
UNIT 5 RIGHTS AND DUTIES

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

The discourse on rights is linked with the rise of liberal individualism. The language of rights permeates and dominates all walks of modern political, social and economic life. In defining the proper relationship between the individual and the state, the philosophical defence of rights have assumed unparalleled importance in the modern political discourse exemplified in the philosophies of Rawls and Dworkin, the proponents of rights-based liberalism. The other streams including the Communitarianism do not emphasise on rights; yet individual theorists like MacIntyre and Walzer accord importance to individual rights. There is a general belief that rights secure liberty by protecting the individual against the state and other persons, even a majority, gives a person the shield against arbitrariness and tyranny. It safeguards the individual's private sphere ensuring that neither the state nor others can interfere without justification. Embedded in the concept of right is the acceptance of ideas of personal autonomy, individuality, liberty and human equality and, any denial or discrimination would have to have sufficient reasons. The concept is quintessentially anti-statist in nature, also the basis of Gandhi's perceptions and philosophy.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi's concept of rights and duties
- His concepts of individualism and autonomy
- Gandhi's vision of the individual's role in Satyagraha

5.2 GANDHI'S INDIVIDUALISM

Gandhi's suspicion of the modern state apparatus, his denial of the all-powerful state, his description of the state as a soulless machine and the supreme importance that he accords to the individual makes him an individualist par excellence. Iyer considers Gandhi as "one of the most revolutionary of individualists and one of the most individualistic of revolutionaries in world history". Writing in 1924, Gandhi declares that 'the individual is the one supreme consideration' and held on this belief right till the end of his life. He writes:

If the individual ceases to count, what is left of society? Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as a man will not grow horns or a tail, so will he not exist as a man if he has no mind of his own. In reality even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual believe in their own.

Gandhi also does not lose sight of the fact that the individual is essentially a social being and in this sense his individualism is like that of T.H. Green. He is critical of unbridled individualism and considers it as unsuitable for social progress.

Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society, enriches both the individual and the society of which he is a member.

Gandhi views society as an aggregate of individuals and that a society is incomplete if it does not cater to individual's self-development. The individual, for him, is not only a social person but also a moral one. Individual initiative enhances human dignity and also provides for a mechanism for resolving conflicts in a non-violent manner. He underlines the importance of common good without denying the pivotal role for the individual. He considers the individual as the bearer of moral authority vested with the moral law and duty (*dharma*) to judge the state and its laws, by the standards of truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*). His faith in the individual as the basis of a modern society is strengthened by his notion of relative truth.

Gandhi considers truth and God as inter-dependent and acknowledges the need to go beyond 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God'. "In 'God is Truth', *is*, certainly does not mean 'equal to' nor does it mean, 'is truthful'. Truth is not an attribute of God, but *He is That*. *He is nothing if He is not That*. Truth in Sanskrit means *Is*. Therefore Truth is implied in *Is*. God is nothing else is. Therefore the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. We are only to the extent that we are truthful" (Gandhi, 1949, p.29). In view of the concept of relative truth and recognising the need for establishing some standard and that is human needs, Gandhi recommends non-violence (*ahimsa*) as truth differs from person to person and describes *satyagraha* as 'soul force'.

5.3 CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

Gandhi's individualism is embedded in his notion of autonomy and is derived from his extensive view of power which he locates in the state, economy and society and in each individual. Within this framework he insists that everyone can and should take charge of his life. Accepting human dignity and worth as intrinsic goods, he is severe in his indictment of

colonialism and untouchability and interestingly, sees the seeds of degeneration that undermines and suppresses human dignity within Indian traditions. He emphasises that India got subjugated because of its moribund and repressive practices and stresses on the need for reforming the Indian society and in particular, Hinduism, by highlighting some of its inequities and discriminatory practices towards women, the lower castes and the untouchables. According to Gandhi, individuals make and remake their lives through their choices and action. The highest duty for Gandhi is to act morally, regardless of the consequences. The moral way to proceed is through non-violence. Since each person knows best about his moral project and the means to realise it in action, each one ought to be free from both domination and violence.

Gandhi's autonomous person is also a social person, never apart from the community to which he belongs and therefore he expects everyone to be concerned not only about their self-governance but also the autonomy of others. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of 'swaraj' or self-rule, a vision of India ruled by Indians with concern for the poorest, the destitute and the most vulnerable. Self-rule not only means end of British colonialism but also an end of other forms of domination such as untouchability and modernisation. 'Swaraj', for Gandhi, is when Indians learn to rule themselves, individually and collectively. It means self-control and self-rule. Like Green, Gandhi seeks to "make life morally meaningful for all people and both viewed the community as held together not by compulsion but by the sense of a common interest or good". The individual has a soul while the state is a soulless machine "which can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its existence". The individual has the moral authority as he consistently pursues *satya* and *ahimsa* and hence his description of the individual as possessing a soul while the state is soulless. He accepts the state if it uses minimum of violence but the fear is always that the state may use too much violence against those who differ from it. His concern with the consequences of excessive centralisation of power makes him concede only a minimal role to the state. Decentralisation of power ensures greater chance for the collective pursuit of *satya* and *ahimsa*. He admits that state ownership is preferable to private ownership involving the exploitation of the masses, but in general he considers the violence of private ownership as less injurious than the violence of the state. In an enlightened anarchy 'everyone is his own ruler'. In an ideal state, there is no political power because there is no state. As this ideal is not realisable, he prefers a minimal state, like Thoreau, namely that government is best which governs the least. Gandhi limits the ambit of the state and focuses on the civil society and the role of the individual within it.

"I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress."

5.4 INDIVIDUAL AND SATYAGRAHA

According to Gandhi, as all states violate *satya* and *ahimsa*, "every citizen renders himself responsible for every act of his government. And loyalty to a capricious and corrupt state is a sin, disloyalty a virtue. Civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the state becomes lawless or, which is the same thing, corrupt, and a citizen who barter with such a state shares its corruption and lawlessness". Satyagraha is the moral right of every individual, a 'birthright that cannot be surrendered without losing self respect'. Gandhi describes *satyagrahi* as 'real constitutionalist' on the grounds that disobedience to evil laws is a moral duty and in disobeying and accepting punishment, he obeys a higher law. The

existence of injustice justifies political resistance and political protest is basically moral. "To put down civil disobedience is to imprison conscience. Civil disobedience can only lead to strength and purity". The state, for Gandhi, has no right to dehumanise or suppress the individual. "It is the inherent right of a subject to refuse or assist a government that will not listen to him". The individual citizen has the responsibility to uphold *satya* and practise *ahimsa* which cannot be relinquished or abdicated. Gandhi also accepts that a majority could be wrong and stresses on the fact that an individual, at all times, must have the power to veto over state action. A citizen, as stated by Antigone¹, must have the right to judge the state on the basis of higher law and like Socrates² must willingly accept the consequences of challenging the laws of the state. This is all the more necessary, according to Gandhi, as modern day states, including representative democracies augment greater power and violence and ignore truth. Like Locke and Jefferson, he believes that loyalty to a constitution and its laws need to be reviewed and affirmed once in every generation. He accepts the Lockean principle that political authority has to be judged and questioned, and, if necessary disobeyed.

Satyagraha demonstrates an intricate relationship between means and ends through a philosophy of action. In its approach to conflict, Gandhi does not seek a compromise but a synthesis, as a *satyagrahi* never yields his position which he regards as truth but he is prepared to accept the opponent's position, if it is true. By sacrificing one's position he does not make any concessions to the opponent but only to a mutually agreeable adjustment. Both parties are satisfied without either feeling triumphant or defeated as both do not compromise in course of the resolution of the conflict.

Satyagraha, for Gandhi, is based on a profound respect for law and is resorted to non-violently and publicly. The *Satyagrahi* willingly accepts full penalties, including the rigours of jail discipline as resistance is respectful and restrained, undertaken by law-abiding citizens. Gandhi insists that 'disobedience without civility, discipline, discrimination and non violence is certain destruction'. A *satyagrahi* accepts personal responsibility publicly. He must inform the concerned government official(s) about the time and place of the act, the reason(s) for protest and if possible, the law that would be disobeyed.

A *satyagrahi* cooperates not out of fear of punishment but because cooperation is essential for the common good. *Satyagraha* is resistance without any acrimony or hatred or injury to the opponent. A *satyagrahi* also suffers the consequences of resistance. As a person he owes it to himself to suffer, if necessary for his conscience and as a citizen, it is his duty to suffer the consequences of his conscientious disobedience to the laws of the state. A *satyagrahi* invites suffering upon himself and does not seek mercy. The following rules have to be followed in *satyagraha*: (1) self-reliance at all times; (2) Initiative in the hands of the *satyagrahis*; (3) Propagation of the objective, strategy and tactics of the campaign, (4) Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with Truth, (5) Progressive advancement of the movement through steps and stages- direct action only when all other efforts to achieve an honourable settlement have been exhausted, (6) Examination of weakness within the *satyagraha* group- no sign of impatience, discouragement or breakdown of non-violent attitude, (7) Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honourable terms by winning over the opponent by helping him. There must be sincerity to achieve an agreement with rather than triumph over the adversary (8) Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation and there must be no compromise on basic principles and (9) Insistence on full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement.

Gandhi suggests on the need to follow these steps in a *satyagraha*: (1) Negotiation and arbitration, (2) preparation of the group for direct action- exercise in self-discipline, (3)

agitation – demonstration such as mass meetings, parades, slogan-shouting, (4) issuing of an ultimatum, (5) economic boycott and forms of strike- picketing, *dharna*, non-violent labour strike and general strike (6) non-cooperation, (7) civil disobedience, (8) usurping of the functions of government and should step 8 fail then resort to the last one, namely establishment of a parallel government by securing greatest possible cooperation from the public.

In 1930, Gandhi laid down a code of discipline that *satyagrahis* would have to adhere to: (1) harbour no anger but suffer the anger of the opponent, refuse to return the assaults of the opponent; (2) do not submit to any order given in anger, even though severe punishment is threatened for disobeying; (3) refrain from insults; (4) protect opponents from insult or attack, even at the risk of life; (5) do not resist arrest nor the attachment of property, unless holding property as a trustee; (6) refuse to surrender any property held in trust at the risk of life; (7) if taken prisoner, behave in any exemplary manner; (8) as a member of a *satyagraha* unit, obey the order of satyagraha leaders and resign from the unit in the event of serious disagreement and (9) do not expect guarantees for maintenance of the dependants.

For Gandhi *satyagraha* incorporates civil disobedience though it went beyond the pressure tactics associated with strikes and demonstrations to include moral, social and political reform (Dalton, 1982, p.148). *Satyagraha*, unlike civil disobedience, is resistance without acrimony or hatred or injury to the opponent. '*Satyagraha*', for him, is both a 'mode of action and a method of enquiry' (Bondurant, 1958, v). *Satya* is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat*, 'being', and means both truth and essence. For Gandhi, it means the continuous search of truth and also a means of resolving conflict by which a person comes to know himself and the process of his evolution. The idea of openness is embodied in *satyagraha*. Actions based on pre-conceived notions and marked by violence are characterised as *duragraha* and is similar to the forms of passive resistance.

