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## UNIT 6 SATYAGRAHA\*

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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Gandhi's years in South Africa exposed him to the evils of apartheid. He experienced firsthand, the pain and humiliation the blacks suffered at the hands of the white colonists. For him the whites were able to dominate the blacks in their own country because they faced no resistance. Gandhi began a movement in South Africa to change the conditions as he believed that their demands were truthful and just. His associate Maganlal Gandhi suggested the term 'Sadagraha' which meant firmness in a good cause. Gandhi changed it to 'Satyagraha'. 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. Satyagraha literally means insistence on truth.

Gandhi's Satyagraha experiment began in South Africa in 1907. 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

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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 theatre in Johannesburg on September 11, 1906, Gandhi organized a strategy of non-violent resistance to oppose racist policies of the South African Government. Thus, Satyagraha was born and since then, it has been adopted by many around the world to resist social injustice and oppression.

For Gandhi Satyagraha was not just a political struggle but a moral struggle too with courage for truth. It had deep ideological values. Gandhi achieved notable success in South Africa through his methods. He returned to India in the latter-half of 1915 and plunged into 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'.
- Course of the Satyagraha movement in British India.
- Satyagraha legacy outside India and its contemporary relevance.

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## **6.2 CONCEPT OF SATYAGRAHA**

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According to Gandhi Satyagraha was one of the most powerful methods of direct action a Satyagrahi (practitioner of Satyagraha) can resort to. A Satyagrahi will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly before everybody, who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to Satyagraha. He further elaborated that his experiences had taught him that a law of progression applies to every righteous or just struggle. But in the case of Satyagraha the law amounts to an axiom. As a Satyagraha struggle progresses onward, many other elements help to increase its force and worth, 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.

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## **6.3 SOURCES OF THE IDEAS OF SATYAGRAHA**

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Satyagraha was based on the twin principles of Truth and Ahimsa (non-violence), which were the founding principle of Gandhi's political ideology. These were also 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 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”, became the guiding principle of the Gandhi’s Satyagraha. Gandhi gave this concept a new shape and philosophy and converted it into a new weapon against evil.

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## **6.4 SATYAGRAHA VS DURAGRAHA**

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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.”<sup>34</sup>

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## **6.5 SUPERIORITY OF SATYAGRAHA TO PASSIVE RESISTANCE**

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Gandhi had been much impressed by the thoughts of Leo Tolstoy and Thoreau about passive resistance. Yet, he felt that the concept of passive resistance was too narrow. Passive resistance was aimed at embarrassing the opponent into submission. Satyagraha on the other hand appealed to the opponent’s heart and changed it by the suffering of the self. In passive resistance there was no place for the love of the opponent. In Satyagraha there was no ill-will or hatred as the movement was to root out evil and not the evil-doer. Passive resistance was static while Satyagraha was dynamic.

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## **6.6 SATYAGRAHA OPPOSED TO MILITANT NATIONALISM**

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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. The Indian youth did not agree with Gandhi’s theories and preferred to adopt more violent means to achieve freedom from the colonial rule quickly. They felt that the moderate strategy of pleas, petitions and prayers had failed. Gandhi was against this and emphasized that, “Brute-force is not natural to Indian soil, so a person will have to wholly rely on soul-force. One must not consider that violence is necessary at any stage for reaching one’s goal.”<sup>35</sup>

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 motherland, 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.

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## 6.7 SATYAGRAHI'S CODE OF CONDUCT

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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 utilization 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 realize the injustice they are committing. It involves encouraging them into acceptance of the right, and if that fails, 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.

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 one's life. Satyagrahis had to have extreme inner strength and moral courage in order to do that. Satyagrahis needed 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 was highly advocated. Everyone 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 his Satyagraha. Through this, Gandhi believed that the Indians would be strong enough to tread the paths of a truly non-violent revolution.

“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. 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.

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## 6.8 SATYAGRAHA, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND NON-COOPERATION

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Civil disobedience and non-cooperation as practiced 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'.

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## 6.9 SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENTS IN BRITISH INDIA

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The British Government appointed the Rowlatt Commission to give recommendations regarding administration of justice in India. The Committee recommended restrictions 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. This was received with dismay by every section of Indian public opinion.

Gandhi initially requested the Viceroy to withhold his assent for the 'black bills', but on the latter's failure, he galvanized mass support for this act of defiance; he proclaimed April 6 Satyagraha Day, a day of 'hartal' (suspension of all business), fasting, mass meetings to protest against the hated legislation. The non-cooperation evoked a widespread response. The people were denied 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 a peaceful gathering were fired upon by the British army officer General 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.

