

Gandhian Social work and his Constructive Programme: Contextualizing his *Satyagrah* for the peaceful world.

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Abstract

Paper highlights three Satyagrah of Gandhiji. Champaran Satyagrah peasant movement was first Satyagrah prevailing situation of indigo planters and role of Gandhiji. It also enumerates his philosophy for world peace through global programme of nonviolence and truthfulness, constructive programs and his concept of the social work education. It concludes Gandhian principles can transform Global world for peace through Professional social work education by incorporating the Constructive Program as suggested by Gandhi. His philosophy- satyagrah, ahimsa and swadeshi are well included in Constructive Programmes for making more relevant for peace today. The social work practitioner may feel teaching and training of Social work student should be based on Constructive Programme for making Sarvodaya Society and a Sarvodaya social Order as Gandhi enshrined in his philosophy.

Keywords: *Satyagrah; Constructive Programme; Gandhian Social Work.*

1. Introduction

We explore the Gandhian philosophy of satyagrahas after his arrival to India from South Africa in this paper. The Constructive Work and Social work were two different things for Gandhiji. The main aims of former lie in changing the basic social and economic structure of Indian Society. The philosophical development of Gandhian model of Social work practice for a peaceful world elaborates the Gandhian concept of Social work and Constructive program for social transformation of Indian society. Further Gandhian concepts of Social work are the product of different aspects of the 20th century. Some of the aspects are in community living together, help the needy, sick, and unfortunate people are the collective responsibility of the society. These are discussed in detail in the paper and finally it tries to evaluate whether can we look forwards for the peace full world with this philosophy? As we are well aware that he had faced different kind suffering, as Indian, in South Africa. His work in Champaran and Kheda Peasant Movement made him prominent as he began to participate in mass movement of National Congress. These movement and his active participations had transformed him to *mahatma* (Mrinal, 2017).

2. Philosophy of *Satyagraha*: 1917-1918

Gandhiji organised three localized satyagrahas between 1917 and 1918. First was in Champaran district of Bihar in April 1917; second campaign was in February 1918 in Ahmedabad and last campaign Gandhi led was in Kheda which began in March 1918. We summarised the brief details of three *satyagrah* as campaigns here.

The Champaran satyagraha, was in response to the personal request of a farmer Raj Kumar Shukla who approached Gandhi for mediation in a case of extreme agrarian exploitation of peasants in Champaran. The European indigo planters forced the petty farmers of Champaran to grow indigo on the best portion of their land for a paltry consideration through a system called *tin-kathiya*. Where indigo cultivation had stopped because it ceased to be a commercial proposition for the planters, the peasants was made to pay heavy damages or compensation in the form of tawan or sharabheshi. Though there was great resentment among the farmers, they were helpless against the planters who had the support of the local government. Chaudhuri (1996) mentions about Champaran, peasant movement

Champaran mission was historic in more than one sense. For the first time, the people saw that there was nothing secretive in politics. Politics was based on utmost probity and openness. A new political culture was created which had no parallel in history. This was the greatest significance of the Champaran mission. Gradually that culture pervaded the entire life of the society. The nonviolent culture gradually eroded the culture of extremism and terrorism. Political rhetoric also began to change. Champaran was a people-oriented struggle which stood as a distinct alternative to the earlier elite-dominated movements. Champaran also became a springboard which lifted Gandhi to national heights.

As Gandhi arrived in Champaran, the district magistrate ordered him to leave the district immediately, but he disobeyed the order. He was compelled by the higher law of his conscience. He suffered a brief period of incarceration as a result. After his release, he carried out a vigorous and thorough investigation of the charges against the planters with the help of local pleaders and volunteers. Thousands of peasants were behind him as was proved by their statement's despite of threats from the planters. They were carefully instructed by Gandhi in the principles of satyagraha, especially regarding the value of non-violence and firm adherence to their demands. He also kept the district authorities constantly informed of his activities. The upshot of his campaign was that the government was impelled to appoint a committee of enquiry in which Gandhi served as the peasants' representative. All his charges were accepted and the tin-kathiya system was abolished.

