



MAHATMA GANDHI: “THE APOSTLE OF NON-VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Gandhi held the spirit of universal love to be the vital source of non-violence. As love and non-violence are the natural instinct of human being, it is the normal behaviour of all living creatures. Gandhi showed to the world that collective non-violence action of individuals if performed with purity of heart then it will create such an atmosphere in which violent thoughts will evaporate. The author believes that non-violence doesn't mean that it is an instrument of the weak. Gandhi's ideas of peace and non-violence hold the beacon light of hope and optimism. Gandhi was a man who seamlessly blended spiritual with temporal, thus, no wonder his ideas and ideals are becoming increasingly popular all over the world.

The paper mentions 3 main points in Gandhi's non-violence ideas: 1. Sources of Gandhi's non-violence method; 2. Main points of Gandhi's non-violence view and 3. Controversial debates about Gandhi's points of view.

Keywords: Gandhi- Apostle- Non-violence - Controversial debates

Introduction

The pinnacle of perfection and moral growth that people strive for is named differently for each nation. This does not exclude, however, the essential commonality of the scale of moral values of one culture with the value systems of other cultures. The name Mahatma - "Great Soul" - cannot be such only for his compatriots. It must inevitably be recognized within the global community. A convincing example of this is Mahatma Gandhi, rightly recognized as the "bapu" - the father of the Indian nation and at the same time, the "apostle of non-violence" for all our contemporaries.

1. Sources of Gandhi's non-violence method

Gandhi's autobiographical work is called "Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth."¹ Gandhi experimented with different forms of nonviolence. Initially, it was an experience of using non-violent methods in the fight against racism in South

Africa. Organized by Gandhi in 1908–1914, *satyagrahas* (literally "persistence in truth") were nonviolent resistance through campaigns of civil disobedience. They turned out to be so successful that they attracted the attention of the world community. Gandhi was supported by Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland, Leo Tolstoy...

Upon returning home in 1915, Gandhi began to use *satyagrahis* in the struggle for Indian national independence. Thanks to his efforts, in 1920, the party that led the national liberation movement, the Indian National Congress, adopted a resolution prepared by him on "Progressive Non-violent Non-cooperation", in which *satyagraha* was recognized as a national method of combating colonialism. In this regard, it was recommended not to buy foreign goods, not to participate in legislative elections, not to enlist in military service, to boycott English courts, schools, colleges, to refuse honorary titles, to resign from positions in government bodies, etc.

2. Main points of Gandhi's non-violence view

¹ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyện Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Although many criticized Gandhi, seeing in his position a weakness, a tendency to subordinate the interests of the people to the interests of the colonialists, far-sighted politicians assessed satyagraha as a pronounced, albeit non-violent, form of resistance, as a virtually peaceful uprising, a highly civilized method of warfare. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, satyagraha became an effective way to motivate the broad masses to action, a method that corresponded to the peculiarities of the mental makeup of the Indian people.

Liberation from colonial oppression was not Gandhi's ultimate goal. He saw in it only the first step towards building a non-violent civilization.

Back in 1908, while in South Africa, Gandhi outlined his views on civilization in detail on the pages of his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*. The "conversations" of the editor (Gandhi) with the readers (collective) was later published in the repeatedly reprinted pamphlet "*Hind Swaraj*", or "*Indian Home Rule*".

By civilization (meaning "good behavior" in Gandhi's native Gujarati language), he means "that behavior which shows a person the path of duty."² Modern Western civilization does not correspond to this concept, for it is the embodiment of evil. The main symbol of Western civilization is machines, which "represent a great sin."³ Gandhi hates machine production primarily because he sees it as the cause of the destruction of handicrafts and the traditional Indian way of life. "It was the machines that brought India to poverty... Indian crafts disappeared because of Manchester."⁴ Gandhi compares machine production to a "snake hole" in which "hundreds of snake nests": cities destroying villages, slavery of workers, horrific exploitation of female labor, unemployment, sexual promiscuity, disbelief in God, mechanical means of transportation harmful to human health, etc.⁵ e. Violence "permeates Western civilization in all its spheres": economics, politics, human relationships, and international relations. The "grave sin" of this civilization is imperialism.

