repackage it and sell it back to the Indian people at about 20 times the price. The enormous taxes imposed on salt, an essential commodity that everybody needs every day, was perceived by one and all totally unjust, and made Gandhi to decide to defy the salt tax. He decided to break the infamous salt law as it affected everybody, Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor. Gandhi calculated that movement against oppressive salt laws would unite the people irrespective of their religion, region or economic status.

The Salt Satyagraha was organised in 1930, when Gandhi announced to the nation that he was going to defy the salt laws enacted by the British and defy the British government. When Gandhi began the march, 247 miles to the sea, on March 12, 1930, it just caught the imagination of the people and millions poured out into the streets; the response was so tremendous that the Congress doubters also began to see the wisdom of it, and the British government was taken completely by surprise. It turned out to be a turning point in the freedom struggle in India. Gandhi's Satyagraha reached the pinnacle of success, and the Indian Nationalist movement reached a feverish pitch, forcing the government to initiate procedures towards the Gandhi-Irwin pact, followed by the Second Round Table Conference, where Gandhi gave one of his greatest speeches exposing the evils of the British rule and endorsing the methods of Satyagraha.

### **16.6.6 Individual Satyagraha**

From his experience, Gandhi understood that every individual is not fit to be a 'Satyagrahi' by inclination and temperament and so, there was a virtual need for training and conditioning. He was aghast with the mass violence in retaliation of use of force by the state agencies like police. As such, in October 1940, when he thought of launching a fresh Satyagraha movement, it was decided that the campaign should be limited to selected individuals who were trained to be Satyagrahis. To his credit, Vinoba Bhave was selected by Gandhi to be the first leader to offer Satyagraha. Satyagraha by that time has gained wide popularity, and there were committed Satyagrahis all over the country. The Quit India Movement reclaimed the ideals of Satyagraha, which finally went a long way in securing Indian independence by August 15, 1947.

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## **16.7 SATYAGRAHA IN THE FRENCH AND PORTUGUESE INDIA**

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### **16.7.1 French India**

The news of the British withdrawal from India before August 1947 augmented the nationalist movement in the French Indian colonies. The locals intended to join free India and this idea spurred them into action. On August 3, people of Pondicherry surrounded the Government offices and demanded freedom from the French rule. Under the leadership of Kamal Prasad Ghosh, the mayor of Chandernagore, a general strike was called for and a *hartal* was announced but withdrawn after the release of about 100 persons who had been arrested earlier. On August 9, the French Indians took to direct action and the public agitation crippled the French India administration as the people sealed the government offices, forced the police to lay down their arms and drove away the French Administrator. Anticipating a flare-up in the French Indian settlements on the eve of August 15, the French approached the Indian Government through Paul Henri Roux, *Chargé d'Affaires* of France in New Delhi at that juncture, who appraised Nehru to the effect and sought an amicable settlement between the Governments of France and India. Nehru suggested to the French to put their stand on French India on paper and

present it to the Indian Government but the French refused to commit themselves on paper. Meanwhile, François Baron, the then Governor of French India, directly approached Gandhi, and pleaded for his interference and assured him of their resolve to settle the matter peacefully through negotiations with its Indian counterpart, assuring to introduce constitutional reforms towards democratising the French Indian administration. Gandhi condemned the action of the Indians who declared their freedom from France and Portugal, as thoughtless and a sign of arrogance and warned against taking the law in their own hands. Gandhi condemned the freedom fighters in Chandernagore as *duragrahis* and not *satyagrahis*, who are supposed to be fighters of a righteous cause through fair means and not violence. Gandhi's condemnation was distorted, printed and distributed throughout French India that further confused and divided the nationalist elements. Taking benefit of this confusion and the resultant lull in the popular movement, Baron let loose rigorous oppression of the freedom fighters and started constitutional reforms for which, he claimed, he got the approval of Gandhi. Though the Indian leaders were enamoured by the French, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, true to his character and conviction, firmly asserted that the French Settlements too must be liberated at the same time as India became free from the British colonial yoke while Gandhi and Nehru opined that their liberation could wait for some more time.