There were some observations in Champaran, peasant movement. The emphasis on fair means was obvious and firm, but it was the non-violent resistance to oppression that achieved the objective. Despite the mass mobilization in the area, there was no incidence of violence by the peasants, which naturally added to the credibility of the technique of satyagraha. The self-confidence of the peasants was greatly enhanced for they realized that there was a plausible solution to their problems through a method that involved no violent confrontation with authority. For Gandhi, this was only the beginning as he saw in Champaran a reflection of the true condition of the peasantry in India. Their extreme poverty and backwardness motivated him to take steps towards improving their social conditions. The greatest need, he perceived, was for all-round education, both for children and adults. He could now rely on an enthusiastic response and, with the help of local people in November 1917 he set up several schools, where the teachers were all volunteers with independent means, many of them from Mumbai and Gujarat. Gandhi also invited the help of the local authorities in the task, which he felt would benefit everyone. With regard to the main purpose of these schools, he wrote, "The chief thing aimed at is contact of the children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character. That to me is education."

Through his social activities in Champaran district, Gandhi was able to highlight two factors- important for those seeking social change through satyagraha. He showed that the trust of the local masses had to be gained by identifying with their problems and issues, and that material resources for voluntary work would not be lacking once the credibility of a cause was established.

Kheda (Gujarat) Satyagraha, Second Satyagraha, began in March 1918. It was more important for raising peasant consciousness and realization of the latent strength of the Indian peasantry. Gandhi said the significance of the campaign in the following manner: "The movement is intended to assert the right of the people to be effectively heard in matters concerning themselves." The cause was the government's refusal to grant a remission in revenue even though the peasants claimed their crops had failed. After carrying out a thorough examination, Gandhi found the peasants' demand to be just and wrote to the local authorities requesting suspension of revenue. When this request was not granted, he advised the peasants to simply refuse to pay the revenue and prepare stoically for the consequences.

There were several important features of this campaign. As satyagraha demanded total commitment to truthful means for pursuing a cause, Gandhi believed that the taking of a public pledge would greatly enhance the resolve of a people undertaking satyagraha. He, therefore, instituted the system of taking a pledge publicly and formulated the pledge on behalf of the peasants. It was a solemn declaration that they would not pay the government dues and would undergo all the suffering this might entail. The pledge was taken by most peasants in all the villages of the district. Gandhi personally toured the villages, propagating his message of firm non-violent resistance and tried to keep up the morale of the peasants, who suffered silently as they saw their goods auctioned and cattle sold off. He posted circulars about the situation to the villages concerned and wrote extensively to the newspapers, explaining the issues involved.

A very important plank of the campaign was Gandhi's direct appeal to the women in the villages. He urged them to fully support their men in the fight for justice and self-respect and bear with patience whatever loss was incurred, as in Champaran, in Kheda too Gandhi was assisted by a band of committed volunteers who helped him sustain the tempo of the campaign. His written instructions to them illustrate the importance he attached to the values of non-violence, honesty and courtesy.

Finally, on 3 June 1918, the government reluctantly granted relief to the peasants. The campaign ended, but Gandhi was led to remark,

"The above orders have not been passed either with generosity or with the heart in them." This fact apart, there is no doubt about the psychological impact of this struggle. The national press carried frequent reports of it and Gandhi and satyagraha became familiar topics of discussion throughout the country. It was recognized that even the poor and backward could, if they wanted, get justice from the rulers without force of any kind, provided they were prepared to suffer. The satyagraha campaign that Gandhi undertook in February 1918 in Ahmedabad was also significant because it defined a new and harmonious relationship between capital and labour. The crux of the dispute between the textile industrialists and their workers was that while the workers demanded a 50 per cent wage increase, the mill owners were prepared to grant only 20 per cent.