In the "mechanized" West, Gandhi was also disgusted by the violation of man's organic connections with nature. His worldview is completely in tune with the sentiments of European opponents of technicism, so accurately conveyed by Nikolai Berdyaev: "Technology radically changes a person's relationship to space and time. It is hostile to all organic embodiment. During the technical period of civilization, man ceases to live among animals and plants, he is plunged into a new cold-metallic environment, in which there is no longer animal warmth, no hot blood. The power of technology brings with it a weakening of soulfulness in human life... Technology kills everything organic in life..."⁶

True civilization, according to Gandhi, must be based on the principles of conscious and voluntary self-restraint. In the

economic field, it is based on villages and handicrafts. It is no coincidence that Gandhi chose the spinning wheel as a symbol of the national liberation movement - it was the spinning wheel that he considered a tool of national revival. The spinning wheel could restore handicrafts, free Indians from the dependence of colonial textile imports, provide mass employment to people and thereby rid the country of unemployment.

The Mahatma was a supporter of the decentralization of production, because he considered the conditions conducive to the accumulation of capital to be destructive. The concentration of industry in cities, in his opinion, led the village to ruin. It is necessary to revive the village, the rural community, putting the city at their service. Gandhi considered it advisable to preserve only certain industries (he refrained from specifying which ones). Moreover, he believed that it was necessary to establish "state ownership wherever a large number of people work together. Through the state, they will be the owners of the products of their labor..."⁷ In all other areas, Gandhi (although he did not exclude individual production) gave preference to cooperation: "Every activity, as far as possible, should be carried out on a cooperative basis."⁸

Trying to eliminate such a form of violence as exploitation, Gandhi at the same time was opposed to the forced expropriation of property. He was once asked how he viewed the complete abolition of private property. Gandhi replied: "By destroying the capitalists, the workers will lose the goose that lays the golden eggs."⁹ In the same way, he believed that it would be more reasonable not to abolish landownership, but to improve it, since "a person who represents his mind and money is the same farmer as the one who invests his physical labor."¹⁰

Gandhi did not object to expropriation because he was an "agent" of the exploiting classes, as some believed. He had other reasons for this. *Firstly*, Gandhi took into account the low cultural level of the bulk of working Indians, who, for the most part, being illiterate, simply could not be independent producers. *Secondly*, he was disgusted by any violence, even justified by noble goals. He considered the path of consistent reforms, personal and collective improvement, not only more moral, but also more effective and efficient. The gradual elimination of private property, according to the Mahatma, is possible through guardianship. To his impatient opponents, who considered such a path of transformation too long, Gandhi replied: "The path to the happiness and prosperity of the kisans (peasants) is to make them educated so that they understand the reason for their present situations and its improvement paths. We can show them a non-violent or violent path. The latter may

² M. Gandhi (2021). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, trans. By Le thi Hang Nga, *Tu tri An Do*, Publisher: Social Sciences; ISBN: 978-604-308-402-3, 255 pages, Hanoi, Vietnam; p. 446.

³ M. Gandhi (2021). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, trans. By Le thi Hang Nga, *Tu tri An Do*, Publisher: Social Sciences; ISBN: 978-604-308-402-3, 255 pages, Hanoi, Vietnam; p. 449.

⁴ Bakshi, Rajni (2012). 'Civilizational Gandhi'. *Gateway House*. http://www.mk Gandhi.org/articles/Civilizational_Gandhi.pdf.

⁵ Bakshi, Rajni (2012). 'Civilizational Gandhi'. *Gateway House*. http://www.mk Gandhi.org/articles/Civilizational_Gandhi.pdf.

⁶ Berdyaev, N. The spiritual state of the modern world: a report read in May 1931 at the congress of leaders of the World Christian Federation // *New World*. – 1990. – No. 1, p. 219.

⁷ Gandhi, M. *Alternative to industrialization* in M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, pp. 550–551.

