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SATYAGRAHA IN MAHATMA GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY¹

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This paper attempts to discuss Gandhi's political philosophy by analysing the role he ascribes to Satyagraha, the mechanism through which the various phases of his social and international program could be integrated to move towards the realization of his social vision, *Ramarajya*.

Starting with Gandhi's view of human nature, the paper will deal with his conception of *Ramarajya* at the national and international levels, his conception of nonviolence and 'Satyagraha brigades'.

I. View of Human Nature

Gandhi's view of human nature was distinguished by two elements. The first derived from the *Bhagavad Gita* which he interpreted as an allegory between the "forces of good and evil in the human beast."² For instance, referring to the allegorical nature of the epic battle which occurs in the Gita, he wrote: "The real Kurukshetra is the human heart, which is also a *dharmakshetra* (the field of righteousness) if we look upon it as the abode of God and invite Him to take hold of it."³

The charioteer Krishna (God incarnate) represented the divine voice that informed the human soul (Arjuna) how to act independently from the forces of 'attraction' and 'repulsion' — desires and aversions which motivate human action, and which Gandhi believed lay at the "root of sin." Gandhi, therefore, held that a basic dichotomy existed within human nature. On the one hand existed the capacity to respond to the 'divine voice', while on the other, there was the capacity to follow human sin, as

represented by the desires or aversions which motivate human action.

Man, being a free agent, knows these distinctions, and when he follows his higher nature shows himself far superior to the brute, but when he follows his baser nature can show himself lower than the brute. . . . What distinguishes the man from the brute is his conscious striving to realize the spirit within.⁴

The second distinguishing element of Gandhi's view of human nature was the belief that all life forms a unified whole:

I believe in the immortality of the soul. . . . The ocean is composed of drops of water; each drop is an entity and yet it is part of the whole, 'the one and the many'. In this ocean of life, we are little drops. My doctrine means that I must identify myself with life, with everything that lives.⁵

It meant that all humanity was unified in a way which enabled individuals "unfailingly respond . . . to the advances of love."⁶ Gandhi believed that this *monistic* or 'non-dualist' position was compatible with the dichotomous conception of human nature emerging from his allegorical reading of the *Bhagavad Gita*.⁷

II. Social Vision: Ramarajya

Gandhi's social vision was inspired by the idea of *Ramarajya* (Kingdom of God). Referring to the Indian struggle for independence, he wrote:

Independence of my conception means nothing less than the realization of the 'Kingdom of God' within you and on this earth. I would rather work for and die in the pursuit of this dream, though it may never be realized. That means infinite patience and perseverance.⁸

Gandhi's *Ramarajya* contained six characteristics which range from interpersonal relations to relations between nations.

Gandhi called the first characteristic (*Purna*) *Swaraj* or (complete) self-rule. He appropriated the term from India's Vedic tradition and its exclusive application to individuals in search of spiritual enlightenment.⁹ He then applied it, as did Tilak, to the collective attempt to achieve self-rule for India.¹⁰ Consequently, Gandhi's conception of *Swaraj* corresponded with freedom for individuals and human associations in two

ways. First, there was the freedom by which an individual could act in the sense of following one's higher nature, and in the sense of ignoring the desires and aversions which ordinarily inform human action. Second, there was freedom through which a human association could fulfil its destiny and place in national and international affairs, in the absence of external control and influence upon the association.

I have . . . endeavoured to show both in word and deed, that political self-government, that is, self-government for a large number of men and women, is no better than individual self-government, and therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule.¹¹

The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment. And if this is the correct view of freedom our chief energy must be concentrated upon achieving reform from within.¹²

The second characteristic was Gandhi's notion of *Swadeshi*. He interpreted it as self-reliance or self-sufficiency. He used it in the sense of restricting an individual's or an association's needs to what was immediately available in the local community:

Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.

. . . [W]hen we find there are many things that we cannot get in India, we must try to do without them. We have to do without many things which we may consider necessary. . . . So will you feel freer men than you are now, immediately you adopt *Swadeshi*.¹³

Swadeshi for Gandhi, like his conception of *Swaraj*, was extended from an exclusive application to individuals to human associations. It meant that he emphasised self-reliance for individuals no less than he did for Indian villages and the nation as a whole.

The third characteristic is the idea of *Panchayat Raj*. It corresponded to a decentralised system of government, where 'real' decision making lay

with village communities. Outlining the basic features of such a system, Gandhi wrote:

The government of the village will be conducted by the *Panchayat* of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. . . . This *Panchayat* will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today.¹⁴

Gandhi referred to his conception of *Panchayat Raj*, or association of sovereign village republics, as 'pure democracy': "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village. . . . In the true democracy of India, the unit is the village."¹⁵ Gandhi believed such a system could safeguard the interests of individuals and the village communities in which the majority of India's population were concentrated.

Gandhi termed the fourth characteristic 'enlightened anarchy': "There is . . . a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler."¹⁶ Gandhi believed that the ideal state of his conception would be one in which the State, or those institutions which embody centralised control, would wither away. In its place would remain the decentralised polity of the *Panchayat Raj* and individuals practising *Swaraj* which together constituted a state of enlightened anarchy.