Gandhi was asked to intervene by Ambalal Sarabhai, a mill owner and a friend of Gandhi. Arbitration proceedings had started, but the workers in some factories struck work. In retaliation, the mill owners cancelled arbitration and gave the workers the option of accepting a 20 per cent increase or being discharged after being paid their due wages. The workers chose the latter and the mill owners declared a lockout on 22 February 1918. On his own initiative, Gandhi undertook to lead the workers and get them their just demands. After a survey of the wage scales in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, Gandhi persuaded the workers to accept a 35 per cent increase in wages as a fair demand, but the mill owners refused to grant this.

Gandhi believed that if the workers could demonstrate that they were prepared to suffer all hardships and stick to their demand and not use violence or threats of any kind, they would win their case. He asked all of them to take a public pledge to this effect. Among others, Gandhi received wholehearted support from Ambalal's sister, Anasuyaben, who was also a confidante of the workers. Through public meetings, visits to workers' homes and instructive leaflets, Gandhi and his co-workers tried to drive home to the striking workers the significance of their struggle – the fundamental role of workers in society, the question of their rights and self-respect, and the need to remain non-violent and maintain themselves through other means, such as manual labour.

In spite of Gandhi's efforts, the workers began to lose hope and some of them returned to work when the lockout was lifted on 13 March 1918. Gandhi realized that only through a drastic personal example would he be able to restrain the remaining workers from betraying their pledge. Therefore, he declared his resolve to fast from 15 March till either the workers got a 35 per cent increase in wages or they simply repudiated their pledge.

Apart from its immediate positive effect on the workers, the fast-put great moral pressure on the mill owners, some of whom got ready to concede the workers' demand. But Gandhi regarded this concession as unfortunate and asked them to be guided in their decision by their sense of justice, rather than concern for him. Gandhi's suggestion of appointing an arbitrator was accepted by the mill owners and a settlement was arrived at on 18 March, whereby the workers were granted a 35 per cent increase in wages.

Three important principles were illustrated by the Ahmedabad *satyagraha* campaign. First, serious industrial disputes could be settled by peaceful arbitration, rather than militant protests. Second, the two classes of capitalists and workers were interdependent and could work

in harmony. Third, wealthy industrialists could behave as their workers' 'trustees'. Gandhi's intervention in the Ahmedabad textile mill workers' strike had a significant impact on labour relations in the Ahmedabad region.

In 1920, Gandhi organized the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, which became one of the most powerful labour unions in the country. It was based on the system of joint arbitration and conciliation. Its constitution provided for recourse to strikes only in case of failure of arbitration. The association contributed to a genuine improvement in the social conditions of the workers through comprehensive welfare measures. From 1937, the association also trained its members in a supplementary occupation to provide sustenance for rainy days, as, for example, during a lockout. Gandhi's experience of the three localized satyagraha campaigns discussed above was the prelude to similar campaigns led by him at the all India level. The efficacy and credibility of this instrument of change was established in both the agrarian and industrial spheres.

3. Transformation of Gandhiji: *Champaran Peasant Movement and after*

Bihar Provincial Congress Committee raised the sufferings of the Champaran peasants in its Annual conference. Some of the prominent leaders provided strength and direction to the movement. The Provincial Congress Committee recommended an inquiry for the suffering of Champaran peasants during 1915. In May, 1917 Gandhiji showed his concern to give the peasants freedom from landlords and government. Gandhiji wanted to improve the relations between the zamindars and tenants. The struggle of the Champaran peasants began during April 1917.

The British government adopted several oppressive methods for the peasants. The Champaran peasant movement had to undergo severe sufferings. But the Gandhian approach to participation of the general peasantry and the ideology of non-violence gave strength to the peasants. M K Gandhi started the non-cooperation in a smaller way by giving leadership to the peasant struggles in Champaran (Bihar) and later on in Kheda, Gujarat. The Champaran peasant movement, indigo planters in Champaran, was a struggle against suffering and oppression of British planters. It began rapidly when Gandhi joined after returning from South Africa. Both struggles were concerned the peasants for their demands. Champaran peasant movement began during 1917-18 to create awakening among the Indian peasants planting the indigo against the European planters. These British planters were exploiting the Indian indigo planters on a low cost of their labour.

