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MAHATMA GANDHI'S MORALITY: ENDS AND MEANS

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ABSTRACT

Gandhian nonviolence is often misconstrued as a static moral injunction against violence or simply a condemnation of violent resistance. Gandhi himself is often portrayed as a saintly idealist, pacifist, or purveyor of conviction politics a moral critic of politics, speaking from standpoint of conscience and truth. Gandhi's political thought bridged developments in both Indian and Western intellectual traditions and political repertoires to produce a novel synthesis and provocation. Gandhi's distinctive understanding of the means-ends question, placing Gandhi alongside Max Weber and Reinhold Niebuhr, thinkers particularly significant for the development of realism in the twentieth century. The Indians were considering the relationship between means and ends, from political debates on the proper political means to attain swaraj (self-rule) to competing interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita, a key source of modern Indian conceptions of political action. Most political and social thinkers have been concerned with the desirable goals of political system or the common and competing ends that men actually desire, and then pragmatically considered the means that are available to rulers and citizens. Most schools of thought accept a sharp dichotomy between ends and means; and discussions about means are always related with their moral implication and property, or about the extent of their theoretical and contingent compatibility with desired ends. It has been observed that in the western tradition there is a tendency of claiming that the end entirely justifies the means moral considerations cannot apply to the means except in relation to ends.

KEYWORDS: Truth, Non-Violence, Ahimsa, Ends and Means etc.

INTRODUCTION

Gandhi was a moralist through and through. He measured every man and everything in terms of morality, purity, righteousness. Truth was the touchstone of any action for him. The criterion of any action, political, personal or social should be, according to Gandhi, moral reasonableness of the act. Gandhi does not agree with those who argue that moral consideration cannot apply to the means except in relation to ends and that the ends have a moral priority. He rejects the dogma that the end justifies the means. He differs with the recent social and political thinkers who measure means with different yardsticks. Gandhi does not believe that noble ends can be achieved through dishonest or foul means. He rather gives moral priority to means in as much as they provide the standard of reference.

To think that there is no connection between means and end is a great mistake. The connection between the means and the end is the same as that between the seed and the tree. He cannot get a rose by planting a noxious weed. As we sow, so shall we reap. According to Gandhi our attention should be primarily focused on means. In September, 1933, he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru, I have concerned myself more with the conversation of the means and their progressive use. If we can take care of them, the attainment of the goal is assured. I feel that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.

RELATION BETWEEN ENDS AND MEANS

The usual division between means and ends originates from the view that they are two quite different categories. Those who uphold this view think that the relationship between the two is mainly technical and that the ethical problem of choice requires decisions about the end only and that the means will take that own course, wrote or right. But Gandhi believed in the law of karma. According to this law the relationship between means and ends is organic and that the psychology of human action demands that the means-end relationship should be viewed in terms of the growth in moral awareness of individuals and not in relation to the mechanical division of time into arbitrary intervals. The karma theory states that every act has its own independent result which affects both the subject and the object of the act. This theory also states that the acts of an individual determine the character of the subject's self in this and after life. According to the Bhagavad Gita,¹ man has control only over his action, but not over the goal. We should therefore, remain detached and not attached to the goal or result of an action. Gandhi writes, as the means, so the end indeed, the creator has given us control and that too very limited

over means not over the end. Realization of goal is in exact proportions to that of the means.² This is a proposition that admits of exception.

Thus according to Gandhi, a morally worthy end can be achieved only by adopting morally pure means. He was primarily concerned with the morally worthy means. Gandhi does not agree with those who say means are after all means. For Gandhi 'Means are after all everything. Jacques Martin Considers the problem of ends and means the basic problem in political philosophy. His view on the mean-end relationship almost coincided with that of Gandhi. According to Jacques Martin, 'Means must be proportioned and appropriate to the end, since they are ways to the end, so to speak, the end itself in its very process of coming into existence. So that applying intrinsically evil means to attain an intrinsically good end is simply nonsense end a blunder. Thus both Gandhi and Martin rejected the pragmatic view of politics and ethics and the inactive doctrine of double standards. These doctrines apply double standards to assess individual conduct and political action.

GANDHI: SATYA AND AHIMSA

Gandhi, regarded 'Satya' and 'ahimsa' as twin moral absolute. He was thoroughly convinced that means should be noble. He never thought of ends as primary and means as secondary. The nobility of the end is vitiated if the means adopted to realize that end are ignoble. Gandhi writes "after the real definition of 'Swaraj' will be determined by our action the means we adopt to achieve the goal. If we would but concentrate upon the means, Swaraj will take care of itself. He said, 'It (Swaraj) means a state such that we can maintain our separate existence without the presence of the English. If it is to be a partnership, it must be a partnership at will'. Nehru said, 'It was obvious that to most of our leaders Swaraj meant something much less than independence. Gandhiji was delightfully vague on the subject and he did not encourage clear thinking about it either.'