Passive resistance may be offered side by side with the use of arms. *Satyagraha* and brute force, being each a negation of the other, can never go together. In passive resistance there is always present an idea of harassing the other party and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships entailed upon us by such activity; while in *Satyagraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyagraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person (Gandhi, 1928, p.179).

Satyagraha is coined during the movement of Indian resistance in South Africa to the 'Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance' introduced into the Transvaal Legislative Council in 1906. At first, Gandhi called the movement passive resistance but realised that a new principle had crystallised as the movement unfolded. He then announced through the pages of his new newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, a prize for the best name to describe the movement. One competitor suggested '*sadagraha*' meaning firmness in a good cause. Subsequently it was changed to *satyagraha*, "a force which is born of Truth and Love or non violence" and gave up the phrase 'passive resistance'³. Iyer interprets it as following:

"Gandhi's analysis of civil disobedience conflated two separate notions –the natural right, the universal obligation of every human being to act according to his conscience in opposition, if necessary, to any external authority or restraint, and secondly, the duty of the citizen to qualify himself by obedience to the laws of the state to exercise on rare occasions his obligation to violate an unjust law or challenge an unjust system, and to accept willingly the consequences of his disobedience as determined by the legal sanctions of the state".

Gandhi's perceptions were determined by the British colonial traditions and the faith he had in the "British love of justice and fair play", mainly because of the British constitutional

practice of equality before law, not only of the British citizens, but for all. He idolised the British constitution because it guarantees both individual freedom and racial equality. Until the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he was a loyalist of the Empire and was convinced that helping the Empire would qualify for *swarajya*, i.e. self-rule. His understanding of the British history and character led him to the use of the technique of *Satyagraha*. He opined that grievances could be redressed only if people demonstrate their willingness to suffer to get relief and cited the example of the British Suffragists for Indians in South Africa to emulate.

5.5 SATYAGRAHA AND SWARAJ

Satyagraha is inextricably linked with his notion of *swaraj* or self-rule or self-restraint. *Swaraj* would be attained through the method of *satyagraha* in which the individual through voluntary self-sacrifice and suffering achieves self-control, in other words self-discipline. For Gandhi, *swaraj* is attained when there is social unity in three major areas of the Indian society: among the untouchables and the various castes, between the Hindus and Muslims and narrowing the gap between the city and villages, the former urban, westernised and educated and the latter rural and illiterate. To be of service for the betterment of the ordinary people, an idea that Gandhi derived from Vivekananda, Tolstoy, 'Sermon on the Mount' and numerous texts and saints of the Indian tradition, is the quintessence of *swaraj*. *Swaraj* means "all around awakening-social, educational, moral, economic and political" (*Young India*, 26-8-1926, II, p.1231). Merely replacing British rulers with their Indian counterparts is Englishstan and not Hindustan, an "English rule without the Englishman, the tiger's nature, but not the tiger" (1997, ch. IV).

By *Swaraj* I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the services of the state and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters.... Real *Swaraj* will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, *swaraj* is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority (Gandhi, 1947, p.14).

Gandhi makes welfare of the masses, with fulfilment of their basic needs as basis of economic freedom, thus reflecting the inspiration that he derives from Ruskin. The India of My Dreams, as Gandhi envisioned, is the *swaraj* of the poor person. A truly non-violent state would be composed of self-governing and self-sufficient small cohesive village communities in which the majority would rule with due consideration to the rights of the minorities. It would be a participatory democracy whereby citizens have the positive freedom to "participate in the process of politics in every possible way, restricting its activities to the bare minimum,... it did not mean that the state was all-powerful, rather an intimate relationship should exist between the state and all its citizens". *Satyagraha* is the glue that cements on one hand his ideal of enlightened anarchy and common good and on the other hand his ideals of individual autonomy and moral self-determinism. Like Thoreau, Gandhi stresses on the supremacy of the individual conscience against all claims of the state.

5.6 RIGHTS AND DUTIES

The crux of *Satyagraha*, for Gandhi, is in deciphering what one's duty is. Gandhi speaks of rights in the context of duties and that is his distinctiveness; he considers 'real rights as a result of performance of duty' meaning, that all rights to be deserved and preserved as

rights is derived from duties which are performed well. Rights cannot be divorced from duties and that rights have to be exercised in the interests of all. The concept of duty, for Gandhi, is derived from the idea of dispassionate action which the *Bhagavad Gita* advocates. Unless one's action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. He contends "if we are sure of the 'purity' of the means we employ, we shall be led on by the faith, before which any fear and trembling melt away". Non-attachment does not mean lack of clarity about the ends one desires to achieve. For Gandhi, the important thing is to get the people to do what they ought to do without offering inducements or threats or theological sanctions.

Interestingly, Gandhi accepts the core idea of right-based individualism, the dominant paradigm in contemporary political theory, namely human equality and moral worth of every person but rights are coalesced with the idea of duties, assigning individuals with responsibilities to lead a moral life and devote to the good of their community. He also supports the basic rights of those at the margins of society, namely women, untouchables and the vulnerable, who have been objects of domination and humiliation. According to him, Freedom is not being left alone but the freedom to cultivate love and service which he describes as the best feature of human nature. He champions equal rights for women and the right of everyone to make the choices they desire. He rejects ascriptive properties such as gender, class, birth, caste, education or nationality that can justify unequal treatment and disqualify some as moral agents.

For Gandhi any discourse of rights would have to focus on how persons are treated. He pays attention to the role of institutions or the way resources affect choices available for individuals, an aspect which most theorists on autonomy, with the exception of Raz, ignore. Another difference between Gandhi and conventional theories of autonomy is that for Gandhi, individuals are equal members of a harmonious and interdependent cosmos rather than abstracted selves. It is only through an association with others based on mutual respect and cooperation that persons become complete or achieve good. The community ought to be one that is open and tolerant of diverse conceptions of good and that its institutional practices do not hinder the pursuit of their good by ordinary persons. Gandhi considers duties as primary and considers the duty to act morally regardless of the consequences as the highest.

5.7 RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Gandhi speaks of equal rights for women. He wanted women and men to be complimentary to one another and insists that women and men differ but their differences cannot be the basis of women's subjugation and oppression. He wanted marriage to be one of partnership between two equals. He censured women if they imitated men and appealed to women to get out of their habits of pleasing men. Writing in 1927, in an address to women in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, Gandhi remarks:

What is it that makes a woman deck herself more than a man? I am told by feminine friends that she does so for pleasing man. Well, I tell you, if you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourself for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against the pretensions on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything.

Gandhi sees the primary tasks of a woman in being a mother and a householder. Additionally a woman, according to Gandhi, is the repository of spiritual and moral values and a teacher

to man. A woman is the embodiment of suffering and sacrifice and it is for this reason that he considers her to be the best messenger of peace and non-violence. A woman is inherently more peaceful than a man. On these grounds he recommends separate education for women and men as women would make better soldiers than men in non-violent struggles. He credits his wife Kasturba and the black women in South Africa for helping him to evolve the technique of *satyagraha*. He considers the nature of women as being conducive to non-violent *satyagraha* based on *dharma*.

...woman is the incarnation of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she is the infant and feeds it during the nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved.... Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in *satyagraha* which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

Gandhi's credit lay in the fact that under his stewardship women participated in large numbers in the nationalist struggle. Initially, in the 1920s he confined them to their homes and made them take up the spinning-wheel. Subsequently he allowed them picket liquor shops as he knew majority of women suffered at the hands of drunkard husbands. At the peak of the civil disobedience movement in the 1930s, he allowed them to join the salt *satyagraha*. Women played an important role in many of the humanitarian works that Gandhi undertook such as helping the poor, nursing, promoting *khadi*, spinning and weaving.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The distinctiveness about Gandhi's formulation is not only the acceptance of rights as central to individual well-being but also stressing on the performance of duties. He considers the two as inter-twined and that the realisation of one without the other is not possible as both pave the way for the fulfilment of common good. The underlying assumption of Gandhi to which he remains steadfast is the idea that the individual is a social person and that the essence of individuality is social self. The emphasis on duties emanates from his quest for building a humane society and conflict(s) would be resolved non-violently through adherence to truth or *satyagraha*. Duty, for Gandhi, is disinterested action which is performed without much attention to the result and one which morally conforms to the order of the Universe. Rights and duties lead to common good which is the basis of *swaraj*- self-rule, self-restraint, self-discipline and voluntary self-sacrifice and this in turn is based in the notion of individual autonomy and moral self-determinism. Gandhi, as a philosophical anarchist, stresses on individual claims against that of the state, with the aim that the individual armed with *dharma* or the moral law is the best to judge authority, take corrective steps if necessary through acts of *satyagraha*, and bring about common good with which his good is inextricably linked.

5.9 SUMMARY

Gandhi is unique in theorising about rights within the framework of duties. Rights cannot be divorced from duties and that rights have to be exercised in the interests of all. The concept of duty is derived from the idea of dispassionate action which the *Bhagavad Gita*

advocates. Unless one's action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. Interestingly, Gandhi accepts the core idea of right-based individualism, the dominant paradigm in contemporary political theory, namely human equality and moral worth of every person but rights are coalesced with the idea of duties, assigning individuals with responsibilities to lead a moral life and devote to the good of their community. Accepting human dignity and worth as intrinsic goods, he is severe in his indictment of colonialism and untouchability and interestingly, sees the seeds of degeneration that undermines and suppresses human dignity within Indian traditions. Gandhi expects everyone to be concerned not only about their self-governance but also the autonomy of others. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of '*swaraj*' or self-rule, a vision of India ruled by Indians with concern for the poorest, the destitute and the most vulnerable.

5.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain Gandhi's concept of individual autonomy.
2. What is the role of the Individual in *Satyagraha*?
3. What is the link between *Satyagraha* and *Swaraj*?
4. Explain Gandhi's views on rights and duties.

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(Endnotes)

Antigone is torn between two loyalties, that of her religion which commands her to bury the body of her brother while that of the state commands that his body be left unburied and unmourned, to be eaten by dogs and vultures. She obeys her conscience on the grounds that no ruler, however powerful, has the right to demand acts contrary to divinely ordained norms.

² A general reading of the *Crito*, a dialogue about the trial and death of Socrates, reveals that civil disobedience requires fulfillment of certain conditions. Its underlying assumption being the imperative obedience to the city, if one is reasonably satisfied with its laws. For Socrates, the entitlement of the state to obedience is because it confers benefits. Anticipating Locke, he argues that Athenian citizens ought to obey the laws of their city since they have freely consented to do so and obedience to the state is for three reasons: gratitude, consent and morality. He does not acknowledge any limits to an individual's duty. He does not consider the fact that person(s) accept benefits with certain assumptions and in the hope of certain reasonable expectations. If these are not fulfilled then obedience to the state is no longer tenable, though breaking or defying the law may undermine and eventually destroy the state, a proposition that is valid if the state is just. In case there are unjust laws, it is better to rectify it and make the state stronger and just. Socrates and Crito never discuss the justification of disobedience but rather the reasons for citizens' obedience to a city. Their answer is that if anybody remains in the city willingly, that demonstrates his readiness to comply with its laws. Disobedience is only permissible if vocalized by a superior authority, in that case, the latter's command overrides that of the city.