Gandhi studied the grievances of the Champaran peasantry. The peasants opposed not only the European planters but also the Indian zamindars due to: there was an enormous increase in the land rent; peasants were obliged to grow indigo which curtailed their freedom of cultivation; compelled to devote the best part of their land for growing grow indigo crops as desired by the landlord which cause damage to fertility of soil. The peasants were paid very poor wages and it was very difficult for them to earn their livelihood. British planters forced Indian ryots to plant indigo which was a form of colonial exploitation and it finally yield into peasant unrest in Chamaparan. The Champaran peasants suffered terribly due to the policies of the European planters which further fueled to oppression of the peasants by Indian landlords and the government officials. Here Gandhi, after returning from South Africa, started his non-cooperation movement and satyagraha in Champaran. Soon peasants accepted the leadership of Gandhi and in the end the incidence of Chauri-Chaura turned the movement to violence. Gandhiji was not happy with all this. The Champaran peasant movement turned into the national movement of independence.

The Champaran movement result into a success and it is described as a success story of peasant movements in India. The main effects were: enactment of Champaran Agrarian Act assented by Governor General of India on 1st May, 1918. However, there were few scholars who did not consider the Champaran movement as a big success. Because this movement did not succeed to strike against the exploitation and discrimination with which the peasants suffered. As Ramesh Chandra Dutt, for instance, argued that the settlements made between the government and the peasants did not embrace the exploitation of our peasants by *zamindars*, so also this agitation led by the Mahatma in Champaran did not lead up to any fight against the main causes for the terrible poverty and sufferings of Champaran peasants, namely, the excessive rents and exorbitant incidence of debts. But Gandhi felt a change in Champaran, as Ranjit Chaudhuri (1996) mentions

"...For Gandhi, truth and morality were an article of faith. He knew that nation-building and nation's survival depended on its moral foundations. He never subscribed to the view that good society could be made out of immoral acts. So also, people's struggle could not be sustained if it was not based on morality and truth. Since truth was indivisible, there was no difference between the private truth and the public truth. To Gandhi, the dichotomy between the esoteric truth and the public truth was redundant because the complex relations between the two were demystified by him and thus made simple. His concept of moral authority has no mystique in it. Moral authority remained dormant in the people and Gandhi's contribution was to bring it out to surface by making the people active. Then the moral authority became a reality. The people came to realise that they possessed a powerful force which Gandhi called soul force. The people became conscious of it as their fight brought dignity to them. Legitimacy of the moral authority of the people was established by restoring self-respect to the people."

4. Relevance of Gandhiji-Toward the peaceful world

Several scholars have reviewed Gandhian relevance then in contemporary world and now in the present century. Basic aspects of his framework are satayagrath, adherence to truth; Ahimsa, non-violence; *swadeshi*, self-reliance; Bread Labor and Equality. David and Von Soet(1999) examined professional peace consciousness for social work based on the Gandhian principles to deal with evils of the society as mentioned latter. They examined implication of social work practice at three different level of its practice: micro, meso and macro level social work practice. Micro level of practice concerns to the individual members of the society, meso level of practice means community, groups etc and macro level practice means the social, cultural and economics reformation the society. All are discussed later in this paper besides social work implication for curriculum goals, objectives, suggestion foundation areas of human behaviour in social environment, multi-level social work practice and policy.

As believed, Gandhian perspective provides a readdressing mechanism for the society. Mohan (1992) expressed that if his perspective incorporated into practicing social work then it would be paradigmatic shift in our professional consciousness about the violence and our place in global order. It indicates that social worker doing the welfare work and understanding the relationship between violence and oppression of inherent in social as well as economic injustice. Professional quality, if added to peace consciousness then it would enhance education and professional capabilities of the social worker.

It is already mentioned that main value of social work has emphasised social justice, equity, self-determination and human rights. So, social workers are inherently well suited for primary role of peacemaking at grass root level of community. It requires personal qualities

and skills to be effective social workers and parallel with those required for peace making. Both are consistent to the core Gandhian principles.