The fifth characteristic was the preservation of India's ancient tradition of four stages of human life (*Ashrama*) and a fourfold division of society (*Varna*), both of which entailed a distinctive set of obligations on individuals.¹⁷ The stages of human life progressed from the duties inherent in being a student (*Brahmacharya*); to those expected of a householder (*Grihastha*) who had to work and maintain a family and meet one's social obligations; to the retiree (*Vanaprastha*) who would spend increasing time with the study of religion; and, finally, to the renunciate (*Sannyasa*) who would spend life detached from 'worldly pleasures' and fully practising one's religion.

The division of society began with the *Brahmin*, or those devoted to spiritual pursuits; next came the *Kshatriya* or those who pursued political and military affairs; then came the *Vaishya* or those who were committed to the production of goods and services; finally came the *Shudra* or those who laboured manually for remuneration of some form. As Gandhi

phrased it, Varna “marks four universal occupations — imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce, and performing service through physical labour.”¹⁸ Unlike the rigid caste system in practice throughout India at the time, Gandhi’s conception of Varna was fluid, one would be able to move between these divisions according to merit and ability.

Though the law of *Varna* is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the law of *Varna*. The world may ignore it today but it will have to accept it in the time to come.¹⁹

The final characteristic was that of a ‘World Federation’:

The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent States warring one against another, but a federation of friendly inter-dependent States . . . I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing our readiness for universal inter-dependence rather than independence.²⁰

Gandhi viewed such a federation as representing the only hope for humanity’s continued existence. Also, such a federation would offer the best means of instituting his conviction in the “basic unity of the human family”.²¹

III. Obstacles to Ramarajya

Gandhi identifies various obstacles to *Ramarajya*. These can be classified under two general categories: psycho-social and structural. Each will be defined and a description of those obstacles falling under the respective categories will be offered.

a. Psycho-social:

Psycho-social obstacles can be defined as practices occurring in a society which derive from shared psychological dispositions; they have the effect of precluding desirable changes in social conditions. The shared psychological dispositions that Gandhi identified are ‘violence’, ‘materialism’ and ‘untouchability’.

Gandhi maintained that ‘violence’ (*himsa*) pervaded human life. In its

most general manifestation he saw it as involving the destruction of life:

The saying that life lives on life has a deep meaning in it. Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward *himsa*. The very fact of his living — eating, drinking and moving about — necessarily involves some *himsa*, destruction of life, be it ever so minute.²²

Gandhi believed violence manifested itself in three ways: mental/moral, physical force used by individuals, and the organised violence of a state's police and armed forces.²³

By 'mental/moral violence' Gandhi included such defects as "corruption, falsehood, hypocrisy, [hate and] deceit."²⁴ He viewed these activities as reflecting a mental state that was injurious towards the practitioner. "Mental violence," he argued, "injures only the person whose thoughts are violent." Also, he claimed that some activities, such as lying, were the original source of violence in the physical sense.

With regard to physical violence, Gandhi viewed it as impermissible for individuals to use in attaining their goals and objectives:

I do not believe in short — violent — cuts to success. . . . I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. . . . Experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence.²⁵

Similarly, the 'organised violence' of 'the State' was seen as an instrument that could be used against individuals with devastating consequences: "[t]he State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence."²⁶ His rejection of physical violence both at the individual and 'state' level, arose from the conviction that "violence must beget violence." Therefore both 'individual' and 'organised violence' would lead to what Helder Camara later called the 'spiral of violence'.

Gandhi condemned 'modern civilisation' as 'materialistic'.²⁷ He contrasted 'modern civilisation', defined as the industrialised societies of Europe and North America, with 'Eastern' or 'Indian civilisation':

. . . modern civilization represents forces of evil and darkness,

whereas the ancient, *i.e.*, Indian, civilization represents in its essence the divine force. Modern civilization is chiefly materialistic, as ours is chiefly spiritual.²⁸

While 'modern civilisation', in Gandhi's view, occupied itself with "the investigation of the laws of matter," 'Eastern' civilisation was occupied with "exploring spiritual laws." This led to 'modern civilisation' being equated with "tremendous activity", while 'Eastern civilisation' was equated with "contemplativeness." Gandhi believed that 'modern civilisation' fostered social attitudes that were centred on the maxims "might is right" and "survival of the fittest."²⁹ Consequently, the materialism that modern society perpetuated resulted in a psychological disposition with members of a society that was conducive to violence. This led to an overabundance of physical violence within and between societies.

The phenomenon of 'untouchability' represented a psycho-social malaise that Gandhi believed was not unique to India.³⁰ In Indian society 'untouchability' represented a doctrine where roughly a fifth of the population was designated as inferior to the rest and consigned to perform menial labour while remaining on the periphery of national life. The 'untouchables', whom Gandhi called the *Harijans* (children of God), were victims of segregation and prejudice in Indian society. Gandhi posited that this contributed to the acceptance of British rule and the racial inferiority such rule implied:

The Devil succeeds only by receiving help from his fellows. He always takes advantage of the weakest spots in our natures in order to gain mastery over us. . . . Has not a just Nemesis overtaken us for the crime of untouchability? Have we not reaped as we have sown? . . . We have segregated the "pariah" [untouchable] and we are in turn segregated in the British Colonies.³¹

More generally, untouchability was equated with the "barriers between man and man, and between the various orders of Being." Such barriers were psycho-social, and Gandhi believed they were a significant impediment to *Ramarajya*.

b. Structural:

Structural obstacles refer to deficiencies in the political and economic systems of a society which result in the systematic disadvantage to sections

within nations, or even to nations vis-a- vis other nations. For Gandhi, these deficiencies were synonymous with 'industrialism', which he viewed as the 'root of evil' in a nation. Consequently, the four obstacles to be described as structural — destruction of rural areas, iniquitous distribution of national wealth, automation and international exploitation - were all distinguishing features, Gandhi maintained, of industrialism.