³ Passive resistance is used first by Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) and became a part of the lexicon of his compatriots - Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Aurobindo Ghosh - within the extremist movement.

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UNIT 6 MEANS AND ENDS

Structure

6.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

6.2 Conflict and its Resolution

6.3 Purity of Means and Ends

6.4 *Ahimsa* as the Means to Realise *Swaraj*

6.5 Conclusion

6.6 Summary

6.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of Gandhi's discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since, in the process of resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. This leads to the exposition of the emergence of a compassionate individual which tries to bridge the gulf between two important factors: compassion and non-violence. This synthesis eliminates any need for revolutionary violence and creates a situation of continuous co-relationship between means and ends. Bringing the question of morality and ethics as the core to understand the importance of this crucial relationship between a particular activity, to lead to a particular redress ultimately has a larger ramification in the context of the universal ethical content of any such local act. This also means that the moral force by itself will make it totally redundant the issue of a conflict between ends and means as the unfoldment of the non-violent mass struggle will itself lead to the logical culmination of reaching a larger ethical point. Gandhi's experiments with truth in itself is an indication of this kind of an activity which is conducive to the larger framework of an ethical code. This also leads to another interesting innovation in Gandhi with his doctrine of relative truth and suspicion of any kind of determinism. For him non-violence is a method and not merely a rule book or prescription. This was a deliberate act on the part of Gandhi because when he was requested to prepare a manual of non-violence being a guide to action he refused as he laid emphasis on the primacy of the method being a technique in its rudimentary and tentative sense and could not be reduced to a doctrine or a set of rules. It is because of the initiation of a major change in the mechanism of resolution of conflict from wars to non-violent resolutions he was categorical that the ethical content can never be diluted.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- Understand the meaning of the concept of ends and means.
- Discuss how Ahimsa can be a tool towards Swaraj.
- Examine Gandhi's views on the importance of ends and means.

6.2 CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION

The concept of ends-means relationship is the core of Gandhi's social philosophy and conflict resolution. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked that ends justifies the means and that "an end which requires unjust means is not a just end". In the *Hind Swaraj* (1909) the Editor tells the Reader, who argues in favour of the forcible overthrow of the British rule in India: "Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom.... The means may be likened to a seed, the end of a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan....We reap exactly as we sow". Impure means would result in impure end. Justice could not be secured through unjust means; freedom could not be obtained through unfair means and peace could not be realised by war. Gandhi also stresses on the close link between the notions of right and duty; to insist on one and forget the other is a redundant argument.

Gandhi rejects the idea that ends justify the means, a notion which Kautilya and Machiavelli endorsed in the context of self-preservation and of the *raison d'état*. To restrict the choice of means on grounds of expediency rather than principle would be unacceptable to Gandhi. Any means is fine for the attainment of power, which in turn is employed for higher ends, is an argument which Machiavelli espouses but what Machiavelli forgets is that attainment and maintenance of power becomes an end in itself.

Marxism too is not rigid on the notion of ends and means as it rejects supra-historic morality and categorical imperatives, both religious and secular. Engels and Lenin justify the use of any means to realise the desired end. In his pamphlet *Socialism and War*, Lenin points out that the Marxists differ from the pacifists and anarchists in their belief that the justification of each war must be seen individually in relation to its historical role and its consequences¹. Means could be justified with reference to the historical end it serves. Trotsky, unlike Engels and Lenin, emphasises on the dialectical interdependence of means and ends and underlines that the means chosen are those that are likely to lead to human liberation². For Trotsky, ends do not justify the means but that means could be justified only by its end, which for him, is the increase of the power of man over nature and the end of the power of one over the other. For Gandhi, the end is *satya* or truth which requires no justification and the means- *ahimsa* or non-violence must be justified not only with reference to the end but also in itself. Every act must be justified with reference to *satya* and *ahimsa*.

6.3 PURITY OF ENDS AND MEANS

Iyer notes that Gandhi not only completely rejects the dichotomy which is established between ends and means but also insists on the use of right and/or moral means to the extent that they, rather than the ends provide the standard of reference. The relationship between means and ends is not a technical one but an ethical one, one that involves choice which requires an initial decision about the desired end and the obligatory acceptance of whatever steps are necessary to secure it or most likely to do so. He constantly emphasises that evil means could never lead to good ends. Noble and good ends could never be attained by evil and/or immoral means. Guided by his belief in the law of *Karma* he underlines the organic interdependence between means and ends. He also stresses on the fact that individuals have control over the means but not over the end.

Gandhi's conception of ends and means ought to be also understood in the context of his insistence that all of us are bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know absolute truth or *sat*. As bearers of relative truth we know our version and that *satya* or truth would appear differently to different people, in the same manner as the five blind persons who held to different parts of an elephant; each knew his version but far removed from the totality of reality. If there are disagreements about ends it is because human beings are creatures of relative truth. The concept of relative truth and the factual have a common concern for truth that led Gandhi to insist on *ahimsa* or non-violence towards one another. A seeker of truth or *satya* is a practitioner of non-violence or *ahimsa*. Iyer also observes that Gandhi's "concept of *satya*, with *ahimsa* as the means, determined his doctrine of *satyagraha* or active resistance to authority, while the concept of *ahimsa*, with *satya* as the common end, enabled him to formulate his doctrine of *sarvodaya* or non violent socialism". Iyer's further explanation deserves to be quoted as follows: Writing an introduction to Ruskin's *Unto This Last* Gandhi states that "the *polis* is nothing more or less than the domain in which all men are free to gain skill in the art of action and learn how to exemplify *satya* and *ahimsa*; the means in which both the individual quest could be furthered and social virtues displayed among the masses of citizens in a climate of tolerance and civility; a morally progressive society in which neither the State nor any social organisation is allowed to flout with impunity the sacred principle that every man is entitled to his relative truth and no one can claim the right to coerce another, to treat him as a means to his own end" (cited in Iyer, Ibid, p.371).

Gandhi's view on the close link between means and ends is also influenced by the idea of dispassionate action which the *Bhagavad Gita* advocates. Unless one's action is performed with a degree of detachment one would not be free from the anxiety of its future consequences. He contends "if we are sure of the 'purity' of the means we employ, we shall be led on by the faith, before which any fear and trembling melt away". Non-attachment does not mean lack of clarity about the ends one desires to achieve.

6.4 AHIMSA AS THE MEANS TO REALISE SWARAJ

Gandhi places the end of *swaraj* and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means. He insists on the need to focus on the selection of means keeping in view only a broad image and a sense of direction regarding the end, the attainment of *swaraj*. Like Aldous Huxley, Gandhi believes that a corrupt means does not fail to corrupt the end. Like Tolstoy, Gandhi observes that once violence is injected into non-violence, the latter would become superfluous and cease to be a guide for life.

Regarding the means of non-violence, Gandhi says 'if we seek it first everything else shall be added unto us'. Both are convinced that with non-violence it is possible to overwhelm all governments resting on violence, all wars and all coercive institutions, as non-violence works as a dynamic force. Gene Sharp identifies 125 methods of non-violent action and classifies them into three categories: non-violent protest, non-cooperation and non-violent intervention. "Non violent resistance and direct action", according to Sharp, "refers to those methods of resistance and direct action without physical violence in which members of the non violent group perform either: (1) *acts of omission* that is, they refuse to perform acts which they usually perform, and are expected by custom, or are required by law or regulation to perform; or (2) *acts of commission*- that is, they insist on performing acts which they usually do not perform, or not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing, or (3) both". These methods are extra-constitutional as they do not rely upon established procedures of the state for achieving their objectives.

Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal Principle "applicable to every situation in life without any exception'. The practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. Non-violence consists in allowing others the 'maximum of convenience at the maximum of inconvenience' to the self and therefore a *satyagrahi* must be ready to embrace self-suffering and self-effacement. Gandhi pleads for voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as that would free the soul from the bondage of the material body. He insists that real endurance comes from physical discipline and suffering. He stresses on voluntary poverty and set a personal example as he endeavoured to identify himself with the most vulnerable, marginalised and the poorest. He considers it as necessary for fostering the welfare of the soul and the happiness of the mass of people. He regards voluntary poverty as a moral and patriotic duty. Voluntary simplicity is needed to minimise the greed that exists among human beings and sees greed as the 'root of most of the major political problems. Voluntary suffering would purify the soul and intellect. There are no limits to non-violence'.

Like Newman, Gandhi insists that one step is enough for him. He insists that if rightful means are used, the attainment of the end is assured and he considers non-violence as opposed to violence as the rightful means to winning India's freedom. He prefers non-violence to violence and violence to non-violent act born of cowardice which he regards as negative violence. Mere absence of force is not non-violence. He regarded violence as the outcome of weakness, moral impotence and intolerance to views and opinions of others. He considers non-violence as a value and that society must actively seek elimination of conflict. Peace is possible only with non-violence. This implies that non-violence has no instrumental value as it has a positive content, namely a non-acquisitive, non-exploitative and an egalitarian society. For Gandhi, non-violence represents heightened compassion. It is the bridge between means and ends; as a means it prepares the way for the realisation of non-violence as a comprehensive end that ends all conflict.

Gandhi is concerned with the ethical purity of means. He contrasts between his conception of non-violent resistance and pacifism. Merely not offering to perform military service is not enough. It is superficial and different from non-cooperation with the system which supports the state. This proves that Gandhi is not interested in symbolic protest or an action which is purely transitory without resolving the basic question of the basis of the state which is intrinsically linked with coercive powers. Gandhi, as a philosophical anarchist, is sceptical of the very existence of the state as a repressive apparatus. He is looking not merely at the philosophy of resistance of a localised and sporadic nature but rather he wants a more lasting framework to emerge on building a non-violent model of resistance and social

change. A state can be effectively demilitarised by non-payment of taxes than pacifist courting of imprisonment. The latter would be effective if it is done on a mass basis. He considers non-violence as the most active force, as the 'supreme law', 'omnipotent', 'infinite and synonymous with God'. Non-violence as means affects and elevates the end. He rejects passive resistance as a policy as it hides weakness and potential violence is not the right means to achieve the desired end. He opposes supine helplessness involved in non-resistance to evil.

This position is of fundamental nature in understanding Gandhi's conception as being committed to a large majoritarian perception of social change he knew that its success is linked to the adherence of its principles by the active participants who, by their acts of sacrifice, courage and determination, would become the role models to motivate others to join the emancipatory collectivist stand. He knew the task itself was a stupendous one and reflected on it in 1922 when violence erupted during a mass civil disobedience which he was spearheading at that time. Even the towering presence of the Mahatma proved insufficient to control the violent elements. He was well aware of the fact that the cyclical order of violence leading to more violence had to be contained and was categorical in his assertion that "civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience with force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is an attempt to imprison conscience". This motivated Gandhi to move away from his large-scale mobilisation of people terming it as a 'Himalayan blunder' and advised that in a situation like this, "aggressive civil disobedience should be confined to the vindication of the right of free speech and right of free association".