⁸ M. Gandhi (1951), *Rebuilding Our Village* / Ed. B. Kumarappa. – Ahmedabad, p. 5.

⁹ M. Gandhi (1951), *Towards Non Violent Socialism* / Ed. B. Kumarappa. – Ahmedabad, p. 150.

¹⁰ M. Gandhi, *Kisan and Zamindars* / M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.531.

seem tempting, but in the end, it is a disastrous path... Apparently, the longest path often turns out to be the shortest.¹¹

Similarly, in the relations between workers and employers, Gandhi preferred peaceful settlement rather than confrontation. This does not mean that he was generally opposed to strikes. However, he considered it more desirable to resort to legislation and arbitration. Only as a last resort did he consider strikes possible.

The Mahatma more than once led strikes that ended in success. At the same time, he was guided by certain rules: not to start a strike without appropriate preparation and not to use it for purely political purposes. "I do not deny," he wrote, "that strikes can serve political goals. But... it doesn't take much intelligence to understand that it is extremely dangerous to use workers for political purposes until the workers understand the political situations in the country."¹²

The ideal of a nonviolent civilization can only be realized if there is a radical change in the nature of international relations. In this regard, Gandhi dreamed of creating a world government, or at least a world union of free nations, which would put an end to colonial oppression, guarantee the equality of all peoples, preventing aggression and exploitation of some peoples by others, protect national minorities, and pool world resources in the name of common good. The Mahatma insisted on the need to establish a world order that would be free from exploitation and based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and cooperation of peoples. Of course, there is no place for any kind of aggression in this civilization. "I believe," Gandhi wrote, "that all war is necessarily evil."¹³ At the same time, the Mahatma recognized that one should distinguish between aggressors and those who took up arms after being victims of aggression.

The position taken by Gandhi in connection with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is extremely indicative. The Mahatma did not accept the justifiable motives for this action. Japan committed an atrocity in the name of unworthy aspirations. "But great unworthiness does not give the right to the less unworthy (meaning the USA. - M.S.) to mercilessly destroy Japanese men, women and children."¹⁴ Gandhi sees the tragedy of what happened in the fact that the atomic bomb rejected the "laws of war" that had guided people for centuries. And most importantly, it "destroyed the souls" of Japan and the United States, because counter-violence cannot put an end to violence: "Retaliatory hatred only serves to spread and intensify hatred."¹⁵

¹¹ M. Gandhi (2021). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, trans. By Le thi Hang Nga, *Tu tri An Do*, Publisher: Social Sciences; ISBN: 978-604-308-402-3, 255 pages, Hanoi, Vietnam, pp. 531– 532.

¹² M. Gandhi, *Article on Strikes* / in M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.483.

¹³ M.K. Gandhi, (1947), *India of My Dreams*. Navajivan Publishing House. Ahmedabad, p.134.

¹⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Atomic bomb and Hiroshima* / in M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.567.

¹⁵ M.K. Gandhi, *Atomic bomb and Hiroshima* / in M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, pp.567 568.

Gandhi advocated disarmament and called on great powers to set an example and decide to unilaterally abandon militarization.

3. Controversial debates about Gandhi's points of view

Of course, preaching love as a norm of behavior in international relations may seem naive. The Mahatma himself admitted that "it will take a long time for the law of love to gain recognition in international affairs."¹⁶ However, he predicted a slow and steady movement towards people realizing the truth that force does not solve problems.

This, in general terms, is the ideological credo of Gandhism. It is not limited to the tasks of achieving national liberation by India or a radical reorganization of Indian society based on a rethinking of religious traditions. It has global dimensions, because it is ultimately aimed at achieving a world non-violent civilization.