In his moral and political thought, Gandhi gave Satya and Ahimsa the highest importance and said that ahimsa is the means to reach satya, which is the end. The pursuit of satya leads to the recognition of the need for ahimsa to a point where we hold to ahimsa as the immediate, tangible part of the ultimate Truth. Gandhi sometimes also equated satya with ahimsa – they are like two sides of a coin, he said – for they are intertwined and it is impossible to disentangle and separate them. But at other times, Gandhi clearly distinguished between the two.

Gandhi was deeply influenced by the message of view of the Gita in his employing morally, right means in furthering political ends.

Gandhi Said, “When doubts surround me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible effect on me, I owe it to the teachings of Bhagavad Gita.”³ Gandhi confessed, “To me Gita Became infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference.” He was convinced that a man must be free from anxiety about the result of his action. If our means are pure and our course is just and clear, all features are removed. Impure means result in impure-end. Just as peace cannot be attained through was freedom through cruel deed or justice through unjust means, similarly truth cannot be attained through untruth means Gandhi outright by rejected the doctrine that end justifies the means. A moral means is almost an end in itself because virtue is its own reward.

Gandhi criticizes the utilitarian stand of means and ends, if means are secondary to ends and they are not chosen carefully the ends are likely to be out of right. Means and methods can be controlled and guaranteed, so should devise and plans them. Carefully, ends are unforeseeable. So, it is to unnecessarily worry about the results. We should develop an attitude of detachment about the consequences. End of dominated approach can have dangerous manifestations. Gandhi said, “If one takes care of the means the end will take care of itself.”

PRESERVATION OF SELF REALIZATION

The notion of self-preservation, the end justifies the means is attributed to Kautilya of India and to Machiavelli of the west. According to this doctrine, any means necessary for securing the end, is justified. Principle and morality have no place in this doctrine. According to Machiavelli, any means could be justified to capture, consolidate and achieve end power. For the Machiavellian philosophy there is no relation between means and ends. Its exponents and advocates regard end as primary and means, as secondary. They violate the moral law in the practice of politics. For them, immortality, faithlessness, tyranny, murder or bloodshed are justifiable means for politics. They justify the violation of moral laws on the expense of unavoidable circumstances.

As regards means and end, Gandhi was diametrical opposed to the Kautillyian and Machiavellian views. To Gandhi power is a part of life and, therefore, it must confirm to the moral laws that govern life. Gandhi considers means as important as the end. He always struck to the purity of means. Only legitimate means can lead to

legitimate ends. Gandhi helped that what was morally wrong could not be politically right. In personal and public life Gandhi ‘kept aloft the moral validity of an act and the right manner of performing it. At the moral level, he advocated the identification of means and ends.

As already stated, Gandhi wanted every act to be weighed in the balanced of ‘Satya’ and ‘Ahimsa’.⁴ Man is to eve. No man is absolutely free from weakness and error. But their justification make to all the difference to our personal and political integrity. We cannot be fee from the blame of truthfulness and dishonesty in the present on the excuse that we shall be tomorrow, when we are stronger or when conditions are more favourable. According to Gandhi, a violent revolution can never lead t a nonviolent society in future. Again, it is not sometimes, but always that the end changes in character as a result of the means adopted in its attainment. Gandhi considered, From God as Truth to Truth as God’. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.’

Gandhi laid stress on the ‘organic connection’ between ends and means. Evil and goodness cannot go hand in hand. A society which reflects the brotherhood of man cannot be protected by lies, violence, treachery etc. To elevate ends at the cost of means is to lose sight of reality. Our relations with other people help us in realizing the general good of human life happiness and self realization. Our methods and means have far reaching effect on human relations than the identity of limited ends. Good personal relation depend mainly on “treating people right” and doing as you would be done by these common places refer to means which lead to lasting and fruitful results. Gandhi’s political faithful results. Gandhi’s political faith was that could lead to heading process of reconciliation among societies and nations.

The ends that we select should be in harmony with our ultimate goal and cur chosen means. Adherence to a rule in a particular situation can generate ends of wide social significance. The ideal of ‘*Swaraj*’⁵ an end that included but went beyond that of political of the use of his principles in the society of the British India. After a long reflection on the effect of the British rule upon the morel stature of his people that he came to see that his means were in conflict with any kind of foreign domination of his country. Gandhi’s other end followed from the direct application of his principles to the situations in which Gandhi and his followers found themselves. He said, ‘True democracy or the *Swaraj* of the masses can never come through 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*.⁷ My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and yet independent for many others in which dependence is a necessity.

Gandhi advocated that non-violence must be accepted as the law of life. Ahimsa is necessary for seeking and finding truth for Gandhi truth. Ahimsa, love and God meant the same thing; I do not regard God as a person, truth for me as God. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which do not know. To me God is truth and love, God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness, God is the source of light and life and yet he is above beyond all these. To Gandhi and life and yet he is above be truth as an ultimate goal was the absolute, whereas truth as a means was ahimsa which was nothing but true manifestation of the motive force of love. Gandhi uses truth both as an end and a means. Thus in Gandhian philosophy, ‘means and end become convertible terms. ‘Gandhi’s love in the form of ahimsa was the way to truth. He emphasizes the significance of ahimsa. He held that if the means are taken care of, the end take care of itself.