For Gandhi, the important thing is to get the people to do what they ought to do without offering inducements or threats or theological sanctions. Human beings acquire moral precepts only by acting on it or reflecting on it through their actions. "A person often becomes what he believes himself to be. A man who broods on evil is as bad as a man who does evil if he is not worse.... He who is not prepared to order his life in unquestioning obedience to the laws of morality cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the word". At the same time Gandhi also believes in the indomitable nature of the human spirit and that no person could be made to do something against one's will. For a person to become irresistible and for his actions to have all-pervasive influence it is important that a person reduces himself to a zero.

Writing in 1947, Gandhi says: "passive resistance as a policy is the second best alternative. At least it minimises loss of life, disruption and demoralisation when it is an unequal battle. At least it limits the chain reaction of violence and preserves the humane character of society as a concept and as an assumption". He is categorical that non-violence can succeed only when (a) the participants practice non-violence strictly; otherwise the combination of violence and non-violence, even tactically speaking fails, because the entire weight of repression comes down on everyone, in the name of averting anarchy; (b) repression and suffering alienate an increasing number of people who join the group of non-violent resisters; (c) the methods of non-violent action are chosen in such a way that the economic or civil disruption caused by it do not alienate large numbers of people from non-violent action.

Alinsky³ points that the Mahatma's "use of passive resistance in India presents a striking example of the selection of means". As an activist the most important consideration for Gandhi is the means that are available. Asserting that "if he (Gandhi) had the guns he might well have used them" he quotes from Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* to prove his point. Giving the example from Punjab, Gandhi writes "as I proceeded further

and further with my enquiry into the atrocities that had been committed on the people, I came across tales of government tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers such as I was hardly prepared for, and they filled me with deep pain. What surprised me then, and what still continues to fill me with surprise was the fact that the province that had furnished the largest number of soldiers to the British government during the war, should have taken all the brutal excesses lying down". The other example is Gandhi's severe indictment of the British to what he considered "the four fold disaster of our country". This included compulsory disarmament which "spiritually... has made us unmanly and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, had made us think we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression or even defend our homes and families".

Gandhi was merely making an assessment of the Indian situation and in this there was a great deal of affinity between his views with the other nationalist leaders. The many reasons that were given included general weakness, non-availability of arms and general submissiveness which Gandhi mentions in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Nehru describes the Hindus of that period as "a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass bullied and crushed by every dominant interest and incapable of resistance". Gandhi himself charged the British for making the Indians unmanly. As such, Alinsky argues that "if Gandhi had the guns form violent resistance and the people to use them this means would not have been unreservedly rejected as the world would like to think".

To reinforce his argument, Alinsky quotes Nehru after India's independence. When Nehru had to use military power in Kashmir against Pakistan, he had lot of worries about the possible opposition from the Mahatma but he did not and Nehru wrote that "it strengthened my view, that Gandhi could be adaptable". In fact Gandhi himself acknowledged that majority of his followers accepted his leadership and principles more out of convenience rather than conviction. However, all great leaders invoke higher moral principles because "all effective actions require the passport of morality". This also means that the end must be expressed in a generalised manner like liberty, equality and fraternity. But the fact remains that in the context of means and ends there are no well laid out universal principles about the means and ends, but only an analysis of the important dictum that a particular end justifies a particular means.

Alinsky quotes from Orwell to justify his claim that Gandhi's method of non-violent mass action was time and country-specific and has no chance of succeeding in totalitarian regimes. This view is endorsed by Mandela. However, what Alinsky ignores is the fact that for Gandhi, the non-violent mass action was a substitute for war for ending human conflict. Gandhi never perceived a conflict-free world but only envisaged a world where the conflict between the haves and the have-nots would be resolved much more amicably than at the present. His favourite example was the British Suffragists who, through a protracted struggle for more than a century, achieved universal adult suffrage in Britain which slowly changed the elite view of democracy being a bad thing till the nineteenth century to becoming good in the twentieth century. Gandhi, through his life's work, was trying to demonstrate that a co-relationship between the means and ends may be achieved at a distant future. As a practical idealist, he reminded the world that he was a believer in the maxim of one step at a time.

Alinsky misses this larger framework of Gandhi which will always remain the ideal type, whereas, all other considerations of particular means for particular ends will be locally and

narrowly based, reflecting aberrations and fault lines, rather than moving towards an optimistic and also realistic framework of resolving conflicts anywhere in the world peacefully.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Gandhi sees the relationship between ends and means as between a seed and the tree and consistently underlines the close and intimate link between the two. The end lies in the means just as the tree is within the seed. He regards 'means and end as convertible terms in my philosophy of life. We have always control over the means but not over the end'. Means are everything. Gandhi does not segregate means and ends and insists that in all spheres of life, including politics, we reap exactly as we sow.

Gandhi also emphasises that for achieving one's ends there is a need for dispassionate action and a degree of detachment. If the means employed are pure then the fear and anxiety about the result would evaporate. Unconcern about the result does not mean lack of clarity about the end. While the cause has to be just and clear, so must the means and also the recognition that impure means would lead to impure ends; truth cannot be attained through untruthful means; justice cannot be secured through unjust measures; freedom cannot be obtained through tyrannical methods, socialism cannot be realised through enmity and coercion and war cannot lead to enduring peace. Gandhi categorically rejects the notion of ends justify the means and asserts that moral means is an end in itself because virtue is its own reward.

For means to be pure, Gandhi also insists that the human soul has to be devoid of all impurities and for attaining purity he recommends fasting and prayer. Gandhi stresses on the purity of means as he finds God in the whole world. He chooses non-violence and *satyagraha* as the means for realising *swaraj* and categorically rules out its realisation through bloodshed and violence. He desires a social transformation through change in the character of individuals. In 1942 Gandhi reminded that 'country's will to freedom must not be paralysed by the 'dread of violence'. I am convinced that we are living today in a state of ordered anarchy.... This should go.... I should like to believe, that 20 years of continuous effort at educating India along the lines of non violence will not have gone in vain and the people will evolve order out of chaos'. Gandhi is the lone voice among the social and political thinkers to firmly reject the rigid dichotomy between the ends and means and in his extreme preoccupation with the means, to the extent that they, rather than the ends become the benchmark for judging action.

6.6 SUMMARY

A major concern of Gandhi's discourse on the relationship between ends and means flows from its centrality of his entire edifice which means that it is not merely a question of an instrument. An interesting postulate of social action is the ultimate elimination of conflict which means eliminating the factors that create a conflict situation. Since in the process of the resolution of conflict, there is neither a winner nor a loser as in the case of a war or a settlement arrived at by use of brutal force, this framework provides the blueprint for lasting peace. This also means that peace is intrinsically linked to non-violent action and a commitment of resolution of conflict only by peaceful means. As such, non-violence ceases to be a negative concept and has a positive dimension in the context of peaceful evolution of society. For Gandhi, means and ends are inextricably linked. Gandhi's conception of ends and means ought to be understood also in the context of his insistence that all of us are

bearers of relative truth and none can stake a claim to know the absolute truth. Gandhi places the end of *swaraj* and points out that its realisation would depend on the adoption of the right means, the adoption of *ahimsa*. Gandhi considers non-violence as an all-pervasive and eternal principle and the practice of non-violence requires moral discipline that would control passions and emotions. He emphasises self-suffering and moral discipline to become a non-violent *satyagrahi* and recommends voluntary poverty, voluntary simplicity and voluntary suffering as the key to attain this moral discipline. He also stresses on purity of means for realising the end.

6.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does Gandhi understand conflict and what are the means to resolve conflict?
2. Why does Gandhi insist on purity of means for realising the end?
3. What is the link between *ahimsa* and *swaraj*?

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(Endnotes)

¹ Lenin writes in the pamphlet: There have been many wars in history which, notwithstanding all the horrors, cruelties, miseries and tortures, inevitably connected with every war, had a progressive character, i.e. they served in the development of mankind, aiding in the destruction of extremely pernicious and reactionary institutions... or helping to remove the most barbarous despotism in Europe.

² "...not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those bad means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation, or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organisation, replacing it by the worship of the leaders".

³ Saul D. Alinsky (1909-72), a social activist of the United States organised the poor and the underprivileged as citizens, to get their social and political rights, mainly in and around Chicago to begin with, and then spreading the movement to the rest of the US and was jailed many times during his long years of struggle, analyses the problems of the relationship between ends and means both from a pragmatic and strategic terms. He links it to the resources available and the various choices one has in a given situation. In this choice the important consideration is the achievability and the cost involved and the question of means arises in the context of if it could be pursued successfully. In the context of means and ends, Alinsky is flexible enough to argue that the process of life and social strife is complicated, corrupt and violent and in this context, a practical revolutionary is to ask the question as to what particular kind of means will bring about salvation in a particular situation. To discuss the entire ethics of means and ends without linking it to real life experience would be sterile. Such discussions are by and large onlookers and are not faced with the actual organisational problems of real action. Their debate centres around a hypothetical and non-existent situation and the entire end result that "the means-and-end moralists, are non-doers always wind up on their ends without any means". The ethics of the means normally leads to a situation where such moralists stand with the haves and not with the have-nots. Alinsky places them along with the allies of the haves. Remarkingly succinctly, he says "the most unethical of all means is the non-use of any means". On the basis of this action-oriented philosophy, Alinsky provides a number of rules to resolve the apparent conflict between the ethics of ends and means. One important consideration is one's involvement and interest and also the presence and absence of the debater from the scene of action. The second depends on the political position of all those who sit on judgement. The example that he provides in the context of the supporters and opponents of Nazi resistance and whether they were selfless or patriotic or courageous persons depended on which side of the conflict they were. The third rule in a war situation, where the end virtually justifies any means and here he argues that the Geneva conventions of treatment of prisoners or nuclear weapons are observed only because there is probability of retaliation. The fourth aspect that judgement made must be in the context of the time of the event and the action required is elasticity, as flexibility is one of the basic requirements of decision making at a particular time of crisis. Alinsky gives the example of Lincoln's suspension of Habeas Corpus which meant defying a directive of the Chief Justice of the United States and the illegal use of military commissions to try civilians, which was in total variance, to what Lincoln did in a similar situation earlier on where he categorically said laws must be religiously observed. Another example is of Jefferson who was critical of Washington for basing his policies only on national self-interest instead of world interest. But when he assumed the office of the President his policies were solely decided on national interest. The fifth rule is where there is a large number of means available in that situation use the method which is the most effective. The cardinal principle here is "ethics is doing what is best for the most". The sixth rule revolves around the importance of the desired end and less is the importance of such an end more one can debate about the ethical dimensions of means. Seventh, is related to the possibility of success and failure as Alinsky remarks the judgement of history leans heavily on the outcome of success or failure. It spells the difference between the traitor and the patriotic hero. There can be no such thing as a successful traitor or if succeeds, he becomes the founding father. The eighth rule of the ethics of means and ends depends on the situation of timing of imminent defeat or imminent victory. Morality or immorality depends on circumstances as "from the beginning of time killing has always been regarded as justifiable if committed in self-defence". The ninth rule is effective means are normally considered unethical by the opponents. The tenth rule depends on the means at one's disposal and one's capacity to present it in as much moralistic terms as possible. For an activist, the most important consideration is the means that are available for reaching a particular goal. The question is not what weapon to use, but what is the most appropriate means available for action?