However, on November 7, 1947, Subbiah, the Communist leader from Pondicherry and Arunanshu from Chandernagore met Gandhi at Delhi and impressed him on the cunningness of Baron and how his words were twisted and falsely presented to serve the purpose of suppressing the *satyagraha* and in perpetuating the French rule on the Indian soil and strengthening their regime here. Gandhi maintained: "I am surprised that my friendly act towards Chandernagore could be distorted by anyone to suggest that I could ever countenance an inferior status in the little foreign settlements in India." (CWMG, LXXXIX (August 1, 1947 – November 10, 1947), pp. 500, 514). The leaders and participants of freedom movement in French India imbibed the ideals of Gandhism and fought against the French colonial rule. The Gandhian non-violent movement with a popular base and participation subsequently achieved independence from the French colonial rule as the French Indian problem was solved amicably through peaceful negotiation between France and India by 1954.

### 16.7.2 Portuguese India

The Portuguese India too witnessed the establishment of nationalist organisations such as the Goa Seva Sangh founded in 1943 by Purushottam Kakodkar, Vinayak Mayenkar, Nilakanth Karapurkar and others to fight the Portuguese colonial rule. The spread of nationalist ideas harnessed mass support for the *satyagraha* movement at a later date. This awakening resulted in the launching of a popular movement in the Portuguese India for the restoration of civil liberties on June 18, 1946 under the leadership of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, who maintained: "Goa is part of us (the Indians) and we can't allow her movements for freedom and unity to be suppressed with such wanton ferocity". He advised the Goans that "the first step towards the resurgence of national life in Goa was the abolition of its infamous law regarding assembly, organizations and publication". The Portuguese Government reacted vehemently; arrested Lohia and barred his entry into Goa. With the formation of Goa National Congress which decided to offer *satyagraha* on 8<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of every month, public meetings, hoisting of Indian national flags, and circulation of pamphlets were undertaken. Police brutalities and imprisonment of the leaders failed to unnerve the Goan nationalists. While supporting Lohia's courageous action, Gandhi advised him to leave the matter to Nehru. The news of the British

withdrawal from India by mid 1947 encouraged popular movements in Portuguese India in spite of the ruthless suppression and oppression spearheaded by the colonial administration. The intransigence of the Portuguese colonial rulers made it difficult for Nehru and the Indian Government to engage and convince its Portuguese counterpart.

The Indian nationalist elements resorted to direct action, which resulted in *Satyagraha* on August 15, 1954. The Portuguese authorities endeavoured to convince the international community that the *satyagrahis* were not Goans but Indian intruders. It also alleged connivance and support of the Indian Government. Its proposal to appoint a team of observers from the countries selected by Portugal and India to probe the matter was turned down by the Indian Government. Further, in spite of appeals from the leaders of the liberation movement to come to their rescue, Nehru believed that the *Satyagraha* opposition to Portuguese colonialism should be an “entirely Goan movement, popular and indigenous” and did not favour the Indian nationals’ participation in the *Satyagraha* movement in Goa. Despite tremendous adverse public opinion, Nehru stuck to his guns and imposed a ban on the entry of Indian nationals into Goa on August 15, 1954. In June 1955, the Portuguese police opened fire and dispersed a gathering of Goans at Cancona in South Goa as they were taking “an oath of allegiance to the liberation movement” from within, without any prior warning indicating that the *satyagrahis* were not safe in the Portuguese India.

Despite the lack of open support and encouragement from the Indian side, mass *Satyagraha* was held on August 15, 1955. Some 4,204 *satyagrahis* marched into the Portuguese possessions but faced the Portuguese police firing. This violent episode led to the death of 22 *satyagrahis* and injuries to 225 persons. Following this, Nehru deplored the ‘wanton and brutal exercise of force against unarmed people’ and asked the Portuguese to close their delegation in Delhi. On September 1, 1955, both the countries closed down their respective Consulates and the Goa borders were sealed off preceded by the economic sanctions and further denial of any facilities to the Portuguese ships entering Indian ports. On September 4, 1955, the Congress Working Committee declared that individual *Satyagraha* by the Indian nationals for the liberation of Goa should be avoided and ruled out mass entries into Goa. In April 1956, Morarji Desai, the then Chief Minister of Bombay, urged the Goan citizens of Bombay to build up a fearless *Satyagraha* movement and pointed out: “But, the struggle for Goan freedom has essentially to be a Goan movement. You have to help yourselves.” In a public meeting held in Poona on February 5, 1957 a demand was raised for the relaxation of the Union Government’s restrictions on the non-violent *Satyagraha* campaign launched by the people for the liberation of Goa by K.M.Jadhe, President of the *Goa Vimochan Sahayak Samiti* (*The Hindu*, September 5, 1955). The Portuguese Indian authorities had scant respect for non-violent *Satyagraha* movement, and the *satyagrahis* were dealt with utmost contempt and in a crude fashion. To avoid violent reaction, Nehru relied on economic blockade and then on diplomacy. In the end, he had to resort to ‘show’ of force, if not ‘use’ of force to liberate Goa from the Portuguese colonists.