AHIMSA AND SATYAGRAHA

Gandhi was a lovely pilgrim on the path of ahimsa. For him the weapon of ahimsa was superior to all nuclear weapons. The atomic bomb had shaken people’s faith in non-violence. But Gandhi such to his guns even when in the 20th century there was a tug of war between the moral and spiritual forces on the one hand, end the physical and material forces on the other. For Gandhi, the force of the spirit is ever progressive and endless. This force resides in everybody, as man, women and child. Gandhi believed that just as bomb cannot be destroyed by counter-booms in the same way violence cannot be destroyed by counter-violence. Man can get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome by love only. Gandhi’s doctrine of means arid ends is exemplified in his philosophy of ‘Satyagraha’. Purity and non-violence of the Satyagrahi was always fundamental to him. A seeker after truth aims at self-realization through social service.⁷ The weapon of Satyagraha does away with the evils and obstacles that stand in the way of realizing truthful and just goals. According to Gandhi, ‘the moral equivalent of war is Satyagraha. Gandhi’s creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It does not brook cowardice or weakness, Satyagraha implies self-suffering. It is a mode of social action directed towards the resolution of political and social conflicts within and between communities. It is a means of stimulating action

when fails to produce an effect. Unlike flu effects of war, the solution brought about by Satyagraha are lasting because they are based on persuasion and communication and not on compulsion. Non-violent direct action in Satyagraha makes the opponent aware of the Satyagrahi claims and problems. This is the moral approach toward the solution of conflicts. Satyagraha tests one’s objectives more comprehensively than does any other kind of struggle. It is a method that adds to the creativeness of conflict.

In order to maintain the Satyagrahi’s truthfulness, Gandhi’s methods place greater emphasis on means rather than on ends. A Satyagrahi’s obligation to resist evil in any form is seen by Gandhi as moral debt which he owed to his opponent as well as to himself. In his view failure to oppose what is unjust does not befit the dignity of a human being and must undermine one’s self respect. Satyagraha is a method of resistance which seeks to bring greater freedom to both sides in a long and sometimes bitter struggle.⁸ As Anthony Wedgwood Benn remarked on the occasion of Nehru’s death, it is some times said that Britain liberated India. In fact the reserves are the truth. Gandhi and Nehru liberated us by winning their freedom, they freed us from the ignorance and prejudice that lay behind myth of Britain’s Imperial destiny.

Gandhi emphasized mostly on ahimsa – for it is within our reach (it is the means) – but he constantly maintained that satya is superior to ahimsa, if a comparison must be instituted between inseparable concepts. He, in fact, distinguished between the positive and negative meanings of ahimsa and satya, but regarded ahimsa as negative in relation to satya; this because of his identification of satya with reality – the derivation of satya from Sat.

Moral life was not for Gandhi a matter of achieving specific objectives. He considered ‘Satya’ the supreme common end and target for all. Satya’ does not imply an abstraction but it refers to the human activity and constructive programme activities for the benefit and welfare of humanity. Of course, all these activities Satyagraha, civil disobedience movements and ether campaigns are to be devised and justified with reference to Satya and ‘ahimsa’. All the means and programmes of action are to be measured with the yardstick of ‘Satya’ and ‘ahimsa’. Non-violence is the test of one’s moral integrity. It has to be justified and exemplified through one’s actions in the society. He said, “That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humanity, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.” He also said, ‘Truth implies love and Firmness engenders and therefore serves as

a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, i.e. the force with is born of truth and love and non-violence’.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi’s view of the relation between ahimsa and satya is of means and end and yet also of identity. To better understand the relation between these two concept we can formulate three propositions. The pursuit of satya gives us the humility to accept the need for ahimsa in our relationship with other fellow men. That is, satya implies ahimsa. Secondly, the pursuit of ahimsa shows that himsa is rooted in fear which can only be removed by the strength which comes from satya. So, ahimsa presupposes satya. Thirdly, that although satya is higher than ahimsa, ahimsa is in practice more important -for it the means, which is the only thing directly available to us. This last proposition also tells us that the degree of ahimsa we display is a measure of the degree of satya we possess.

Gandhi has emphasized that in embarking on a campaign or a constructive programme, one should not lose sight of the moral value of means adopted. The means must be worthy of the end. Gandhi outright rejects the Kautlean or Machiavellian theory that the end justified the means. He was thoroughly convinced that truth is not

compatible with the adoption of dishonest means or condoning of untruth. Gandhi’s ‘Satyagrahi’ an essential accomplishment of the constructive programme was an instrument of struggle which he fought for the welfare of the common people. This powerful weapon of Satyagraha invented by Gandhi can be wielded by the people to fight against injustice and tyranny. To a Satyagrahi, every man is ‘a friend or a brother. A Satyagrahi only acts against the evil and not against the evil-doer, since doer is only a diseased person and the aim of a Satyagrahi is to cure the diseased psychology.

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