UNIT 7 LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Structure

7.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

7.2 Individual Freedom and *Swaraj*

7.3 Individual Conscience and Freedom

7.4 Equality as an All-Pervasive Value

7.5 Economic Equality

7.6 Racial and Caste Equality

7.7 Conclusion

7.8 Summary

7.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi described himself as a practical idealist, yet there is a larger projection of an ideal world based on human equality and freedom. His philosophy begins with the expression of deep love and respect for the neighbour which is the basis of conceiving a universal association of free individuals superseding the artificial barriers of race, creed, wealth, power, class and nation. All these form the basis of his doctrine of universal brotherhood as any of these categories which tries to extract or dominate is a form of gross injustice and such a situation of exploitation can only be maintained by force. In such a situation there is a continuous process of hatred, suspicion and fear of losing on the part of the possessed in the hand of the dispossessed who are the overwhelming majority of the humankind. For Gandhi, a good society could be attained if it could realise liberty, equality and fraternity through non-violent means. This is the lesson, he observed to the Indian princes in 1942 that Europe has learnt from the French Revolution of 1789. Gandhi distinguishes between the fuller moral connotation of freedom and the narrower conception of individual or national freedom while analysing *swaraj* or self-rule. Asked to explain the meaning of *purna swaraj* in 1931, he says:

The root meaning of *swaraj* is self rule. *Swaraj* may, therefore be rendered as disciplined rule from within and *purna* means “complete”. “Independence” has no such limitation. Independence may mean licence to do as you like. *Swaraj* is positive. Independence is negative. *Purna Swaraj* does not exclude association with any nation, much less with England. But it can only mean association for mutual benefit and at will. Thus there are countries which are said to be independent but which have no *Purna Swaraj* e.g. Nepal. The word *Swaraj* is a sacred word, a vedic word, meaning self rule and self restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which “independence” often means.

Swaraj or self-rule is the core of freedom and is the crux of real home rule. Just as with Vivekananda and Aurobindo, for Gandhi, right conduct is right form of civilisation. Freedom

is not to be left alone but one that will enable the individual to cultivate love and service. Individual and society are complementary and a society, where citizens are not free cannot be a good society. He does not agree with the liberal conception, according to Terchek, in two ways: how people are treated and how are individual choices and capacity to make choices affected by the institutional practices and asymmetrical distribution of power. The more mature Gandhi, observes Dalton, establishes the link between non-violence and the preservation of liberty seeing the former as the bedrock of freedom. Yet in his commitment to non-violence he does not sacrifice the social and political freedom of the individual: "...to make mistakes as a freeman... is better than being in bondage in order to avoid them (for) the mind of a man who remains good under compulsion cannot improve, in fact it worsens. And when compulsion is removed, all the defects well up to the surface with even greater force" (Harijan 29th September 1946).

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi's thoughts on the concepts of liberty and equality
- Gandhi's notion of individual freedom and swaraj
- Gandhi's concept of economic, racial and caste equality.

7.2 INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND SWARAJ

Gandhi rejects the notion of unbridled individualism and stresses on the notion of the individual as a social self. Within this framework he analyses freedom as not being left alone or to abdicate moral obligation towards others who are equally entitled to freedom for themselves. A free person can choose to enter into any association with others but cannot simply cut off from others. This is true of nations also. Gandhi's equation of freedom with self-rule is to underline the intrinsic link between freedom and obligation to others and to oneself, without abandoning the voluntary basis of freedom. Self-rule means voluntary internalisation of one's obligations towards others and that a free person and a nation cannot be selfish and isolationist.

Gandhi emphasises on the voluntary nature of freedom as a human being by nature is an autonomous moral agent having the capacity for choices and freedom to experiment. The individual that Gandhi has in mind is the social self and like Green, he too argues that it is the freedom which the individual enjoys that makes possible for the survival and the continuance of society. Gandhi writes, "Individual freedom alone can make a man voluntarily surrender himself completely to the service of society. If it is wrested from him, he becomes an automaton and society is ruined. No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom. It is contrary to the very nature of man. Just as man will not grow horns or a tail so he will not exist as man if he has no mind of his own. In reality even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual believe in their own". For Gandhi, freedom is rooted in human nature and is to be claimed as part of self-awareness earned through self-effort; conversely, any external threat to human freedom arises not from circumstances outside one's control but by recognising our weaknesses in the first place. Self-purification is therefore integral to the concept of *swaraj* as that gives us strength and capacity to translate the abstract notion of freedom into a practical reality in society and politics.

Gandhi wrote extensively on national freedom and self-rule but these were applicable to the individual as well. He considers the individual to be the bedrock of *swaraj* and that “*swaraj* of a people means the sum total of the *swaraj* (self-rule) of individuals; government over self is the truest *swaraj*, it is synonymous with *moksha* or salvation. He considers individual *swaraj* as logically and conceptually prior to the notion of collective or national *swaraj*. He also clarifies that “self-government means continuous effort to be independent of government control whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. *Swaraj* government will be a sorry affair if people look up to it for regulation of every detail of life”.

Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* includes four aspects: Truth, Non-violence, political and economic independence. *Swaraj* would be incomplete without realisation of each, since each, for Gandhi, is interwoven with all. His conception of *swaraj* makes the same distinction between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ forms of freedom which Vivekananda and Aurobindo conceive of. Vivekananda's distinction involves a relegation of political freedom and national independence to a subsidiary position. But as the struggle for national independence gathers momentum merely relying on ‘inner’ freedom does not seem enough. Aurobindo's identification of national with spiritual freedom takes on an extreme form of religious nationalism which threatens individual liberty, which he subsequently abandons. Gandhi never espouses this view of freedom as he consistently emphasises on the supreme importance of a supra-political form of freedom which very few Indian leaders concur with. Dalton observes that, *Swaraj*, for Gandhi, means acquiring inner freedom which means that Indians gain sovereignty over themselves and over their nation.

Swaraj would become a reality only if people have the capacity to regulate and control authority. Real *swaraj*, for Gandhi “will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.... *Swaraj* for me means freedom for the meanest of my countrymen. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log’ for ‘king stork’. Elaborating further he points out “there is no freedom for India so long as one man, no matter how highly placed he may be, holds the hollow of his hands the life, property and honour of millions of human beings. It is an artificial, unnatural and uncivilized institution. The end of it is an essential preliminary to *swaraj*”.

Gandhi does not consider good government as better than self-government as there is a connection between individual and national self-rule. The evolution of the nation and its component parts, the individuals are inter-twined; one cannot advance without the other. Individual self-rule is included in *swaraj*. Self awareness, self-discipline and self-respect are key components of *swaraj*. Fundamental to *swaraj* is the essence of freedom which is more important than the social, political and economic liberty. *Swaraj* “is infinitely greater than and includes independence”.

“Let there be no mistake about my conception of *Swaraj*. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So, at one end you have political independence; at the other, economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and social, the corresponding end is Dharma, i.e. religion is the highest sense of the term. It includes Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc., but is superior to them all. You may recognize it by the name of Truth, not the honesty of experience, but the living Truth that pervades everything and will survive all destruction and all transformation. Moral and social uplift may be recognized by the term as we are used to, i.e. Non-violence. Let us call this square of *Swaraj*, which will be out of shape if any of its angles is untrue. We cannot achieve this

political and economic freedom without Truth and Non-violence in concrete terms, without a living faith in God and hence moral and social elevation' (Harijan, 2nd January, 1937).

7.3 INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE AND FREEDOM

A person is truly free if he listens to his conscience or the inner voice, the only tyrant that one would accept. He advises every individual to weigh his circumstances in the court of conscience according to the criteria of *satya* and *ahimsa* and the obligation of *sarvodaya*. This would redefine radically both the means and the ends of action providing the basis of fundamental reform of society. He advises political workers to engage wholeheartedly in the Constructive Programme and bread labour and to sacrifice their comforts in the service of the poorest of the poor.

Gandhi links his views on conscience with his arguments for *satyagraha*. "When people cease to think for themselves and have everything regulated for them, it becomes necessary at times to assert the right of individuals to act in defiance of public opinion or law, which is another name for public opinion. When individuals so act, they claim to have acted in obedience to conscience". He expects the *satyagrahi* to be honest to their deepest convictions and ready to suffer on behalf of their commitments. Gandhi goes on to argue that those who witness the suffering will be prompted by their conscience and be converted. A *satyagrahi*, when he sacrifices and voluntarily suffers, appeals not only to the reason but also the heart of others and this brings people on the same moral plane.

Like Thoreau, Gandhi does not consider the government to be important in the day-to-day activities of the individual. The disinterest and lack of enthusiasm towards the government that is found in perceptions of both Thoreau and Gandhi is because of their belief that all states, including the democratic ones, are the embodiment of force and physical strength, concerned with functions related to law and order, and protection of property. Laws, policies and associations are essentially coercive, stifling and hindering individuality and spontaneity. Thoreau sees law as a form of control and is not different from any kind of coercion and observes that 'the law will never make men free. It is men who have got to make law free'.

Thoreau had insisted that persons with conscience should disassociate from the state as that enabled them to lead lives untainted by the evils which the state sponsors and promotes. The government is incompetent to control the diabolical forces that it releases among individuals. It is for this reason that he suggests withdrawal and reliance on one's inner resources. Thoreau perceives individual conscience as inseparable from common standards and humane sensibilities and since the conscience is above the state, it is the true criterion of what is politically just and right. It is important that individuals perceive themselves first as individuals and only then as citizens or subjects. Conscience, which for him is the inner voice and the 'genius', as an exclusive and purely personal thing, is expressed through acts of civil disobedience. Conscience, for Thoreau is secular, the ability to do what one thinks to be right. However, his notion of morality and politics is subjective and anti-legalistic as he does not acknowledge the existence of general principles or universal standards of right, including the *Bible* and the constitution. For Thoreau, conscience has three implications for politics: first it becomes clear as to why does not restrict conscientious action to non-violence and passive disobedience, as conscience may demand more than non complicity or withdrawal. He does not rule out the use of violence and force if conscience demands. In fact, he views conflict as the gist of life itself and any action that flows from one's

convictions is good and it is for this reason, that violence is necessary. Second, intolerance is the crux of a militant conscience. Belief in one's convictions makes tolerance impossible. Third, in light of his anti-institutionalism he contends that solitary action rather than collective ones as good (Rosenblum, 1981, pp.101-03).

Gandhi differs from Thoreau and is more like Green, when he links individual actions to public interest or *sarvodaya* though he is certain that the dictates of individual conscience, if genuine, would culminate in conduct that would arouse and appeal to the conscience of others. Moreover, his emphasis on *ahimsa* as the means to be used in the vindication of *satya* makes him believe that resistance to injustice, properly conducted, could not lead to general anarchy. He regards *satya* and *ahimsa* as universal principles with an inseparable link between them. The omnipresence of truth and non-violence is derived from another basic foundation of his theoretical edifice, that human beings are amenable to moral persuasion. The individual, a moral and a social person, follows the paths of truth and non-violence since it is the best possible way of leading a good and satisfactory life. It enhances human dignity, relative equality and human perfectibility, as it allows for individual initiative and recognition and provides a mechanism for resolving conflicts in the complex modern world. It is the logical culmination of democratic principles based on active citizen's participation and civility leading to self-realisation, self-awareness and responsibility.