The first feature of industrialism was that urban production centres began to monopolise various industries, thereby leading to the impoverishment and dependence of rural areas. In metaphoric terms, Gandhi explained this as follows:

I regard the growth of cities as an evil thing, unfortunate for mankind and the world. . . . The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built. I want the blood that is today inflating the arteries of the cities to run once again in the blood vessels of the villages.³²

Industrialism's second feature was the uneven distribution of the wealth produced in a nation. Replying to a question over whether the mass production techniques pioneered by Henry Ford would raise the standard of living, Gandhi claimed: "I do not believe in it at all . . . there is a tremendous fallacy behind Mr. Ford's reasoning. Without simultaneous distribution on an equally mass scale, the production can result only in a great world tragedy."³³ Distribution of a nation's wealth was of primary concern to Gandhi: "There can be no Ramarajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat."³⁴

The third feature of industrialism was that improved production techniques would be achieved by the introduction of modern machinery. For Gandhi, this resulted in greater unemployment:

What I object to, is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation.³⁵

Gandhi believed that automation or the introduction of capital intensive industries in a country such as India with its large rural population was motivated not by a desire to raise the standard of living, but greed:

I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction [of] mankind,

but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is the philanthropy to save labour, but greed.³⁶

Industrialism's final feature, according to Gandhi, was the exploitation of nations by other nations:

Exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors. . . . India, when it begins to exploit other nations — as it must if it becomes industrialized — will be a curse for other nations.³⁷

Gandhi viewed this phenomenon as the basis of 'imperialism'. Referring to the Western democracies during the second world war, Gandhi wrote:

Western democracy, as it functions today, is diluted Nazism or Fascism. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the Fascist tendencies of imperialism. Why is there the war today, if it is not for the satisfaction of the desire to share the spoils?³⁸

Each of the four facets of industrialism were structural obstacles to Gandhi's social vision. Together with psycho-social obstacles, these all had to be overcome if *Ramarajya* was to become a reality. Consequently, Gandhi's social and international program was designed with this aim in mind.

IV. Social and International Program

Gandhi's social program can be divided into four phases: education, ethical program, nonviolent action and 'satyagraha (peace) brigades'. It will be shown how his 'satyagraha brigades' represent the apotheosis of his thought in so far as they synthesise all parts of his social and international program into an integrated program for achieving *Ramarajya*.

a. Education:

Education, for Gandhi, was primarily a means by which individuals could be 'liberated' from 'external' and 'internal factors':

The ancient aphorism, 'Education is that which liberates', is as

true today as it was before. . . . Liberation means freedom from all manner of servitude even in the present life. Servitude is of two kinds: slavery to domination from outside, and to one's own artificial needs. The knowledge acquired in the pursuit of this ideal alone constitutes true study.³⁹

As a result, his education program took two directions. The first was to ensure that 'external factors' did not unduly interfere with an individual's life. For Gandhi, this would begin by ensuring the proper exercise of authority by individuals and institutions: "*Swaraj* is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."⁴⁰ It entailed that individuals could learn about political and social conditions, set out to rectify these and maintain a modicum of external constraints on social life.

Gandhi argued that "the primary aim of all education is, or should be, the moulding of the character of pupils." This formed the second direction education should take. For Gandhi, it meant two things: first, individuals would be free to restrain their own behaviour; and second, individuals would ignore the desires and aversions which affect their decision making and interaction with others. For instance, Gandhi believed that the message of the Gita was *asteya* (not coveting) *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) and *brahmacharya* (continence).⁴¹ Consequently, Gandhi rejected the emphasis on literacy in place throughout British India:

By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man — body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education.⁴²

He emphasised teaching the manual arts since he believed this would best develop the intellect, lead to a mutual understanding between rural and urban India, and form the proper basis for the development of character.

b. Ethical Transformation:

A crucial element in Gandhi's ethical and political thought is his view of the 'inner voice': "Everyone should follow his or her own inner voice. If he or she has no ears to listen to it, he or she should do the best he or she can." It represented the 'divine element' in human nature which Gandhi equated with the 'Voice of God' and conscience. Following conscience or

the 'inner voice' therefore became an ethical imperative that Gandhi never failed to emphasise:

. . . every man has to obey the voice of his own conscience, and be his own master, and seek the Kingdom of God from within. For him there is no government that can control him without his sanction. Such a man is superior to all government.⁴³

Nevertheless, Gandhi believed that not all possessed conscience, in so far as it signified a lengthy process by which one became acquainted with his/her inner voice.

