

GANDHI : ARCHITECT OF NON VIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

**(Text of lecture delivered by Ambassador (Retd) Alan Nazareth
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The architecture of Gandhi's non violent conflict resolution is structured on the following principles:

"The world rests upon the bedrock of Satya, which being what is can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of Satyagraha in a nutshell".

"There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. That Power is God and a Living Force. Satyagraha is soul force pure and simple and connotes the living Law of Life. This law will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not and just as a scientist works wonders with various applications of laws of nature, so also can one who applies the law of love with scientific precision."

"This force is to violence and therefore to all tyranny and injustice, what light is to darkness. In politics, its use is based upon the immutable maxim, that government of the people is possible only so long as they consent either consciously or unconsciously to be governed."

"The objective of all non-violent struggle is to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement and never the defeat, much less the humiliation of the opponent."

"A non-violent revolution is not a programme for seizure of power. It is an effort for transformation of relationships ending in a peaceful transfer of power."

"Three fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world would disappear if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint"

"Peace will come when Truth is pursued, and Truth implies Justice"

The first major conflict issue Gandhi faced was Racialism because of which he was thrown out of the first class carriage he was seated in at Pietermaritzberg Station in South Africa. despite having a first class ticket

and not causing any disturbance to a fellow passenger. When this happened he was initially tempted to return to India but recalled Lord Krishna's injunction in the Bhagwat Gita that when faced with Injustice and evil, one's bounden duty is to confront it irrespective of success or failure. Being deeply imbued with Jainism's 'Ahimsa Paramo Dharma' ethic he was aware he had to do this non violently. From Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount' exhortation that "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness" he was conscious that this would entail self suffering. His 'Satyagraha' conflict resolution strategy, which he conceived at this time and publicly enunciated on September 11, 1906 emanated from these spiritual inspirations. The prime requirements for its practice was a deep faith in the "*indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything*" and a firm commitment to truth, love and non violence. It also required identification of the root causes of every conflict before undertaking to confront it..

Richard Attenborough's 'Gandhi' film clearly shows where and how Gandhi enunciated his 'Satyagraha' strategy and launched it by burning his / his supporters racial identity passes as their protest against the unjust / humiliating Racial Laws of South Africa. It also shows their subsequent imprisonment / suffering for this "crime" as also their final triumph. What it does not show is the amazing transformation in the relationship between Gen. Smuts and Gandhi. The former had inflicted much humiliation and suffering on Gandhi yet in taking leave of him on the eve of his departure for India, Gandhi presented him with a pair of slippers he had himself made while in prison. The general preserved them and some years later paid Gandhi the following glowing tribute : "Gandhi was one of the great men of my time and my acquaintance with him over a period of 30 years has only deepened my high respect for him. I always found him ready to discuss in a reasonable and fair minded manner and always searching for a solution along peaceful lines. Gandhi has left behind a name almost unequalled in the world today. He is an outstanding leader of men".

The Attenborough film also shows how effectively Gandhi handled the conflict between the Indigo farmers of Champaran and their British landlords and between the Indian people and their colonial masters over the unjust Salt Law. Both these conflicts were settled with mutual satisfaction and without animosity despite the injustices and sufferings inflicted by the British on the Indians. When Independence was granted

both sides parted as friends and India joined the British Commonwealth as an equal partner. It also requested the British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten to be its Governor General until its Constitution was drafted and adopted and it emerged as a sovereign Republic. The eminent British historian Arnold Toynbee wrote “ Gandhi was as much a benefactor of Britain as of his own country. He made it impossible for us to go on ruling India but at the same time made it possible for us to abdicate without rancor and without dishonor.

The radical transformation which Gandhi's ‘Satyagraha’ strategy brought about in India is also noteworthy. Almost overnight a minimally democratic, highly caste ridden, feudal, women and “untouchables” oppressed India was transformed into a Constitutional democracy based on universal adult franchise in which all forms of discrimination based on caste, creed, sex and social status was banned and positive discrimination measures provided for the benefit of India's most disadvantaged citizens.

The extent to which Gandhi's Satyagraha (known in the US & other foreign countries as “Soul Force”) strategy has transformed the global scenario is seen in the following facts :

When India attained Independence and was admitted to the UN it was its 37th member. Today it has 192 members ! Nearly all of these 155 new UN member countries are former European colonies. Most of them attained their independence through ‘soul force’ struggles, aided by India's strenuous decolonization efforts at the UN.

The US had fought a four year long civil war in order to abolish slavery and preserve its unity. It lost more of its soldiers in this war (mainly because of lack of medical care for the wounded) than in the two World Wars. Yet the political and social status of the former slaves remained largely unchanged until one intrepid middle aged, Gandhi inspired woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery City bus on December 1, 1955, as she was then legally required to do. She was penalized for this “crime” with a fine and imprisonment. But the year long boycott of the Montgomery City buses which that city's blacks, which was conceived led by another Gandhi inspired, recently ordained, 24 year old black pastor named Martin Luther King initially bankrupted the mentioned bus company and subsequently led to the US Supreme Court banning racial discrimination in all public services and places all over the US. The

crowning glory of this national movement to end racial discrimination in the US which Rosa Parks triggered and Martin Luther King had led for 13 years until his assassination in 1968, was the entry of a black president in the White House in January 2008. For over 50 years now Rosa Parks has been hailed as the “Mother of the American Freedom Movement”. When she died in 2005 at age 92, her body was placed in the “Rotunda” in Washington for public tribute and a statue of hers now adorns its Statuary of America’s most renowned leaders.