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## 16.8 SATYAGRAHA LEGACY OUTSIDE INDIA

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*Satyagraha* has gained wide acceptance around the world as a more potent tool of resistance than armed violence. *Satyagraha* legacy was carried on long after Gandhi and Martin Luther King used it in his battle against racism and also used the term “soul force” during his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. The Reverend Martin Luther King used it in the United States to oppose segregation and during the campaigns he led for the civil

rights movement in the United States. While acknowledging Gandhian influence over his work, Martin Luther King said: "Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of Satyagraha was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. ... It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking". Later, Nelson Mandela used the Satyagraha technique in South Africa to end apartheid.

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## 16.9 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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At present, the negative effects of globalisation have created an unbridgeable gap between rich and poor countries and people as well. Powerful nations try to corner all the world's resources for their own benefit and are ready to use military force to impose their will on others. Moreover, militancy, insurgency and terrorism have become the order of the day in several parts of the world. Minority Politics of language, culture, ethnicity, religion and region and consequent crises situation has taken a heavy toll on global peace and security. Real or perceived grievances – political, economic and socio-cultural – have led to catastrophic conditions everywhere. On failure of peaceful, constitutional means in achieving the goal, the leadership has taken recourse to violence and use of force. There are incidents leading to huge loss of life and property by terrorist activities and also by counter-terrorist actions of the State. Unfortunately, innocent civilians are becoming targets of both terrorists and state agencies. Terrorists terrorise to discredit the State in the eyes of its own subjects and State terrorises to eliminate opposition to its authority and to suppress political dissensions. While terrorists try to justify their action in the name of right to self-determination/achievement of political goals/ root cause of socio-economic injustice, the State justifies it in the name of protecting their citizens and safeguarding their territorial integrity. There is rather a race between the parties to terrorise and who terrorises more comprehensively and effectively wins the race. This is the sorry spectacle of international politics of the day. In such a situation, all right thinking human beings have to resolve that violence is unacceptable and unjustifiable and serves no purpose.

Here comes Gandhian technique of 'Satyagraha' and his vision of a non-violent mass movement. All his arguments against the use of violence on the part of anarchists against the British colonial rule are more relevant today than they were ever before. That violence leads to more violence needs no further proof. His advocacy of the use of soul-force or love-force and his strategy of Satyagraha to attain unsullied 'swaraj' stands vindicated. Uninterrupted peace and ever-lasting prosperity could be achieved, if only Gandhian prescription to the issues of globalisation and international terrorism is paid heed of.

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## 16.10 SUMMARY

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To achieve the goal of national independence from colonial rule, Gandhi emphasised ahimsa and satya, which he welded together in the concept and practice of Satyagraha. Satyagraha proved to be a novel method of political action, a technique which revolutionised Indian politics and galvanised millions to action against the British Raj. Satyagraha for Gandhi was the only legitimate way to earn one's political rights, as it was based on the ideals of truth and non-violence. Satyagraha was the key aspect of all revolutions of the Indian National Movement in the Gandhian era. It is the most potent legacy Gandhi left

to India and to the world. Satyagraha is the pursuit of truth. Gandhi believed that truth should be the cornerstone of everybody's life and that we must dedicate our lives to pursuing truth, to finding out the truth in our lives. And so his entire philosophy was the philosophy of life. It was not just a philosophy for conflict resolution, but something that we have to imbibe in our life and live it all the time so that we can improve and become better human beings.

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## 16.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the concept of 'Satyagraha' and bring out its political, socio-economic and spiritual dimensions.
  2. Evaluate the role of Gandhi in transforming the Concept of Satyagraha as a political weapon against the European Colonial masters.
  3. Is Satyagraha a panacea to the present day ills in national and international politics?
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