Social life meant that the imperative for individuals to follow conscience would lead to differences with others and with the laws of a society. With regard to cases where there were differences in conscience between individuals, Gandhi advised 'mutual toleration':

The golden rule of conduct . . . is mutual toleration. . . . Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody else's freedom of conscience.⁴⁴

Where conscience differed with the laws of a society, Gandhi advocated 'civil disobedience'; he defined it as a "civil breach of unmoral statutory enactments." Civil disobedience meant that laws which conflicted with conscience were deemed unjust, and thereby entailed a moral obligation to withdraw compliance. This also meant that it was incumbent on a society not to preclude civil disobedience by its members:

. . . to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison consciences. . . . [It is] possible to question the wisdom of applying civil disobedience in respect of a particular act or law; it is possible to advise delay and caution. But the right itself cannot be allowed to be questioned.⁴⁵

To allay the risk that society would become ungovernable if citizens adopted civil disobedience *en masse*, Gandhi introduced the distinction between 'aggressive' and 'defensive civil disobedience':

Aggressive, assertive or offensive civil disobedience is non-violent, wilful disobedience of laws of the State whose breach does not involve moral turpitude and which is undertaken as a

symbol of revolt against the State. . . . Defensive civil disobedience, on the other hand, is involuntary or reluctant non-violent disobedience of such laws as are in themselves bad and obedience to which would be inconsistent with one's self-respect or human dignity.⁴⁶

Gandhi intended to demonstrate that those who adopted 'defensive civil disobedience' would be individuals who ordinarily were law abiding, and were compelled to depart from previous behaviour as a result of a genuine regard for the law rather than wilful disobedience or political expediency.

c. Nonviolent action:

i. Truth and Nonviolence: The most important principle in Gandhi's political philosophy is 'Truth'. In his *Autobiography*, Gandhi wrote: "Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that he alone is real and all else is unreal." Two points emerge from this statement. The first is Gandhi's interchanging of the terms 'Truth' and 'God'; and the second is a distinction Gandhi introduced between 'Absolute' and 'relative truth'.

Gandhi asserted that 'Truth is God'. Another time he said 'God is Truth' to show that Truth was not merely an attribute of an Absolute Deity, but the 'Being' which is common to both Truth and God. In a passage describing this relationship between the terms 'Truth' and 'God', Gandhi wrote: "In 'God is Truth' *is* certainly does not mean 'equal to' nor does it mean, 'is truthful'. He is nothing if he is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means *Sat*. *Sat* means *Is*. God is, nothing else is."⁴⁷

Absolute Truth formed a metaphysical ideal to which Gandhi believed one should strive to realise and manifest in thought and action:

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. . . . There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it.⁴⁸

Gandhi argued, however, that "as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative truth as I have conceived it."⁴⁹ Gandhi thought that without 'realisation' of 'Absolute Truth', the 'relative

truth' or "faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth" had to be one's "shield and buckler."⁵⁰ This entailed that those who had not realised Absolute Truth — which generally meant all humanity — had always to be prepared to surrender their relative truths for other truths. This approach was observed by Raghavan Iyer to form a dialectic:

... we must be prepared to visualize Absolute Truth, in practice we must ever regard [relative] truth not as a cast-iron dogma, a final statements or a fixed formula, but rather as a many-sided, evolving and dynamic dialectic.⁵¹

It entailed that though one may not have realised the Absolute Truth, one's limited perceptions of it could act as a general guide for life.

The pillar upon which Gandhi based the search for Truth is *ahimsa*, or nonviolence:

This ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is vain unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis.⁵² . . . Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty.⁵³

To clarify his conception of nonviolence, he introduced a distinction between 'non-violence of the weak' (or 'cowardly') and 'non-violence' of the 'strong' (or 'brave').⁵⁴ He argued that to be a potent force, nonviolence must *begin* with the mind and not merely the rejection of physical force between human beings:

Non-violence of the mere body without the co-operation of the mind is non-violence of the weak or the cowardly, and has, therefore, no potency. . . . Non-violence is not mere disarmament. Nor is it the weapon of the weak and impotent. A child who has not the strength to wield the lathi does not practice non-violence.⁵⁵

'Non-violence of the strong' was based on Gandhi's conviction that "Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer."⁵⁶ It entailed action by adherents of nonviolence which went beyond the lofty ideal of not hurting other living creatures either in thought, word or deed, but which reflected an unqualified state of love for others, indeed all creation.

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong-doer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Non-violence [of the strong] is therefore in its active form good will towards all life. It is pure Love.⁵⁷

Though Gandhi steered the Indian nationalist movement towards nonviolence of the strong, he admitted failure in this task: “the non-violence that was offered during the past thirty years was that of the weak. . . . India has no experience of the non-violence of the strong.”⁵⁸ This led to the distinction between ‘non-violence as a policy’ and ‘non-violence as an article of faith’. The former was an adoption of nonviolence as a matter of political expediency and would be abandoned when conditions altered. ‘Non-violence as an article of faith’, on the other hand, was synonymous with ‘non-violence of the strong’.

ii. Satyagraha: Gandhi combined the twin ideas of Truth and nonviolence (‘of the strong’) into the principle of *Satyagraha*. Using the banyan tree as a metaphor, Gandhi argued that “*Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) together make the parent trunk from which all innumerable branches shoot out.”⁵⁹ Satyagraha literally meant ‘holding on to Truth’ or ‘Truth force’, and entailed that nonviolence (‘of the strong’) would be adopted as the exclusive means for pursuing Truth:

In the application of Satyagraha I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other.⁶⁰

Gandhi wanted to distinguish the ideas inherent in his Satyagraha campaigns with ‘passive resistance’ which he equated with ‘non-violence of the weak’.⁶¹ It should here be pointed out that Gandhi did not view passive resistance as action devoid of purpose and commitment, since the English Suffragists had amply demonstrated these qualities in their campaigns. This led to another term being used to describe activity which abjured physical force, and in which purpose and commitment were

abundant, yet was still distinct from Satyagraha, *duragraha* (stubborn resistance).⁶²

Gandhi viewed Satyagraha as possessing three characteristics, the first of which was *suffering* oriented towards converting the views of one's opponents:

The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering. . . . Our motto must ever be conversion by gentle persuasion and a constant appeal to the head and the heart. We must therefore be ever courteous and patient with those who do not see eye to eye with us.⁶³

The goal of converting an opponent's views entailed, in Gandhi's opinion, a preparedness to suffer deprivation, imprisonment and even death. This contrasted with 'coercing'⁶⁴ opponents to change their views, which he believed was far less efficacious:

Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason.⁶⁵

Gandhi believed that the suffering a *Satyagrahi* (one who practices *Satyagraha*) would voluntarily undergo to convert an opponent was consistent with the pursuit of Truth, and was certain to 'melt the hearts of even the most implacable of opponents':

... even Nero is not devoid of a heart. The unexpected spectacle of endless rows upon rows of men and women simply dying rather than surrender to the will of an aggressor must ultimately melt him and his soldiery.⁶⁶

The Satyagrahi's course is plain. . . . He must know that his suffering will melt the stoniest heart of the stoniest fanatic.⁶⁷

The second characteristic of *Satyagraha* was a consistency between means and ends: "For me, it is enough to know the means. Means and end are convertible terms in my philosophy of life." This consistency entailed the Satyagrahis would view the social and political goals they pursued, as inextricably intertwined with the means adopted to achieve them. This

view led to Gandhi's condemnation of Bolshevism, for even though he sympathised with the goals aimed for, he saw these as being hopelessly compromised by the adoption of violent methods:

. . . from what I know of Bolshevism it not only does not preclude the use of force but freely sanctions it for the expropriation of private property and maintaining the collective State ownership of the same . . . if that is so, I have no hesitation in saying that the Bolshevik regime in its present form cannot last for long. For it is my firm conviction that nothing enduring can be built on violence.⁶⁸

As a result, Gandhi saw that the goals of the Indian Independence campaign, and, more generally, all attempts to overhaul radically an existing political and social system, as achievable only through nonviolence: "I have often said that if one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself. Non-violence is the means, the end for every nation is complete independence."⁶⁹

The third characteristic of Satyagraha was non-cooperation with a political and social system regarded as corrupt. It could be distinguished from civil disobedience in that while civil disobedience was a response to laws considered by conscience to be unjust, non-cooperation was a response to an 'unjust political, social and economic system'. Non-cooperation was therefore more extensive and widespread in its application, and this led Gandhi to believe it was capable of stopping a government from functioning:

I believe, and everybody must grant, that no Government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if people suddenly withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the Government will come to a standstill.⁷⁰

Since non-cooperation was an instrument for undermining the normal functioning of a government, Gandhi introduced a further distinction, between non-cooperation and civil resistance. Unlike non-cooperation, civil resistance was restricted to specific grievances such as, for example, the payment of taxes which were unfairly levied on peasant farmers.⁷¹ Civil resistance differed from civil disobedience, in Gandhi's view, in so far as the grievance in question was not necessarily a law or rule "promulgated by constituted authority."

In conclusion, Satyagraha was a principle that elevated nonviolence to the exclusive means by which an individual could search for Truth. For Gandhi it meant that those exercising nonviolent action would necessarily reflect a commitment to Truth. This meaning becomes important vis a vis Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha brigades.

d. Satyagraha (Peace) Brigades: Gandhi believed that individual practitioners of Satyagraha would band together to form a 'nonviolent army' for communal disturbances: "What you and I have to do is to show our *ahimsa* when there is rioting or similar disturbance. If every one of us, wherever he is, begins doing so there will come into being a non-violent army."⁷² He also believed that such an army could be used as the basis for national defence against external invasion:

Congress . . . [is] of the opinion that, while it might be possible for us to exercise *ahimsa* in internal disturbances, India has not the strength to exercise *ahimsa* against the invasion of a foreign foe . . . their want of faith has distressed me . . . congressmen should train themselves to defend their country with a non-violent army.⁷³

Gandhi believed that a nonviolent army would comprise units he called 'Satyagraha' or 'peace brigades' where commitment to nonviolence would form an indispensable requirement for membership:

. . . a member of the . . . peace brigade should possess . . . a living faith in non-violence . . .⁷⁴

For a Satyagraha brigade only those are eligible who believe in *ahimsa* and *satya*.⁷⁵