The individual, for Gandhi, is the bearer of moral authority and has therefore, the right and the duty to judge the state and its laws by the standards of *dharma* which in turn is based on *satya* and *ahimsa*. The individual can challenge and even disobey the state, as all states violate *satya* and *ahimsa*. Gandhi, like Raz, places considerable emphasis on autonomy as he pays attention to the role of institutions or the way resources affect choices that are available to the individual. But he differs from conventional theories of autonomy as he emphasises on duties along with rights and considers duty to act morally regardless of the consequences as the highest. Another difference is the stress on individuals as equal members of a harmonious and interdependent cosmos rather than as abstracted selves. Persons achieve good and become complete only in association with others based on mutual respect and cooperation. Such a community ought to be open and pluralistic. It would have to be tolerant of diverse conceptions of good and ensure that its institutional practices do not become obstacles to the ordinary persons' pursuit of their good. The gist of tolerance is the belief that differences can be resolved through reason and not by force and this belief is based on the faith that ultimately truth prevails. Tolerance allows for co-existence of competing forms of partisanship while civility enables the transcendence of partisanship for the pursuit of common good. As Iyer says, "Tolerance and civility both point out to the limitations of human powers, the folly of dogmatism and the futility of violence, the common search for truth by equal citizens in the service of common good. They provide the basis of respect for the inalienable freedom and the fundamental equality of all citizens united in their concern for truth and peace".

7.4 EQUALITY AS AN ALL-PERVASIVE VALUE

The crux of freedom, for Gandhi, is not being unrestrained or unhindered but to cultivate love and service as these are the quintessence of human nature. Freedom is worthwhile as long as it fulfils basic needs in dignity. Gandhi pleads for both freedom and equality of status which he thinks would make it possible for the establishment of a universal community of free persons. Those who accept such a community would have to overcome the artificial barriers of race and creed, wealth and power, class and nation. If one segment augments

for itself at the expense of others it would be adopting an undemocratic method and would have to use arms to defend the injustice that it perpetrates. The possessing class would always be in fear of dispossession and the oppressed would be storing up resentment. Gandhi laid emphasis on equal claim that every individual is entitled to by birth and he also acknowledges that in spite of many setbacks, the human civilisation has enhanced the philosophy of oneness and that is how we see that the ideals of justice, equality and freedom have been accepted by the major philosophies and social movements. This is also a reflection of the growing consciousness of being human which had to fight continuously a process which tried to retard them from this noble mission.

Gandhi's talisman of keeping the face of the poorest in mind while making policies and in undertaking any social reform is with the concern to bring the marginalised and the most vulnerable into the mainstream of politics and society. He champions the basic rights of the untouchables and women, as they have been objects of domination and humiliation. He rejects ascriptive properties such as gender, class, birth, caste, education or nationality that can justify unequal treatment and disqualify some as moral agents.

I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All... have the same sort as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of men that I fight the doctrine of superiority... that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer.... I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow human being.... He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. That is my opinion.

For Gandhi, equality logically follows from non-violence; non-violence entails non-exploitation and non-exploitation is impossible without equality and thus equality and non-violence are interdependent. In Gandhi's perception, freedom and equality are also inter-related; without social and economic equality, there cannot be freedom and without freedom, there can be no social and economic equality. Thus, in Gandhi's thought, freedom, equality and non-violence mutually depend on one another and together constitute justice, which is the basis of good society.

7.5 ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Of all the dimensions of equality, Gandhi focuses most on economic equality and sees economic equality as the basis of non-violence and freedom. He considers economic equality "as the master key to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power as the richest in the land".

According to Gandhi, violence stems from inequality, the wide gap that exists between the possessing and the non-violence and unless the root cause of violence is weeded out through non-violent means, one cannot rule out the possibility of violent revolution. In Gandhi's ideal society there would be absolute equality of incomes for all types of work and for all individuals. Believing in the concept of bread labour and dignity of work, Gandhi insists that same amount of work in any occupation ought to be rewarded by the same

amount of wages. Echoing Ruskin, Gandhi observes that “if India is to live any exemplary life of independence which would be the envy of the world, all the *bhangis*, doctors, lawyers, teachers, merchants and others would get the same wages for an honest day's work”.

Gandhi knew that such an ideal would not be realisable in the foreseeable future but that does not justify the gross inequalities that existed in the contemporary human society nor is the argument that some need more than others is acceptable. He points out “let no one try to justify the glaring difference between the classes and the masses, the prince and the pauper, by saying that the former need the more....The contrast between the rich and the poor today is a painful sight. The poor villages...produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it”.

Gandhi clarifies equal distribution as his ideal and till that is realised he would like to settle for work for equitable distribution as that would not only ensure elimination of gross disparities in income but also allow every member of the society to receive enough goods and services to meet his basic requirements and enjoy a certain minimum standard of living. “The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural needs and no more....To bring this ideal into being the entire social order has got to be reconstructed. A society based on Non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal”.

Gandhi considers accumulation of wealth as immoral which is why he proposes trusteeship. To achieve equitable distribution he proposes four specific measures: (a) Bread Labour or manual labour which for Gandhi would remove exploitation. “If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest”. Bread labour would reduce not only economic inequality but also social inequality and in the Indian context, it would undermine caste-based inequalities. Bread labour ensures that none would be rich and poor; high or low and touchable and untouchable. (b) Voluntary renunciation, a value that Gandhi reiterates from the *Isopanishad* of not coveting the possessions of others and not accumulating beyond one's basic needs. Personal wants ought to be kept to the barest minimum keeping in mind the poverty of one's fellow human beings and try for a new mode of life. (c) *Satyagraha* to resolve industrial and agricultural disputes as legitimate and the proposal of trusteeship to resolve the conflict between labour and capital with the core idea of non-appropriation by owners. He writes, “If, however, in spite of the utmost efforts the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find the solution to this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society....If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation”. (d) Governmental Action is necessary to ensure that every work receives a minimum or living wage. Gandhi insists that his ideal would have to be realised through non-violent measures, through moral process of transformation involving individuals and keeping the role of the state to its minimum. This is what separates the Gandhian ideal from the Marxists and socialists, who too emphasise on equality as a moral ideal but while the Marxists advocate violent transformation, the socialists insist on a democratic transformation. Gandhi categorically rejects the Marxist ideal of the dictatorship of proletariat as a means of securing social and economic justice for the poor.

7.6 RACIAL AND CASTE EQUALITY

Gandhi was well aware of the contemporary situation, the savage brutality of the Nazi's treatment of the Jews and was saddened by the expression of racialism anywhere in the world. What puzzled him was that even in democracies, racialism is a fact of life both in the British Empire and the United States. His initiation to politics was his first hand acquaintance of racialism in South Africa and what disturbed him the most was that both the Church and the state approved the basic denial of equality to non-European races. For him, any form of inequality based on race and colour was unreasonable and immoral and to fight for the redress of such illegitimate inequality and to restore one's own dignity and honour, he began his *satyagraha* movements in South Africa.

Gandhi was a great believer in the principles of democratic equality and the British constitution providing equality and justice to all and could not accept this serious violation when it came to involve the Indians in South Africa. When he arrived in India he was struck by the inequalities from which the Indian society suffered and took a vow to get rid of all stark inequalities. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan considers that one of the greatest contributions of Gandhi is the removal of untouchability. Gandhi went to the extent of declaring "if I have to be reborn I should wish to be born as an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition". Though Gandhi called himself a *sanatani* Hindu, he was one of the severest critics of the curse of untouchability and any other form of inequality that was practised in the name of religion, caste, race or nation. He did not spare even the Indian princes and was very critical of the condition of the poor in their states. He was equally critical of the Permanent Settlement Act and the landlords and cautioned them hoping that "they will realise before it is too late that their safety and survival are bound up with the rapid introduction of responsible government which even the paramount power with all its strength was obliged to concede to the provinces".

One of the severest criticisms that Gandhi levelled against the British occupation of India was that it has led to extreme oppression of the poor, pointing out the earlier periods of plentiful situations; he castigated the British for keeping majority of the population in a situation of abject poverty and a system that is totally inhuman. As Gandhi himself says, "the semi starved millions scattered throughout the seven hundred thousand villages dotted over a surface of nineteen hundred miles broad" and added that it is a painful phenomenon that "those villages through no fault of their own have nearly six months in a year are idle upon their hands". This, he contrasts with the situation before the advent of the British, which was self-sufficient, with no shortage of food and clothing. He blamed the British East India Company for ruining the supplementary village industry for this situation and as a remedial measure proposed the regeneration of the villages through the Constructive Programmes with due emphasis on cottage industries. Gandhi was equally conscious that the problems of thickly populated underdeveloped colonial situations like India cannot have the same solution as the sparsely populated industrialised western countries. It is because of such an understanding that Gandhi discounted capital intensive production mechanism and pleaded for the revival of the village economies that were labour-intensive production as these would guarantee meaningful employment to our teeming millions. One of his close associates, J.C. Kumarappa, worked out the details of his plans.

7.7 CONCLUSION

Gandhi puts the consciousness of enjoying freedom as the very cornerstone of human history and accepts temporary setbacks which is led by the perpetrators of inequality and exploitation but always had the confidence of the human ability to overcome them. In a way, this is a dialectical understanding of the historical evolution as he gives important examples from history like serfs becoming freemen; no more burning of heretics and the privileges of the nobility is under increased threat; slaves are becoming equal citizens and the rich are becoming apologetic for their wealth; Mightiest of empires are understanding the necessities of peace and we find the dreamers dreaming about unity of the entire humankind as increasing all the time. He is critical and cautioning of the obstacles to this cherished path by the lust of the powerful, the lies and the hypocrisies that go by blindly following the diktats of arrogant racialism and nationalism, but again here his optimism is demonstrated when he talks of the inevitable march of democracy and increasing awareness that give the poorest of the poor the essential right to food, sunshine in their houses and hope, dignity and beauty in their existence equal to others. This optimism of Gandhi allows him to transcend the immediate setbacks and retreat towards equality and freedom and keep the torch alive as the servant of entire humanity.

7.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi rejects the notion of unbridled individualism and stresses on the notion of the individual as a social self. Within this framework he analyses freedom as not being left alone or to abdicate moral obligation towards others who are equally entitled to freedom for themselves. A free person can choose to enter into any association with others but cannot simply cut off from others. This is true of nations also. Gandhi's equation of freedom with self-rule is to underline the intrinsic link between freedom and obligation to others and to oneself, without abandoning the voluntary basis of freedom. Self-rule means voluntary internalisation of one's obligations towards others and that a free person and a nation cannot be selfish and isolationist. He considers the individual to be the bedrock of *swaraj*. The individual, for Gandhi, is the bearer of moral authority and has therefore, the right and the duty to judge the state and its laws by the standards of *dharma* which in turn is based on *satya* and *ahimsa*. The individual can challenge and even disobey the state, as all states violate *satya* and *ahimsa*.

Gandhi pleads for both freedom and equality of status which he thinks would make it possible for the establishment of a universal community of free persons. Gandhi's talisman of keeping the face of the poorest in mind while making policies and in undertaking any social reform is with the concern to bring the marginalised and the most vulnerable into the mainstream of politics and society. Of all the dimensions of equality, Gandhi focuses most on economic equality and views it as the basis of non-violence and freedom.