In South Africa, its many centuries of racial discrimination and many decades of Apartheid were finally ended with a 5 year, arduous “soul force” in Port Elizabeth led by its black youth leaders. When this happened Colonel Laurent Du Plessis, former Chief of Military Intelligence of South Africa’s Eastern Cape province declared (as seen in the *‘Force More Powerful’* film titled *‘Freedom in our Life Time’*), the “armed struggle came to nothing..... It was the people’s mass action, the economic boycotts and international pressure, that brought about the change. The boycotts were very effective. Not to buy is not a crime. What do you do with people who do not buy ? You cannot shoot all of them. De Klerk had no option but to take the action he did” The action President F. W. De Klerk took when he succeeded P.W.Botha (who resigned in 1989) was to lift the ban on Black political parties, free Nelson Mandela, negotiate a new constitution with him based on universal adult franchise and hold South Africa’s first free elections in 1994. The ANC won an overwhelming victory and Mandela became President. From being Africa’s pariah state, South Africa suddenly emerged as its most admired nation and Mandela as the symbol of its indomitable will for freedom. However, the real heroes of its freedom struggle were 27 year old, Port Elizabeth youth organizer Mkhuseleli Jack, and his collaborators Tango Lamani, Mike Xego & Janet Cherry.

Also in the 1980s the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, was ended with a ‘soul force’ struggle led by the brave Mrs Corazon Aquino, widow of assassinated senator Benigno Aquino who had contested against President Marcos in an earlier election. Her struggle, which was supported by the Catholic church and millions of Filipinos was hailed as the ERDA (Peoples Power) Revolution, as she defeated Ferdinand Marcos in the 1986 presidential election and became President of the Philippines 1986 – 1992 and Asia’s first woman head of State..

During the same period, all of Eastern Europe's Communist dictatorships, including that of the Soviet Union were ended with 'soul force' struggles. These commenced in Poland. This one, known as 'Solidarność' was led for almost ten years by a Gdansk shipyard worker named Lech Walesa, He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1983 and was elected President of Poland in 1990. The 'soul force struggle' in Czechoslovakia, known as the 'Velvet Revolution' was led by its reputed dramatist Vaclav Havel. He was elected president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and of the Czech Republic in 1993. He has described 'soul force' as "Power of the Powerless"

In March 1990's the 17 year Augusto Pinochet military dictatorship in Chile was ended with a similar 'soul force' struggle which was fought mainly with silent street marches and TV messages of 'Chile Si, Pinochet No (Chile Yes, Pinochet No)

Perhaps the most unusual of these momentous struggles is that of Evo Morales, a minimally educated Aymara (indigenous Bolivian) cocoa farmer who led a march in 2003 from the small provincial town of Cochabamba to La Paz, Bolivia's capital. He had only about 50 other marchers with him when he started but when he reached La Paz their number had swelled to almost 10,000. Their demand was simple. Raise the royalty on Bolivia's natural gas exports from 15% to 50% and utilize this additional revenue for providing education, housing and medical facilities to the Bolivian people, particularly its indigenous communities. The govt. then in office rejected this demand and in the ensuing turmoil had to demit office. The next govt. initially resisted this demand but thereafter was constrained to accept it. This greatly enhanced Evo Morales's popularity and enabled him to win the 2006 presidential election and become Bolivia's first Aymara president since its conquest by Spain 500 years earlier. He is still in that high office and has done much to ameliorate the political and social status and living conditions of his fellow Aymara people.

Until 1947 almost all of the world map was in five colours; pink for British, Green for French, Yellow for Portuguese, blue for Italians and brown for Belgians. The world map is now free of all these colours There has never been a more radical transformation of global political geography as between 1947 (when India attained independence) and 1997 (when the last British Colony was returned to China). But the trigger for this incredible transformation was gestated in 1894 at Pietermaritzberg in South Africa, when a 24 year old, three piece suited Indian barrister was thrown out of a

first class carriage because of the colour of his skin and was transformed from a timid young man into a fearless Soul Force Warrior determined to confront racialism and all other such social evils and the conflicts they engender with Truth, love and non violence.

I shall conclude by reading out just three of the innumerable tributes that have been to Gandhi as the architect of non violent conflict resolution.

Mary E King, author of 'Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. – The Power of Non Violent Action' has written : “Gandhi was a pioneer in leading eight militant struggles - against racism, against colonialism, against the caste system, for popular democratic participation, against economic exploitation, against the degradation of women, against religious and ethnic supremacy, and on behalf of nonviolent methods for social and political transformations. Because of the breadth of his concerns, there is, in a sense, a different Gandhi for each reader.....As long as there is strife, hostilities, ethnic cleansing, religious unrest, internal conflicts and threats of military occupation, people will turn to Gandhi. His usefulness will not end unless conflict ceases.”

Gene Sharp in his book 'Waging Non Violent Struggle : 20th Century Practice, 21st Century Potential' has written “Gandhi was an experimenter in the development of “war without violence’. His work was pioneering and not always adequate, but it represents a major development of historic significance both in ethics and in politics..... Many problems in its further development and application remain. But in words and action Gandhi pointed toward what may be the key to the resolution of the dilemma of how one can behave peacefully and at the same time actively, and effectively oppose oppression and injustice.”

Ralph Bultjens, in his Foreword to 'Gandhi in the Post Modern Age' edited by Sanford Krolick and Betty Canon has written :

“The fragility of modern civilization is exposed by the frighteningly ineffective way in which our world approaches conflict resolution. In international relationships, neither conventional diplomacy nor various uses of military deterrence have improved the thin margin on which the world exists. This somewhat pessimistic reading of history is challenged by one major exception, Mahatma Gandhi’s application of policies and techniques of non-violence in India. Gandhi’s success both redeems human nature

from the inevitability of its historical experience and also suggests the viability of non-violence in modern situations.”

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