Gandhi thought that Satyagraha brigades could "be organized in every village and in every block of buildings in the cities." He argued that each "non-violent corps [peace brigades] must be small, if they are to be efficient;" and that each brigade would "select its own head." Gandhi argued that obedience to whoever led the peace army was essential: "Let me explain what my army will be like. . . . The general should have the quality which commands the unquestioning obedience of his army, and he will expect of them nothing more than this obedience."⁷⁶ To point out how his nonviolent army would differ from a conventional army in terms of decision making, Gandhi pointed out that though "in Satyagraha and military warfare the position of the soldier is very nearly the same," the

“Satyagraha general has to obey his inner voice” regardless of the exigencies of the day.⁷⁷

Gandhi viewed that the chief activity of peace brigades would be ‘constructive work’:

... a non-violent army acts unlike armed men. . . . They would be constantly engaged in constructive activities that make riots impossible . . . seeking occasions for bringing warring communities together, carrying on peace propaganda, [and] engaging in activities that would bring and keep them in touch with every single person . . . in their parish or division.⁷⁸

Thus it would also involve anticipating any violent conflagrations by performing constructive work and by cultivating contact with individuals in a designated area.

In conclusion, Gandhi's Satyagraha (peace) brigades form the apex of his political philosophy. They integrate the various elements that Gandhi identifies in his social and international program: the commitment to constructive work entailed that the satyagraha brigades would perform activities that could be found in his education program; incorporating the ideas of civil disobedience and non-cooperation in the activities of Satyagraha brigades ensured that the ethical imperatives dictated by conscience were a primary consideration in any campaigns of the Satyagraha brigades; and finally, the commitments to nonviolence and Truth ensured that the brigades would embody nonviolent action in its most vigorous form.

V. Evaluation: Satyagraha Brigades in Gandhi's Political Philosophy

The critical elements to be examined with regard to Gandhi's Satyagraha brigades are the following: the distinction between ‘aggressive’ and ‘defensive civil disobedience’; the role of suffering and attempted conversion of opponents; the importance of a commitment to Truth; and finally, the issue of leadership and the advocacy of the ethical imperative.

In his social and international program, Gandhi distinguishes between ‘aggressive’ and ‘defensive civil disobedience’. A problem arises over the element Gandhi uses to make this distinction: genuine regard for the law. Does not the difficulty in objectively identifying such a psychological state

disqualify Gandhi's distinction from operating as a demonstrable 'social fact'? This becomes especially important with regard to Gandhi's call for collective action in the form of Satyagraha brigades. How can one distinguish between Satyagraha brigades and other groups of individuals practising civil disobedience when the latter may feign genuine regard for the law?

The difficulty in making the above distinction arises from Gandhi's assumption that only those practising Satyagraha, or who adopt a position that can be identified within the parameters of Satyagraha, could have a genuine regard for the law despite breaking a particular law or laws. This assumption overlooks that some groups may take a principled stand on what amount to unprincipled or selfish ends. Consequently, the identification of genuine regard for the law as the basis for differentiating between the activities of Satyagraha brigades and other groups of individuals, appears a shaky basis upon which to distinguish between aggressive and defensive civil disobedience.

No element in Gandhi's philosophy arouses as much debate as the stress he places on 'conversion' of an opponent, and the concomitant requirement that suffering is the means for achieving this. As Iyer points out, "Gandhi's faith in the religious and temporal value of suffering should seem to a few westerners as an atavistic retrogression to so-called "Oriental" pessimism and masochism."⁷⁹ This becomes especially important with regard to the activities of Satyagraha brigades, since it suggests that such brigades have to be capable of experiencing much suffering as a result of their activities. The question that arises is: is it realistic to expect a group of individuals to solely aim to convert an opponent when they are capable of coercing the opponent, or of reaching some 'accommodation' as a result of their collective action?

With regard to the distinction between 'conversion', 'accommodation' and 'coercion', Gene Sharp believes that each forms a goal of a nonviolent campaign, and each has had some historical success.⁸⁰ Gandhi himself admitted that the nonviolence adopted by the Indian nationalist movement was 'of the weak', thereby suggesting that coercion and accommodation were its primary goals. Consequently, though maintaining that conversion remains important as a philosophical goal of Satyagraha brigades, the exigencies of any situation suggest that coercion and accommodation may be the eventual outcome.

The commitment to Truth as a metaphysical ideal dominates Gandhi's philosophy and, along with nonviolence, forms the primary requirement for a Satyagraha brigade. Indeed, such a commitment leads, in Gandhi's political philosophy, to a dialectic whereby the relative truths adopted by individuals and Satyagraha brigades become the dispensable stepping stones to Absolute Truth. Difficulty arises in unambiguously demonstrating a philosophical commitment to Truth for groups of individuals, since many groups either demonstrate or develop a commitment to their own political and social-economic norms. For Gandhi, such an ambiguity can be overcome by noting the nonviolence performed by such groups, which explains the importance, in Gandhi's mind, of intertwining Truth and nonviolence. Nevertheless, this ought not overlook the fact that Satyagraha brigades could operate with a set of norms that may radically differ from other groups who may also purport to have a commitment to Truth.