7.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the link between individual freedom and *swaraj* according to Gandhi?
- 2) Explain how individual conscience is the basis of freedom.
- 3) Why does Gandhi consider equality as an all-pervasive value?
- 4) Why is economic equality important and how does Gandhi propose to achieve it?
- 5) Explain Gandhi's views on racial and caste equality.

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UNIT 8 POWER AND AUTHORITY

Structure

8.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

8.2 Spiritualising Political life and Political Institutions

8.3 Concept of Power

8.4 Concept of Truth as Authority and Individual Conscience

8.5 State, Obligation and Civil Disobedience

8.6 Authority in Anarchist Society

8.7 Conclusion

8.8 Summary

8.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's views on power and conflict resolution puts him apart from all the other major theories developed in contemporary times. His serious reservations about the desirability of what constitutes the major components of modern civilisation allows him to transcend known categories of power and enables him to develop a conceptual framework which is in total variance from the other dominant views. The starting point of his view can be traced back to the Indian roots of *maya* or illusion and *moha* or delusion. Gandhi uses these two categories as being symptomatic of modern civilisation because within this neither an individual human salvation nor a collective well-being can be conceived. One can only think in terms of an idealised world of harmony and bliss if an alternative thought process can be conceived and popularised. Modern civilisation, according to Gandhi, is not conducive to reaching higher end of life as it perpetuates false consciousness and encourages the pursuit of materialistic ends. However, Gandhi is also aware of the fact that it is practically impossible to go back to the golden past. Nor can one do away with all the facets of the modern civilisation by a quick violent intervention. The satanic nature of the modern civilisation pervades the entire evolution of Gandhi's formulation of power and authority in a reformed political order. The major characteristics of the degradation of the modern civilisation are discovered in the soullessness of the entire political process which inevitably makes the entire state system corrupt and irresponsible to the genuine needs of the people. In such an order, all the major political institutions become merely instruments for pursuing power, to enhance one's own authority and acquire ownership of property. As a philosophical anarchist, the essential nature of the state as striving for more concentration of power and egoism is writ large in Gandhi's entire philosophy. He concedes the point that the pursuit of power is an endemic human desire but he was equally careful on emphasising the countervailing and more effective role of moral values which may create a new category of power which will be in consonance with individual fulfilment and a humane collective face.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to understand:

- Gandhi's intention behind spiritualising politics.
- Gandhi's concept of power
- His concept of making truth as authority.
- His concept of Authority in an Anarchic society.

8.2 SPIRITUALISING POLITICAL LIFE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Iyer rightly observed that, Gandhi challenges the conventional view of the nature and sphere of politics, widens the concept of power and undermines the distinction between private and public morals, religious values and political norms, and ethical principles and political expediency. In 1915, he declares that his aim was “to spiritualise” political life and political institutions. He underlines the importance of religion to politics observing that politics-divorced from religion- is completely meaningless. Politics is a part of individual's being and cannot be separated from the rest of life, in particular the deepest things of life. Gandhi approaches politics in a religious spirit: “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole....I do not know any religion apart from activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities without which life would be a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing”.

Gandhi insists on the need to look at political work within the framework of social and moral progress as power resides in the people and not in legislative assemblies. He dismisses disparagingly power politics as irrelevant and insists that “political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life”. Like Huxley, not only does he distinguish between power politics and goodness of power but also does not see power politics as being co-extensive with the whole of life and the entire gamut of human activity in society. Politics divorced from religious values is a cynical game of power played according to its own immoral rules under the guise of morality. When Gandhi stresses on religion as the bedrock of politics what he means are religious values that are common to all religions rather than any kind of sectarianism. It means a belief in the “ordered moral government of the universe” as “when morality incarnates itself in a living man it becomes religion, because it binds, it holds, it sustains him in the hour of trial”. True religion and true politics is concerned primarily with human life and action and both must have a common basis in a common morality determined by a common set of values. Gandhi, however, rejects the idea of state religion even if a country has only one religion. Sectarian religion is purely personal and has no place in politics. “A society or a group which depends partly or wholly on state aid for the existence of religion does not deserve or have any religion worth the name. In reality, there are “as many religions as there are individuals”.

Gandhi rejects the attempts to compartmentalise human life as that leads to segregation of politics from religion. “Politics, like religion, is ever concerned with the happiness of the toiling masses, a means to the realisation of the highest realizable in life”. Echoing the sentiments of Aristotle and Gramsci, Gandhi considers public life as the arena for bringing

out the highest spiritual qualities of an individual. "Politics is art of doing on the largest scale what is right, and, as an affair of principle, it touches the eternal interests and religious sentiments". Politics is not the art of capturing, holding and managing governmental power but the art of transforming social relations in terms of justice; "a non-violent revolution is not a programme of 'seizure of power', but it is a programme of transformation of relationships".

8.3 CONCEPT OF POWER

Gandhi identifies two kinds of power: one which is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. He points out in 1947 that "by abjuring power and by devoting ourselves to pure and selfless service of voters, we can guide and influence them. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by going into the government. But a stage may come, when the people themselves feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield the power.... It is my firm view that we should keep altogether aloof from power politics and its contagion. To set our own house in order is the first indispensable requisite, if we want to influence political power...to regard adult suffrage as a means for the capture of political power, would be to put it to a corrupt use....Today, politics has become corrupt....The greater our inner purity, the greater shall be our hold on the people, without any effort on our part".

Stressing on the close link between religion and politics, Gandhi suspects politics as understood in the ordinary sense as power over the lives of the people that is vested in governments and is sought by legislatures. He rejects the notion of power for one's selfish gains and motives devoid of public good. Power for Gandhi, like Rousseau, lies in being an actively engaged citizen with a capacity of public involvement and political participation rather than being a passive acquiescent subject. If individuals recognise the power in their hands and use it constructively to bring out *sarvodaya* or good of all through non-violent means against injustice and repression of the state, then the monopolistic nature of state power could be reduced undermining morally and materially its coercive authority. This would ensure purification of politics which can be achieved through constructive programmes. Power based on coercion and hierarchy only ensures spiritual poverty of the society. Society ought to be changed through the efforts of morally evolved persons; if not, it would be diseased. Gandhi asserts the primacy of social power and political power and insists that social and political power is co-extensive. Politics has to be subordinated to morals; of doing the right thing and readily suffer for one's beliefs or to withdraw into oneself to find a basis for action. There is no justification for abdication of one's responsibility or a passive resort to continued inaction. Gandhi sees a close link between firm and pure intentions and the capacity for effective choices and decisions on the basis of what is considered right and necessary. Gandhi rejects the view that politics is intrinsically sinful or inherently moral or that it is essentially pragmatic with some utilitarian or prudential justification. For Gandhi, politics is inherently impure and is never ideal but could be purified by repudiating the distinction between the public and the private, political and personal morality. Impure politics, for Gandhi, is power seeking that hinders the relationships between individuals. A leader must seek acceptance and maintain it not just through reasoning with the people but by identifying with their dreams, activities and sufferings. The life of a leader ought to be one of continued sacrifice of the self for the immediate service of his fellow beings. A leader must never hold office or occupy any formal position of power.

Gandhi points out that while it is natural for those in authority to use force but if those who obey the commands of the government also decide to express their will by physical force

then it would become impossible for sanity. Individual citizens have the alternative of using 'soul force' which they should and to disregard non-violence is the surest way to destruction. He stresses on the need to make a conscious choice between coercion and peaceful conversion and stakes his preference for the latter as it is enduring: "True democracy or the *Swaraj* of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated *ahimsa*". Non-violence must be the means to influence power politics and a non-violent state would be the one based on the will of the people with no infringement on just rights, without exploitation and without inequality, namely the disparity between the rich and the poor, and the privileged and the underprivileged. Inequality exists as long as private property exists as that leads to sentiments of possession. Only through a detached attitude towards property, an attitude that possessions ought to service the needs of others can a non-violent society succeed. Differences must be settled through reason and not by force in the belief that truth would be ultimately vindicated and that is the essence of tolerance. Competing ideas could be transcended with the help of civility in the hope of reaching common good and that ensures respect for the inalienable freedom and the fundamental equality of all citizens. Dogmatism conceals one's fallibility preventing the expression of a sense of human solidarity.

Exploitation could be reduced if individuals are allowed to freely develop their moral capacities and not depend on the state. Increase in the power of the state is the greatest fear that Gandhi has, "because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress". For Gandhi, if there is greater decentralisation of power in any society, then there are greater the chances for the collective pursuit of truth or *satya* through non-violence or *ahimsa* among individual citizens. For citizens to accept the authority of the state and render obligation depends on the extent to which the laws and the policies of the state are just and non-repressive respectively. Gandhi categorically asserts that "a government is an instrument of service only in so far as it is based upon the will and consent of the people. It is an instrument of oppression where it enforces submission at the point of the bayonet". While all states misuse power, it is the citizen(s) whoever retains his moral authority which is why a citizen can never afford to allow his conscience to become silent. He insists that a citizen is responsible for the acts of the government, even if these acts are of minimal nature. Citizens are collectively responsible for the acts of the government and for the very nature of the state.

8.4 CONCEPT OF TRUTH AS AUTHORITY AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE

For Gandhi, authority is to be understood with reference to *satya*, which he considers as the supreme value in ethics, politics and religion, as the *raison d'être* of all existence, as it is 'philosopher's stone', the sole talisman available to mortal human beings. It is the highest of human ends, all important and all inclusive principle surpassing all other values and leading eventually to emancipation. This belief is an underlying axiom of Indian tradition and is common to Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. For Gandhi, morality is the basis of all things and truth is the quintessence of morality. *Satya* is derived from *Sat* which implies that truth alone exists and everything else is an illusion.

The concept of truth as elaborated by Gandhi affirms the moral autonomy and authority of the individual as an active agent and performer in political and social life. He writes: I would reject all authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the handiwork of reason but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the still small voice within". Once the quest for truth becomes universal, individuals begin to enjoy real freedom and the need for authority diminishes. The individual, in Gandhi's scheme, turns inward not to abandon his political and social responsibilities but to arm himself in his struggle against external authority. He needs the moral courage and spiritual equilibrium to become inward while remaining amidst society and fight untruth: "In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest for Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height".

The individual is the votary of *satya* and *ahimsa* and has the moral authority to judge and if necessary, oppose the authority of the state, as all states violate *satya* and *ahimsa*. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* or non-coercion is essential in order to accord respect to the human being and that minimal coercion is a necessary evil to secure the larger good thus establishing superiority of *ahimsa* over *himsa*. Gandhi insists on the need for more and more people to affirm the value of *ahimsa* not as an elusive ideal or a pious hope but as a widely relevant principle of social action. Fear breeds force but if more and people become fearless then force would become redundant. Gandhi points out that it is because of this commitment to *ahimsa* that has made us question the retributive theory of punishment and forms of *himsa* like capital punishment, duelling, slavery, torture, collective retaliation or revenge, acts of aggression by states, preventive wars, cruelty to animals, flogging and corporal punishment, which were seen as respectable at one time. Gandhi's attitude towards *ahimsa* was that of an absolutist as he declares "a votary of *ahimsa* cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realise the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die so that others may live.... The absolutist's sphere of destruction will always be the narrowest possible. The utilitarian's has no limit". Gandhi was convinced that the masses could be trained in the acts of non-violence and he consistently insists that *ahimsa* is the power of the stronger and not of the weak; that it requires greater physical and mental courage to be non-violent. Strength comes from the indomitable will and not physical power. *Ahimsa* needs the cultivation of self-control. For the success of non-violent mass action Gandhi relied on a small band of committed, intelligent and honest persons who have an abiding faith in non-violence as they would ensure the non-violent atmosphere required for the working of civil disobedience in accord with *ahimsa*.