The popular movement started becoming violent in different parts of the country. This made Gandhi realize the need for teaching the people the art and techniques of civil disobedience and Satyagraha and launched a massive training programme.

### 6.9.1 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 systematically enquired 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 a subsequent Act was passed protecting the interests of the poor peasants.

### 6.9.2 Kheda/ Kaira Satyagraha

The crops had failed in Kaira district of Gujarat in 1918 but the British officers insisted on full collection of land revenue. Gandhi organized the peasants to take up Satyagraha and encouraged 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, despite all threats of coercion. The government was forced to yield to the pressure and to arrive at a settlement with the peasants.

### 6.9.3 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 them by undertaking 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.

#### **6.9.4 Bardoli Satyagraha**

The Bardoli Satyagraha was led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and this was 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 agitated by a large increase in land revenue announced by the British government. The non-violent movement started after two years of petitioning and protesting. The peasants moved 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. They were threatened by the government that their land would be forfeited. An iron will is said to have prevailed in Bardoli where village headmen and the subordinate officers resigned in large numbers. After a four-month agitation 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 release of arrested Satyagrahis. Following a careful scrutiny of official records and taking stock of the situation, the government annulled the increase which they had tried to enforce at any cost. The leadership abilities of Patel were recognized by one and all and earned him much respect and he was called a true disciple of Gandhi.

#### **6.9.5 Salt Satyagraha**

The British 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 twenty times the price. The enormous taxes imposed on salt, an essential commodity that everybody needs every day, was perceived by one and all as totally unjust, and Gandhi decided 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 the movement against the oppressive salt law would unite the people irrespective of their religion, region or economic status.

Salt Satyagraha was organized in 1930, when Gandhi announced to the nation that he was going to defy the salt laws enacted by the British and thus defy the British government. Gandhi began the Dandi march, 247 miles to the sea, on March 12, 1930. This 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 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.

#### **6.9.6 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 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. 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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## 6.10 SATYAGRAHA IN THE FRENCH AND PORTUGUESE INDIA

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After India achieved independence from British in August, 1947 people of French held India, such as Pondicherry began to agitate for their own independence. This was also true for the people of Goa who were under Portuguese rule. Though, initially Gandhi was against people's agitation in French held territories as he thought they were in favour of violence. Later on, he was upraised of the correct situation and went on to support Satyagraha in these areas. Even after Gandhi's demise in 1948 the leaders and participants of freedom movement in French India imbibed the ideals of Gandhi 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.

Similarly in Goa the people adopted Gandhi's mode of agitation including hartal and non-cooperation. The Portuguese government was brutal in suppressing these movements. Yet, by 1960 they achieved success and with Jawaharlal Nehru's support Goa too became a part of the Indian nation.

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## 6.11 SATYAGRAHA LEGACY OUTSIDE INDIA

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Satyagraha gained wide acceptance around the world as a more potent tool of resistance than armed violence. Satyagraha legacy was carried on long after Gandhi. 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 at the time of the civil rights movement in the United States. While acknowledging Gandhi's influence over his work Martin Luther King acknowledged, "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 non-violent 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 because of Gandhi's emphasis on love and non-violence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking."<sup>36</sup> Later, Nelson Mandela used the Satyagraha technique in South Africa to end apartheid.

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## 6.12 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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At present, the negative effects of globalization have created an unbridgeable gap between rich and poor countries and between people as well. Powerful nations try to garner 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 terrorize to discredit the State in the eyes of its own subjects and State terrorizes 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 or achievement of political goals or due to 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 terrorize and who terrorizes 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 Gandhi's 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 everlasting prosperity could be achieved, if only attention is paid to Gandhi's prescription to the issues of globalization and international terrorism.

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## 6.13 SUMMARY

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To achieve the goal of national independence from colonial rule, Gandhi emphasized '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 revolutionized Indian politics and galvanized millions to act 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 one must dedicate our lives to pursuing truth, to finding out the truth in our lives. 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 lives and live it all the time so that we can improve and become better human beings.

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## 6.14 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) Write in detail about Gandhi's Satyagraha movement in British India.
- 4) Explain in brief the legacy of Satyagraha outside India.
- 5) What is the contemporary relevance of Satyagraha? Explain.

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## 6.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

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