Is the Gandhian scheme of the future a speculative construction of a utopian or an insightful foresight of an albeit distant, but still fundamentally possible world order? Many assess the Gandhian project as "an archaic historical concept for our time," oriented toward the preservation of pre-capitalist communal relations. This kind of judgment is not unfounded. There are enough reasons for them in the Mahatma's statements about machine production, about modern types of transport and energy, about cities, which he saw as nothing more than "appendages of the village," about the monetary system and trade, reduced to intercommunal natural exchange, etc. Essentially, Gandhi acted as the forerunner of a modern social phenomenon that has become especially noticeable in the last decade. We are talking about "fundamentalism" or "revivalism". In third world countries, it now represents not just a broad, but often dominant socio-political trend.

"Renaissance" is a peculiar reaction of rejection of Western-oriented modernization. But not only it is, in fact, a sign of a reform process aimed at identifying internal development impulses that allow traditional societies to reach a modern standard of living. "Everyone who loves India," Gandhi wrote, "should cling to the ancient Indian civilization like a child to its mother's breast."¹⁷ Healthy growth is possible only with strong roots that feed on the life-giving juices of the native soil.

At the same time, Gandhi's "revivalism" is different from the ideological currents of the indicated orientation. It is enough to compare it with the ideology of the Hindu "Jana Sangh" or "Muslim Brotherhood" to understand that the fundamental feature of Gandhism is tolerance, and moreover, respect for other cultures, in a comprehensive spirit of non-violence.

Gandhian revivalism is completely free from nationalistic egoism. The Mahatma considered morally justified only that which does not infringe on the interests of others. He asserted: "When the interests of one's country are not in conflict with the interests of the world, service to the cause of the country leads one to moksha."¹⁸

¹⁶ Young India. – 1919. – 23.06.

¹⁷ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.448.

¹⁸ M. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. – 1927–1928. – Vol. XXXII. – p. 430.

Gandhi's "internationalism" is based on the belief in the existence of human unity. "God is the sum of all souls," "We have one soul,"¹⁹ he liked to repeat.

One of the fundamental features of Gandhian reformism is that, generated by the realities of Indian reality, it is focused on transforming the human community as a whole. Drawing attention to this "universal" character of Gandhism, the first biographer of the Mahatma wrote: "I doubt whether any religious system absolutely restrained it. Gandhi's views are too closely related to Christianity to be completely Indian, and too deeply imbued with Hinduism to be called Christian. His sympathies are so broad and comprehensive that he seems to have reached a point where sectarian formulas are powerless."²⁰ The Mahatma himself, by his appearance, the use of terms, concepts, and symbols of Hinduism, constantly demonstrated an inextricable connection with Indian culture. At the same time, he never tired of insisting on the unity of humanity. "...Social, political, religious activities of a person should be guided by the ultimate goal of searching for God," wrote the Mahatma. – The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with Him. This can only be accomplished through service to all. I am part of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from all humanity."²¹

The Gandhian vision of the future lacks a linear, hierarchical view of progress though it is in tune with the most modern ideas. Two years before his death, the Mahatma wrote: "Life will not be a pyramid with a top resting on a base. But it will be an ocean circle, the center of which is the individual, always ready to die in the name of the interests of the village, the latter will be ready to disappear in the name of the circle of villages. This will continue until finally the whole becomes one life, consisting of individuals, never aggressive in their claims, but ever humble, sharing the power of the oceanic circle of which they are components. That is why the outer sphere of the circle will not strive to destroy the inner circle, but, on the contrary, will give strength to everything inside and draw strength from there for itself."²²

What is this - utopia or providence? Was not adherence to the ideal of non-violence the most tragic mistake of the Mahatma? Doesn't the history of India and his personal dramatic end prove the futility of the method of non-violent achievement he advocates? Let us remember the high price paid for the independence of India - the division of a great country along religious lines, the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The partition was accompanied by violent inter-communal clashes. In response to Gandhi's message of religious tolerance and brotherhood, more and more people heard (from both Hindus and Muslims) the fierce "Gandhi murdabad!" ("Death to Gandhi!") And then the Mahatma declared the sixteenth hunger strike of protest in his life. It lasted from January 12 to 18, 1948. Having received a promise to begin reconciliation, Gandhi stopped fasting. But on January 30, as the Mahatma came out to the people

¹⁹ Cm.: Chatterjee (1983), *M. Gandhi's Religious Thought*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, p. 132

²⁰ Joseph, J. Doke (1967). *M. K. Gandhi – an Indian Patriot in South Africa*. – Delhi, p. 106. ¹⁹ Harijan. – 1936. – 29.08

²¹ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.569.