Gandhi's ethical imperative that one follow conscience, since this demonstrated the philosophical endeavour to realise Truth, needs examination with regard to Satyagraha brigades. This arises from his advocacy of a decision-making process of unquestioning obedience to brigade leaders and to the leader(s) of any nonviolent army. It becomes evident that such unquestioning obedience may clash with the ethical imperative that would apply for each member of a Satyagraha brigade. While Gandhi's response, that the crucial factors in any such clash are the (brigade) leader's commitment to the ethical imperative and the (brigade) member's 'faith' in him/her, reflects the exigencies of his own involvement in the Indian Independence movement, it still overlooks the potential difficulties in advising Satyagrahis to be both committed to conscience and unquestioningly obedient to brigade leaders.

Finally, Satyagraha brigades integrate the educative, ethical and non-violent phases of Gandhi's social and international program. They form a critical mechanism in the practice of nonviolence and for ushering in Ramarajya. If Gandhi's conception of a world where nonviolence forms a primary ethical imperative, then encouragement in the formation of Satyagraha brigades around the world is an important goal.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Ralph Summy who gave numerous helpful suggestions and criticisms in the writing of this paper. Thanks also to Edwin Dowdy for his suggestions in earlier drafts of this paper.
2. See Gandhi, "Moral Support," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. 1, p. 316. *Harijan*, 18/8/1940. See also Gandhi, *Gandhi: Selected Writings*, ed. Ronald Duncan (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) p. 61.
3. Gandhi, "Discourses on the Gita," *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Shriman Narayan (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1968) vol. IV, p. 268. See also "Urmuzd and Ahriman," *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Govt. of India, 1958-84) vol. XXV, pp. 450-51. *Young India*, 26/12/1924.
4. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 111. *Young India*, 3/6/1926, p. 204.
5. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 109.
6. Gandhi, *For Pacifists* (1949; Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1971) p. 80.
7. For more on Gandhi's *monism*, see Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, 2nd ed. (London: Concord Grove Press, 1983) pp. 91-94.
8. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 446. Gandhi also used the term "Kingdom of Heaven" to refer to Ramarajya. "A Talk of Non-violence," *Nonviolence in Peace and War*, vol. 1, p. 123. *Harijan*, 14/3/1936.
9. *Young India*, 19/3/1931, p. 38.
10. Cf. Iyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-47. For Gandhi's definition of Swaraj, see "Interrogations Answered," *Collected Works*, vol. XXVI, p. 50.
11. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 440-41.
12. *Young India*, 1/11/1928, p. 363.
13. Narayan, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 336 and 138. Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Madras: Natesan & Co., 1933) p. 336.
14. *Harijan*, 26/7/1942, p. 238. For further description by Gandhi of such a system, see Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi*, ed. Louis Fischer (1962; New York; Vintage Books, 1983) p. 295.
15. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 450.
16. Gandhi, "Power Not an End," *Collected Works*, vol. XLVII, p. 91. *Young India*, 2/7/1931, p. 162. See also, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 436.
17. For Gandhi's description of both *Varna* and *Ashrama*, see *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 474-75.
18. Quoted in Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, New Revised Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) p. 168.
19. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 477.
20. Gandhi, "Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress," *Collected Works*, vol. XXV, pp. 481-82. *Young India*, 26/12/1924, p. 425.

21. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 249. *Harijan*, 18/2/1939, p. 12.
22. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927; Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982) p. 318.
23. Gandhi uses 'organised violence' in the sense of state violence, e.g., police and army. He does not have an equivalent of 'structural violence', as the term is used by Johan Galtung, but instead refers to imperialism and exploitation. For Galtung's use of structural violence, see "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* (1969) pp. 167-91.
24. Gandhi, "Suspension of Civil Disobedience," *Satyagraha: Non-violent Resistance* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1951) p. 294. *Harijan*, 3/6/1939.
25. Gandhi, "My Path", *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 27.
26. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 369. *Modern Review*, (1935), p. 412.
27. Gandhi, "Letter to H.S. Polak," *Collected Works*, vol. IX, p. 479.
28. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. XIII, pp. 261-62.
29. Gandhi, "Speech at YMCA," *Collected Works*, vol. VIII, pp. 244. *Indian Opinion*, 6/6/1908 and 13/6/1908. See also Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 279.
30. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. IV, p. 237.
31. Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi*, p. 251.
32. Gandhi, *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, eds. J.S. Mathur and A.S. Mathur (Allahabad, India: Chaitanya Publishing House, 1962) p. 514, 198. *Harijan*, 29/9/1940, p. 298. *Young India*, 7/10/1926, p. 348.
33. Gandhi, "Mass Production Versus Production by the Masses," *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 490. *Harijan*, 2/11/1934, p. 301.
34. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 236. *Harijan*, 1/6/1947, p. 172.
35. Gandhi, "Views on Machinery," *Economic Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 475. *Young India*, 13/11/1924, p. 378.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 377. *Young India*, 12/11/1931, p. 355.
38. Gandhi, "Democracy and Non-violence," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 269. *Harijan*, 18/5/1940.
39. Gandhi, "What after finishing studies," *Harijan*, 10/3/1946, p. 38. See also *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 503.
40. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 454. *Young India*, 29/1/1925, p. 40.
41. Gandhi, *Character and Nation Building* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1946) pp. 4-12.
42. Gandhi, "Criticism Answered," *Collected Works*, vol. LXV, p. 450. *Harijan*, 13/7/1937, p. 197. See also *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 507.