Gandhi aims for social and political transformation by relying on *satya*, *ahimsa* and *dharma*. Resistance to unjust authority armed with the power of truth and to resolve conflicts, to bring change to non-violent action are central to his plank. Through the doctrine of *Satyagraha*, Gandhi shows how a person of conscience could engage in heroic action with the intention of vindicating truth and freedom against tyranny and injustice. By appealing to *dharma* or the moral law, Gandhi challenges the conventional notion of authority, law and obligation through self-suffering and sacrifice. There is no external authority which is higher than *satya* either in religious or the political sphere and no political or social action can be given legitimacy superior to *ahimsa*. Iyer pints out that, "Like Proudhon, Gandhi visualizes the establishment of a new system of moral sanctions in society, based on universal harmony in nature". By that yardstick, Gandhi is critical of modern civilisation as it is unjust, coercive, untrue and exploitative.

Gandhi defends the action of the individual citizen who challenges the might of the centralised bureaucratic state on the basis of *dharma*, *satya* and *ahimsa*. The state, for Gandhi, represents violence in a concentrated and organised form and is described as a 'soulless machine'; it can never be weaned away from violence and force as these are the bases of its existence. The individual has a soul. People normally take for granted the legalised coercion of the state as the state has too much violence which it could use against those who differ from it. Gandhi's fear of the centralised state makes him emphasise on a minimal role for the state. He admits that the state ownership is preferable to individual ownership but concedes that the latter's violence is less injurious than that of the state. However, he supports minimal state ownership on unavoidable grounds.

8.5 STATE, OBLIGATION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Gandhi desires a society without the state but being the practical idealist that he is, he supports a minimal state. In a state of enlightened anarchy everyone is his own ruler, ruling in a manner without obstructing others. There would be no political power as there would be no state. In the absence of this ideal, Thoreau's maxim of that "government is best which governs the least" is the next possible option. According to Gandhi, human beings have the capacity for developing their moral capacities to such an extent that exploitation could be reduced to the minimum which is why he states that he "looks upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress".

The relation between the state and citizens follows from Gandhi's exaltation of *satya* and *ahimsa* as ultimate values on which individual and social morality must be based. The citizens' pursuit of *satya* and *ahimsa* makes them morally superior to the state, the former with soul while the latter is soulless. Since social progress is towards furthering *satya* and *ahimsa*, the coercive role of the state would be weakened. This process could also be achieved with greater decentralisation of power in any society.

The citizens' obligation to accept the authority of the state would depend on its just laws and non-repressive policies. A government is an instrument of service if it is based on the will and consent of the people. It is citizens' obligation that distinguishes a democratic from an authoritarian state though Gandhi views all states as soulless machines. A citizen's responsibility is greater under a democratic regime as citizens would have to safeguard against authority becoming corrupt and farcical. In every state there is a possibility of abuse of power and it is the citizens vested with superior moral authority who should not lose their conscience or lose their distrust of state authority. Gandhi makes it the responsibility of every citizen for every act of the government.

It is the citizen who ought to decide whether to show active loyalty or total opposition to the state, to resist none or few of its laws as the citizen is endowed with *satya* and *ahimsa*. The citizen cannot relinquish a portion of this responsibility in the name of a social contract or legal sovereignty or tacit consent or the rule of law or similar notions that are implicit in democratic constitutionalism. According to Gandhi, for the sake of peace there can be no unconditional consent, even if secured under majority rule nor can the limits of state action be established in advance in a manner that will automatically secure the citizen his natural rights. Gandhi distrusts the institutional safeguards in societies with many factions and class conflict, as the majority could be wrong. The individual alone, for Gandhi, is a moral

person which no state or institution could ever become. A citizen could appeal to eternal unwritten laws against the laws of human beings and of states and the commandments of religion, but like Socrates accept the consequences for challenging the laws of the states.

Gandhi rejects the idea and institution of the state based on two anarchistic arguments: the state represents an authority that poses a threat to the liberty of the individual and the state represents violence in an organised form. Classical anarchism as articulated by Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin and the early Kropotkin supports revolutionary violence to put an end to the organised violence represented by the state. Gandhi insists on non-violent resistance as the only means to end the tyranny of the state and desires a purely non-violent society based on voluntary organisations as the alternative to the state. He is convinced that once society becomes truly non-violent, true anarchy would be established, as non-violence is possible only in an anarchistic society. In 1940 Gandhi categorically stated that “the ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy”.

Not only are states undesirable but even parliaments are as these are ineffectual and can do only when there is an outside pressure. Gandhi is critical of the parliamentary system of government in the *Hind Swaraj* (1909), as the members of parliament ‘are hypocritical and selfish’; indifferent to matters of serious concern and engage in endless talk. “Members vote for their party without a thought. Their so-called discipline binds them to it. If any member, by way of exception gives an independent vote, he is considered a renegade. The Prime Minister is more concerned about his power than about the welfare of the Parliament. His energy is concentrated upon securing the success of his party. His care is not always that Parliament shall do right. Prime Ministers are known to have made Parliament do things merely for party advantage.... If they are to be considered honest because they do not take what are generally known as bribes, let them be so considered, but they are open to subtler influence. In order to gain their ends, they certainly bribe people with honour. I do not hesitate to say that they have neither real honesty nor a living conscience”. Through his criticisms of the British parliament, Gandhi tries to show, according to Bandyopadhyaya (1969), that even the best of the parliaments are not the ideal substitute for anarchy.

8.6 AUTHORITY IN ANARCHIST SOCIETY

Regarding the nature of the ideal society under anarchy Gandhi does not offer a clear answer. He is unconcerned about preparing the blueprint for the future because he insists that the future end would depend on the means that are adopted at present, and that a purely mental construction is quite meaningless but offers few pointers.

Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat, having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces.... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But will be an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever number, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

The social basis of the ideal society would be *Varna* system which is a qualitative and functional division but without its humiliation, feeling of high and low, and indignities, and guaranteeing each, fruits of one's labour. The economic basis, the relationship between labour and capital in both agricultural and industrial sectors will be a harmonised one reconciling freedom, equality and non-violence through the system of Trusteeship. There would be no need for armed forces or the police. Defence from external aggression would be organised non-violently in two stages. In the first stage, people would offer *satyagraha* at the frontier in the form of an unarmed human wall, but if this failed to stop the aggressor, occupation of the country would be resisted by complete non-cooperation. If the entire population refuses to cooperate with the invading army even risking its personal safety, it would be impossible, according to Gandhi, for the foreign army and administrative personnel to maintain themselves in the occupied territory. The same principle applies to internal security as well. Police would be like a body of reformers than a coercive agency of the state.

Gandhi later diluted his rigorous opposition to parliaments. In 1937, he points out that today's legislatures, unlike that of the past, are composed of representatives of people and that people must be taught how to stand up effectively against the government. Members of the legislature ought to render service to the people, undertake constructive social work and ensure the passage of right legislations. He clarifies that he does not want to destroy the legislatures but "destroy the system which they are created to work". In the late 1930s, Gandhi also moved away from minimal role of the state in the economy to state ownership of key industries as it would provide employment to large number of people. The state would look after secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and own land as cooperative farming by the peasants subject to state ownership of land is something that he toyed with but never really developed in full detail. Gandhi also insists that the state must eschew physical violence. He supports the idea of a decentralised, non-industrial, non-violent, self-sufficient and self-reliant free society; village *swaraj* would advance the cause of individual freedom.

8.7 CONCLUSION

Gandhi theorised about the nature of power and authority keeping in mind his commitment and preference to anarchist ideals of how to ensure wider diffusion of power to realise justice in society. His essential distrust of power and authority led him to articulate an alternative which he called enlightened anarchy. Gandhi insists on the need to anchor power and authority in the supreme values of *satya*, *ahimsa* and *dharma* to ensure that politics ultimately is service of all people in general and the underprivileged and the marginalised in particular. The distinctiveness of Gandhi lay in the fact that he desires social and political transformation through non-violent means. He also provides a vision of his ideal and at the same time accepts alterations to this ideal on grounds of feasibility.

The activist theoretician that Gandhi was, he is categorical that it would be futile to theorise about the future and expects the ongoing movements to yield the desired end, constantly reminding of the intimate relationship between ends and means. Gandhi also consistently reminds of the corruption that centralised power results in and underlines the need for the devolution of power to the grassroots. Rejecting modern civilisation and its stress on industries and technology as highly unequal and violent, Gandhi offers an alternative that would maximise self-reliance and self-sufficiency of ordinary persons. Gandhi stresses that devolution of power is the key to a better and fuller democracy. Gandhi's vision had its

critics. A major critic was Rabindranath Tagore who points out that a civilisation which is predominantly based on villages cannot advance the cause of individuals as the village-centric life revolves around the community. Offering an alternative to what Tagore offers, Gandhi argues from the standpoint of a philosophic anarchist who seeks to defend the freedom of the individual against the authority of the state and social tyranny which is why he focuses on decentralisation. He clarifies that the “outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it”. Gandhi reminds of the mutual dependence of the individual and the next larger group on a voluntary basis stating that no individual is an island and that the individual is the social self. His consistent emphasis that it is the individual and not the state with the moral authority to question and judge injustice and repression and to bring about desired changes through non-violent means is the framework within which he defends the supremacy of the individual.

8.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi's views on power and conflict resolution put him apart from all other major theories developed in the contemporary times. His serious reservations about the desirability of what constitutes the major components of modern civilisation allows him to transcend known categories of power and enables him to develop a conceptual framework which is in total variance from the other dominant views. Modern civilisation, according to Gandhi, is not conducive to reaching a higher end of life as it perpetuates false consciousness and encourages the pursuit of materialistic ends. He dismisses disparagingly power politics as irrelevant and insists that “political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life”. True religion and true politics is concerned primarily with human life and action and both must have a common basis in a common morality determined by a common set of values. Gandhi, however, rejects the idea of state religion even if a country has only one religion. Power, as Gandhi says, lies in being an actively engaged citizen with a capacity of public involvement and political participation rather than being a passive acquiescent subject. Gandhi rejects the idea and institution of the state based on two anarchistic arguments: the state represents an authority that poses a threat to the liberty of the individual and the state represents violence in an organised form. He supports the idea of a decentralised, non-industrial, non-violent, self-sufficient and self-reliant free society, in essence, a village *swaraj* that would advance the cause of individual freedom.

8.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Why does Gandhi stress on the need to spiritualise political life and political institutions?
2. Explain Gandhi's concept of power.
3. Why does Gandhi consider Truth as Authority?
4. Explain Gandhi's concept of state and obligation.
5. What is the role of authority in the anarchist society?

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