²² Harijan. – 1946. – 22.07.

who had come to listen to his sermon, a man came out of the crowd and shot him three times at point-blank range.

The bloodless acquisition of independence did not take place. Human bitterness led to interreligious hostility sweeping the country and the death of hundreds of thousands of people. The preacher of non-violence - ahimsa - was killed.

Was Gandhi's asceticism in vain, the ideals he defended meaningless? The answer to this question is important not only for assessing the past. Without him there cannot be a calm conscience of his contemporaries.

Gandhi himself answered the question posed quite clearly. "The only hope for a suffering world," he wrote on July 15, 1947, in anticipation of a tragic end, "is the narrow and straight path of non-violence. Millions, like myself, may fail in the attempt to prove the truth with their own lives, but it will be their personal failure, not the failure of this eternal law."²³

And in fact, is it fair to consider the Gandhian experiment a complete failure? Didn't Mahatma awaken the self-awareness of his compatriots, didn't he instill in them, downtrodden, unarmed, devoid of hope, faith in their own strength, the ability to overcome evil? Didn't he unite everyone without distinction of caste, class or religion in a powerful impulse for liberation? Didn't he disarm many of his opponents with the example of "suffering without vengeance"? Finally, didn't he inspire the anti-racist movement in the USA and Africa to non-violent asceticism, to fight for peace in the East and West, North and South?

To the short-sighted eye, Gandhi appears as a hopeless idealist. But a discerning mind will appreciate him as "a dreamer with his feet firmly on the ground." Being a sober realist, the Mahatma realized the unreality of the complete triumph of the idea of non-violence in the near future. "I know that the progress of nonviolence seems to be a terribly slow process," he wrote in 1939, "but experience has convinced me that it is the surest way to the goal... Violence, even in defense of justice, has already almost outlived its usefulness. With this conviction, I agree to plow my lonely furrow if I am not destined to have like-minded people in the boundless faith in non-violence."²⁴

The Mahatma explained the "bankruptcy" (his own expression) of the policy of nonviolence in India not by the fallacy of the idea itself, but by the fact that the movement carried out in his country for several decades demonstrated, in essence, "passive resistance to which the weak resort."²⁵ Nonviolent resistance, he believed, would become "the most powerful force in the world" when it was

²³ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.569.

²⁴ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.150.

²⁵ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyen Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.570.

embraced out of conviction. Then it will turn into “non-violence of the strong.”²⁶

Gandhi also soberly assessed the prospects for implementing the project of nonviolent civilization. “Perhaps,” he wrote two years before his death, “they will sarcastically remark to me that all this is a utopia and therefore it is not worth even thinking about it. If the Euclidean point (although it is beyond human ability to depict it) has an enduring value, then the picture I painted has value for the future of humanity. Let India live for this, although it cannot be fully realized.”²⁷

A nonviolent civilization truly seems like a utopia. The movement of history is irresistible. Conservation of the past (communal structure, “rural civilization,” patriarchal family, etc.) is impossible and undesirable.

Conclusion

The Gandhian project also has certain positive features. It contains critical pathos that has a sobering and healing effect on those who are looking for the ways to overcome socio-economic lag through blindly copying other people's social models. This criticism can also be fruitful for those who, living in materially prosperous countries, realize the need for improvement, movement towards a better world, not only for the “chosen” nations, but for humanity as a whole.

And finally, the main thing: the Gandhian ideal of the future is a world without violence. Gandhi discovered for himself and revived for others a universal human value - respect for the sacred gift of life. Civilization without violence is a beacon that lights the way so that humanity does not perish in darkness.

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²⁶ M. Gandhi (2018). *Autobiography, or the Story of My Experiments with Truth (Tu truyện Gandhi)*, ISBN 978-604-86-9676-4, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, p.568.

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