

### **I. c) A new/old alternative: basic ideas of Vedanta**

A.

### Gandhi's Spiritual Vocabulary: Some Terms

M. N. Nagler

	<u>'Surface' level</u>	<u>'Deep' level</u>
<i>ahimsā</i>	Abstention from harmful force (non-violence)	Creative force, <i>agape</i> , 'love in action'
<i>swarāj</i>	Political independence	self mastery
<i>swadeshi</i>	Use of cottage industry or Indian goods	Reliance on one's own (inner) resources
<i>aparigraha</i>	Voluntary simplicity	Complete self-reliance, spiritual contentment, no jealousy
<i>Satyāgraha</i>	A campaign of non(-)violent resistance	Complete adherence to Truth in thought, word and deed

B. Gandhi on *yajña*, 'sacrifice' (from *Hindu Dharma*)

— see following page



## INTRODUCTION

Birth was given to a distinctively new concept in early January of 1908.\* The then thirty-eight year old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called this concept "satyagraha" and began to use it in describing the social change approach he would engage in throughout the forty years remaining in his life.

Any attempt to understand satyagraha is complicated by the fact that Gandhi would typically emphasize different aspects of the approach according to different audience settings. The same "satyagraha" which he would variously translate as "truth force", "love force", and "soul force", therefore, was described in different though complementary ways both over time and in adjustment to the perceptions of those encouraged to experiment in its use. While different levels of understanding were encouraged in different audiences, all levels remained quite interrelated and formed a framework for action in Gandhi's own mind which all but a very few of his closest associates have failed to comprehend.

Fortunately, the problem of changes of meanings over time is very minimal after 1909. Prior to that time Gandhi's general framework for action was

\*Special appreciation is due to those who offered valuable advice in my research for and preparation of this monograph Radhakrishna (Secretary, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi), Pyarelal Nayar (former secretary to Gandhi), and Mulford Q. Sibley (Professor of Political Science, University of Minnesota).

subject to radical changes. He describes himself as an "agnostic" upon arriving in South Africa in 1894 and confesses to having been "a believer in violence" prior to being influenced by Tolstoy in 1905.<sup>1</sup> After 1909, however, Gandhi maintains that his views changed very little and most Gandhi scholars agree with him.<sup>2</sup> What few significant changes have been noticed after 1909 can be dealt with quite adequately in footnotes or in brief commentary.

Unfortunately, the task of clarifying—let alone analyzing—Gandhi's approach is a very difficult undertaking in which one must risk misrepresentation in order to render as understandable a real complexity of thought. Gandhi would often confuse his use of terms by referring to the same concept on a variety of levels, in the same presentation. Thus, for example, he might refer to "Truth" as that which is absolute (secular), God (religious), and the Law (mystical). This state of affairs becomes greatly compounded as Gandhi might also seek to develop such important concepts as "love" and "suffering" with similar sloppiness on different descriptive levels, concurrently! The task of understanding his meaning of "satyagraha" with its three major component concepts of "truth", "love", and "suffering" becomes very difficult in such a context.

What I propose to do, therefore, is to analyze the theoretical bases Gandhi uses in his description of satyagraha, thus confining myself to the foundation on which his nonviolent action programs were built during the last half of his life. The approach of Joan Bondurant will be utilized insofar as she emphasizes the importance of the interrelationships between "truth", "love", and "suffering" in under-

standing "satyagraha".<sup>3</sup> An added dimension will be provided by separating three levels of understanding of these interrelationships and, hence, satyagraha.

It seems to me that there are at least three levels on which Gandhian satyagraha may be understood, accepted, or rejected. These three levels correspond to the different kinds of meanings he attributes to the words "truth" (satya), "love" (ahimsa), and "suffering" (tapas or yajna). These three levels can be crudely described according to whether his meanings are primarily secular, religious, or mystical. Most Western writers have related best to Gandhiji's terminology when secularized and thus describe satyagraha primarily as a "technique" or "method".<sup>4</sup> Some Eastern writers comprehend the religious bases for Gandhi's words and emphasize satyagraha as a religious discipline.<sup>5</sup> Few writers, however, have given any analysis of the deepest level to which Gandhi referred: soul force.<sup>6</sup> By analyzing satyagraha on each of these three levels I hope to clarify this concept more thoroughly than has been done before and, in the process, reveal the relevance of this clarification to an understanding of Gandhi's views in general and of coercion in particular.