43. Gandhi, "Letter to W.J. Wybergh," *The Collected Works*, vol. X, p. 249. *Indian Opinion* 21/5/1910.
44. Gandhi, "Religion of Volunteers," *Collected Works*, vol. XXXI, p. 441. *Young India*, 23/9/1926.
45. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 212. *Young India*, 5/1/1922, p. 5.
46. Gandhi, "Aggressive v. Defensive", *Collected Works*, vol. XXII, p. 362.
47. Quoted in Thomas Weber, "Unarmed Peacekeeping and the Shanti Sena," (La Trobe University: Ph.D. Thesis, 1991) p. 91. See Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. L, p. 175.
48. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. IV, pp. 213-14. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, Chapter 1. For further discussion on Gandhi relating the terms 'Truth' and 'God', see Iyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-58.
49. *Autobiography*, p. 15.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.
51. Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 160. For further reference to Gandhi's dialectic see Bondurant, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-97.
52. Gandhi saw the English translation for ahimsa, non-violence, as inadequate since it did not connote the idea of Love which ahimsa did in Sanskrit. See *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 118. "God of Love, not War," *Harijan*, 5/9/1936.
53. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, IV:219. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, ch. 2.
54. Gandhi, "Some Questions Answered," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. 1, p. 167. *Harijan*, 17/12/1938. See also Gandhi, *For Pacifists*, p. 52.
55. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 170-71. *Young India*, 2/4/1931, p. 58.
56. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol VI, p. 153. *Young India*, 25/8/1920, p. 2.
57. Gandhi, *Gandhi: Selected Writings*, p. 69. See also Gandhi, "A Talk on Non-violence," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 113. *Harijan*, 17/10/1936.
58. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. II, p. 265. "Non-violence," *Harijan*, 29/6/1947.
59. Gandhi, "Like a Banyan Tree," *The Science of Satyagraha*, ed. Anand T. Hingorani (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970) p. 62. *Young India*, 1/5/1919.
60. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 179. See also "Hindu-Muslim Unity," *Collected Works*, vol. XXXV, p. 353.
61. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. III, p. 1152-158.
62. Gandhi, *Gandhi: Selected Writings*, p. 189. For further discussion on *Duragraha*, see Bondurant, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-44; and Iyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-312.
63. Gandhi refers to three pre-requisites for satyagraha: noncooperation, tolerance and suffering. "Pre-requisites for Satyagraha", *Satyagraha*, pp. 66-68. *Young India*, 8/1/1925. I have exchanged 'tolerance' for 'consistency between means and ends' which appears as a characteristic of Satyagraha in "Means and Ends," *Satyagraha*, p. 14. See also *Hind Swaraj*, Rev. ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1962) chap. xvi, and Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 202.
64. The problem of clearly distinguishing acts aimed at *converting* from those aimed at

- coercing an opponent was something that Gandhi observed in his writings. For example, see "Coercive fasts," *Satyagraha*, pp. 319-20. *Harijan*, 6/5/1933. For discussion of this problem, see Weber, "Unarmed Peacekeeping and the Shanti Sena," pp. 273-77; and Bondurant, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
65. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 202. *Young India*, 5/11/1931, p. 341.
 66. Gandhi, "The Future," *Satyagraha*, p. 386. *Harijan*, 13/4/1940. See also, "Is Non-violence ineffective?" *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, pp. 179-81. *Harijan*, 7/1/1939.
 67. Gandhi, "Suffering melts the stoniest heart," *The Science of Satyagraha*, p. 83. *Young India*, 4/6/1925.
 68. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 240. *Young India*, 15/11/1928, p. 381.
 69. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 151. *Harijan*, 11/2/1939, p. 8.
 70. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol I, p. 157. For further discussion of cooperation being the source of a government's authority and capacity to function, see Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, (1973; Boston: Porter Sargent, 1985) pp. 34-48.
 71. Gandhi, "Non-co-operation or Civil Resistance," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 214-15. *Young India*, 19/7/1928.
 72. Gandhi, *For Pacifists*, p. 39. *Harijan*, 11/8/1940. For Gandhi's advocacy of such an army in riot situations, see "An appeal for self-examination," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, pp. 145-148. For discussion of how Gandhi began to develop the idea of the peace (nonviolent) army, see Weber, "Unarmed Peacekeeping and the Shanti Sena," pp. 73-78; and Naryan Desai, *Towards a Non-Violent Revolution* (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1972) pp. 119ff.
 73. Gandhi, "A Cry in the Wilderness," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, pp. 301.
 74. Gandhi, "Qualifications of a Peace Brigade," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, pp. 154-55. *Harijan*, 18/6/1938.
 75. Gandhi, "Satyagraha in face of hooliganism," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. II, p. 60.
 76. Gandhi, "An interesting discourse," *Non-violence in Peace and War*, vol. I, p. 326. *Harijan*, 25/8/1940.
 77. "Discipline - Satyagrahi and Military," *Satyagraha*, p. 98.
 78. Gandhi, "A non-violent army," p. 86. *Harijan*, 26/3/1938.
 79. See Iyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 287, 310-13. See also April Carter, *Direct Action and Liberal Democracy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) p. 90.
 80. *Op. cit.*, pp. 707-54. In a later work, Sharp adds a fourth goal or mechanism of nonviolent change, 'disintegration', to these. See "The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Conference paper, The Albert Einstein Institution, October 1986) p. 31.