The implication for social worker practice can be seen at micro, meso and macro level. Today social worker practices can be seen in such a world which is full of violence-personal violence, social, economic and global violence. But Gandhian principles provide a way to understand at a deeper level of its realities and require interventions at these levels of social work practice. Micro level practice means, in Gandhian model, the practice at individual level including dignity, respect, compassion, love, opportunity and material support. Such caring qualities of social work practice for the victims of domestic violence, child abuses etc mean responding to injustice with non-violent action in the Gandhian framework (Walz, Saharma and Birnbaum, 1990). This framework requires a strong faith in goodness of people and principle of love and nonviolence at individual level, micro level practice. It is greatest challenge for all of us now for such a transformation on an individual which is main issue of people as God's instrument in Gandhian philosophy needs to be adopted by every social worker. His Swadeshi movement is nothing but a micro level-individual- transformation of people at bottom of the society. This had been a serious consideration of Gandhian principle challenging the social worker to serve welfare of all people. Swadeshi movement means promoting the self-reliant, harmony religion, culture and indigenous ways of living rather than operating from white, middle class social work practice. Hence, Gandhian work argues for reordering the services priorities and re-newing our commitment to serve the poor and oppressed (*Ibid*).

Similarly, meso level practice addresses the physical violence among individuals, in group, community. Here Gandhian framework felt the need to broaden the professional understanding of violence and its interventions. Gandhi felt need to explore the two aspects of violence-physical and passive in form of decriminalisation, oppression and exploitation (Dasgupta, 1968). Further it also reduces personal, behavioural, passive and structural violence exists in the unjust social structures of our institutions which often go unnoticed. They appear as "violence which not seen as such" (Keefe and Roberts, 1991). Gil (1998) motioned about social work practice through Gandhian Philosophy in community organisation must emphasised on social intervention required for transformation of unjust and violent system. As Gandhi had derived the clear set of principles to be followed in "Civil Disobedience" or in *satyagrah* actions from his own "Experiment with Truth" (Walz et al, 1990).

In case of macro level social practice, social work addresses the greater need of bigger social structures, particularly equitable to economic system. He felt that capitalism, mass production, and its distribution as irresponsible aspects of economic system. He had firm belief in the promotion of cottage industries for character building promoting the decentralisation of economy. In this sense, social work intervention aims at reducing poverty and its related violence, promotion economic alternatives community-based credit scheme for poor people.

5. Social work education-emerging implications for peace

Education is the basic fabric of a society which can stimulate positive changes to improve the human conditions, for the just society, a society free of violence, and many more issues can be dealt well with proper curriculum of social work. Professional social workers – students, teachers, and fieldworkers- are the main peace-making people. Gandhian philosophy provides rich resources for work. Peace-making refers to those conditions which can give the best possible environment for development of human beings (Reasonson, 1988) Van Soest (1997) has summarized the development of curriculum model for the future social workers. Curriculum goals and learning objective are well explained (David and Von Soet, 1999; Billups, 1990; Hokenstad et al, 1992) is

6. Gandhi and his concept of social work

Gandhian concepts of Social work are the product of different aspects of the 20th century. Some of the aspects are: in community living together, help the needy, sick, and unfortunate people are the collective responsibility of the society. Earlier both Buddha and Jesus emphasized these aspects too. But Gandhi equally voiced for the welfare of all through Sarvodaya-rise or awakening of all people (Chowdhary, 1992). His concept also imbibed Constructive Programme, then need of independence, means Poorna Sarvraj or complete independence. Narayansamy says about Gandhian Social work that social work is the social institution dealing with day to day needs in present besides the social and cultural forces of the society (Narayansamy, 2000). His concept of social work had been concerned to non-violence (Ahimsa) and Sarvodaya-rise or awakening of all people. As far as the Constructive Programme, it is pertinent to think about his contribution to social theory and practice of social work (*Ibid*. p-210). Yaras (1965) wrote about Indian students who could learn basic values of professional social work more easily, if they could see themselves as in different ways of saying same thing as that have been said by our saints, leaders, reformers and philosophers.