It might well be argued that Gandhi was a man of action and to not focus upon historical practice is to overemphasize the importance his ideals held for him. This would carry weight if I were to deny the dialectical nature of ideals and practice in Gandhi's approach. However, to emphasize ideals first and then their relationship to practice constitutes no such denial. Such a priority, in fact, would appear to be justified in the context of Gandhi's own description of the relationship of religion to

politics in his approach. He tells us that "My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion", which he did not consider to be contextually bound in any way.'

While it may appear somewhat arbitrary to explore the inward Gandhi before viewing the outward, such an approach would seem necessary to a sympathetic/empathetic analysis of his approach. We must remember, for Gandhi,

There are two aspects, the outward and the inward. It is purely a matter of emphasis with me. The outward has no meaning to me at all except insofar as it helps the inward.<sup>6</sup>

This suggests that a predominantly historical or secularized analysis of Gandhi's approach might fail to reveal the depths of Gandhi's own ideals. To say that we need not "subscribe" to Gandhi's theology "in order to understand and value the central contribution of his technique of nonviolent action" may well miss the point. While "subscription" is not necessary, serious exploration may be. On an outward level, satyagraha may well be understood as a "technique", but if the more inward religious/mystical levels are not granted their due emphasis, so also may be the real "central contribution" Gandhi has left us.

Accordingly, we shall act upon the assumption that, at least in the case of Gandhi, "those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."<sup>7</sup> In so doing we shall give Gandhi the benefit of doubt and not question his claim that he entered politics only insofar

as it developed the religious faculty in himself. Thus, any outward emphasis upon politics and historical/situational context would have to follow (or presupposes) an exploration of what he means by such phrases as "self-realization" and the "ordered moral government of the universe". An analysis of the "religious" and "mystical" may, as the "inner reality" of his approach, help us to even broaden our horizons to include possible insights not really explored in relation to politics before.

To indulge in an analytic separation of the "religious" from the more "mystical"—or even the "religious" from the "secular"—inherently involves a certain arbitrariness in the case of Gandhi. There are no lines of demarcation. In fact, it might be helpful for the reader to recognize from the outset that Gandhi's is a hierarchical perspective or mentality. The "mystical" includes the "religious" which includes the "secular". Each may be seen as building upon the truths as discovered within the lower levels of understanding which are a part of it.

If Gandhi was at all close to the Truth, the ramifications of his understanding of satyagraha may have truly fantastic possibilities. As we are able to understand satyagraha on its highest level of "soul force", the relevance of his nonviolent action approach to social change may be more fully appreciated for its revolutionary potential.

## Five Great Yajnas

---



There can be many ways of interpreting *yajna*. For the Hindu householder, five *yajnas* are considered essential: the oven, the pestle, the quern, the pitcher and the spinning-wheel. The fewer there are of these the less substantial the household. A glance at them, however, will show that the important sacrifices are the first and the last and the middle three are their offshoots. The quern, the pitcher and the pestle presuppose the oven. The oven would not work at its best in the absence of the quern or the pestle in a home, but still it can pull on. But stop the spinning-wheel and you are without a principal organ. You have paralysis. A man who does no *yajna* for his food and clothing has no right to either. There should be a custom that he who does not work at his stove must go without food, and he who does not ply his spinning-wheel must go naked. We have discarded the spinning-wheel without discarding clothes. He is a thief who wears clothes without doing any spinning, in the same way that he who consumes food without working for it is a thief. *Yajna* means an offering, a sacrifice of the self, which is what physical labour is. They who work at the oven and the wheel are engaged in an intelligent sacrifice. Even those who are not engaged in such beneficial physical effort have to take some exercise to digest their food.

It will perhaps be clear now what a sin we have committed in giving up the spinning-wheel. India was a happy country, healthy and bright, when in the past millions of its women used to engage themselves in this light but beneficial labour.