Gandhian concept of Constructive Programme emphasized on the reconstruction of men and society by correcting private and public life. This is what Gandhi regarded as constructive work to be "Fulfillment of Swaraj" (Devadoss, 1924). Similarly Vinoba Bhave, felt that non-violence require no external agency but need only the inner self belief to propagate it. It only requires self-purification, services to living human beings, and embracing love and fearlessness. Here Vinoba Bhave seems to feel a kind brotherhood. The Sarva Seva Sangh propagates his ideology. A constructive worker must keep away from the power politics though it does not imply any kind of non-cooperation with government and polices for welfare the people. In this sense, Sarvodaya thinkers still experimenting to discover to find out how this programme can enthusiasm the people with this programme for realizing latter (*ibid*). Here it seems during the contemporary freedom of struggle, sarvodaya- emerged due to the felt needs when eminent leaders –mainly Gandhi, M. K. began to think for working welfare of the all people. This what Vinoba Bhave attributed as "Sarva Seva Sangh" or "jan seva" wherein then contemporary leaders led to think what to do? How to do and for whom it has to be done? These were some relevant questions for "Sarvodaya programme".

Gandhi M K mentioned about 18 areas of Constructive Programme- community unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, khadi, village industries, village sanitation, new/basic education, adult education, women, education in health and hygiene, , development of provisional language, national language, economic equality, Kisan/framers, labour, advivasi, leprs and students. These were the core aspects of Gandhian Constructive Programme for construction of "Poorna Swaraj" or complete independence, by truthful and non-violence means (Gandhi, 1948). He had visualized two things from this programme. First, it can establish moral and spiritual values, unity among all people without any distinction, social justices and self-reliant in people life and society. Second, it will reform the entire society-all social problems of Indian society shall be eradicated and shall form a new social order "Sarvodaya Samaj"-a society of elevated/learned people free from immorality, social injustice, exploitation and political subjugation. It was clear in his mind which had

conceptualized a new social order for Indian society- a society free from class, caste and state society based on the principles of truth in thoughts, words and action, non-violence in human behavior, non-cooperation with evil, decentralization of power and productions and principles of bread labour for living (Ibid,p-11)

7. Conclusion: constructive work or social work

The Constructive Work and Social work were two different things for Gandhi. The main aims of former lie in changing the basic social and economic structure of Indian Society. Further Narayansamy(2000) elaborates that Constructive Work is not the same as traditional social work. Now social work has emerged through needs and problems of urban or civilized society which is curative in nature whereas Constructive Work is preventive in its endeavor for achieving socially healthy cooperative behavior in the society. Furthermore, it is based on non-violence, quality, eliminating violence, domination and inequality which are basic factors of every human society (Ibid, p-212).

Some of dedicated and contemporary workers like Soundarm, and Ramachandran, have developed Gandhian Model in 1956 for achieving the goals of Constructive Programme. It finally emerged as Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) basically aimed for new education or Nai Talim as Gandhi conceived in his 18 constructive programs. Today GRI is the deemed University contributing the education in constructive programs to rural people. Furthermore Narayansamy(2000) looks Constructive Programme in new Millennium goals concerning various aspects ranging from population control, AIDS/HIV, to female feticides, education of slum dwellers. He thinks that Constructive Programme is the mother of all developmental work and complement each other and had desired the indigenisation and Indainisation of social work so it may replace to Master of Social work (MSW) to Master of Constructive Work (MSC). All University teaching school of Social work should include Constructive Programme in their MSW syllabus in order to realize Gandhian concept of Social work. Then it will definitively create Sarvodaya Society and a Sarvodaya social Order (Ibid, p-216-17).

We sum up that there are no doubt Gandhian principles can transform Global world for peace through Professional social work education by incorporating the Constructive Program as suggested by Gandhi. His philosophy- *satyagrah*, *ahimsa* and *swadeshi* are well included in Constructive Programmes for making more relevant for peace today. The social work practitioner may feel teaching and training of Social work student should be based on Constructive Programme for making Sarvodaya Society and a Sarvodaya social Order as Gandhi enshrined in his philosophy.

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