

## A Concept of Satyagraha: A Gandhian Weapon

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Satyagraha, a principle deeply rooted in truth and nonviolence, has emerged as a powerful force of resistance and social transformation. While the term itself was coined by Mahatma Gandhi, its essence can be traced back to ancient religious texts such as the Gita and the Quran, as well as the noble actions of individuals like Prahlad, Raja Harishchandra, Jesus, Socrates, Plato, and King Ashoka. Gandhi, recognizing the limitations of the English phrase "passive resistance," sought to articulate a more comprehensive concept that encapsulated the profound vision he had in mind.

In his book *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi expressed his dissatisfaction with the term "passive resistance," emphasizing that it failed to convey the full breadth and depth of his philosophy. He believed it reduced the method while failing to hint at the holistic system it represented. Gandhi's ultimate goal, the pursuit of real beauty, lay in doing good against evil and promoting positive change in society.

Satyagraha, as envisioned by Gandhi, transcends mere resistance. It embodies a profound philosophy rooted in truth and nonviolence, with the power to transform individuals and societies alike. At its core, Satyagraha emphasizes the pursuit of truth (Satya) and the practice of nonviolence (Ahimsa). It is a philosophy that calls for active engagement and constructive action, aiming to uplift both the oppressed and the oppressor, guided by the principles of self-suffering (Tapasya) and the pursuit of justice.

Throughout history, proponents of Satyagraha, including Gandhi himself, drew inspiration from various sources—religious teachings, philosophical wisdom, and exemplary individuals who embodied the principles of truth and nonviolence. By synthesizing these diverse influences, Gandhi created a unique and potent weapon of social change that had the power to touch the hearts and minds of people.

### **Meaning of Satyagraha**

The term "Satyagraha" originates from the Sanskrit words "Satya," meaning truth, and "Agraha," meaning clinging or holding fast. Thus, Satyagraha embodies the concept of steadfastly adhering to truth. Mahatma Gandhi coined this term during his tireless nonviolent resistance movement against racial discrimination in South Africa.

For Gandhi, Satyagraha was his ultimate invention, discovery, or creation. It represents an unwavering commitment to pursuing truth without resorting to hatred, resentment, or ill will. Gandhi defined Satyagraha as "the vindication of truth, not by inflicting suffering on the opponent but on one's own self." He viewed this technique of struggle as a moral weapon, emphasizing the supremacy of soul force over physical force.

Satyagraha is an action-oriented quest for truth and a nonviolent fight against falsehood. It was Gandhi's path to realizing "Swaraj," which encompasses not just political independence but also self-rule and self-realization. Satyagraha is deeply rooted in the principles of nonviolence and love. It

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combines the power of truth, nonviolence, and love, making it a unique and potent force.

Gandhi described Satyagraha as "firmness in a good cause" and equated it with the "law of self-suffering" in his writings. He emphasized that sacrificing oneself is far superior to causing suffering to others. A practitioner of Satyagraha does not seek to make others suffer for their mistakes but willingly endures self-suffering for the sake of truth and justice. Gandhi believed that self-suffering brings about the desired relief more quickly and with greater certainty than imposing suffering on one's opponents.

Satyagraha embodies the notion that truth and nonviolence are inseparable. It represents a philosophy of principled action, combining the pursuit of truth with a commitment to nonviolence, love, and self-sacrifice. Satyagraha was a powerful method employed by Gandhi to bring about social and political change, and its principles continue to inspire individuals and movements around the world seeking justice, freedom, and human dignity.

### **Satyagraha and Passive Resistance**

Gandhi made a clear distinction between Satyagraha and passive resistance as his understanding of the concepts evolved over time. The term "passive resistance" initially used to describe his approach, created confusion and was often associated with the weakness of the oppressed. Passive resistance aimed to embarrass the opponent into submission and could resort to violence if deemed expedient and likely to succeed. This approach, according to Gandhi, was contrary to the true spirit of Satyagraha.

Gandhi defined Satyagraha as "Soul Force" and emphasized its fundamental reliance on truth and nonviolence. It was not merely a technique or policy but a matter of faith and creed grounded in a comprehensive philosophy of life and ethical principles. Satyagraha was considered the weapon of the strong, based on voluntary self-suffering, while passive resistance was seen as the weapon of the weak or helpless.

While passive resistance allowed for the use of violence if an opportunity arose, Satyagraha categorically rejected force and violence, even against apparently weaker adversaries. Satyagraha sought not to cause harm or harassment to the other party, whereas passive resistance aimed to defeat and embarrass the opponent.

In passive resistance, victory over the adversary was the goal, whereas in Satyagraha, terms like "victory" or "defeat" were irrelevant. Satyagraha aimed at the moral and mental transformation of the opposing party, seeking their conversion rather than conquest.

Passive resistance could be directed against individuals, while Satyagraha was never directed at a person as such. It was focused on challenging institutions, systems, vested interests, and wrongdoings, rather than targeting specific wrongdoers.

Through these distinctions, Gandhi emphasized that Satyagraha was a more profound and principled approach than passive resistance. It was grounded in truth, nonviolence, self-suffering, and the moral transformation of society, offering a path of strength and integrity in the face of injustice.

### **Purpose of Satyagraha**

The purpose of Satyagraha, as envisioned by Gandhi, was to provide a nonviolent and constructive method for resolving conflicts, be they political, social, or economic. Gandhi recognized the futility and destructive nature of violence in resolving conflicts on a lasting basis, both in organized and unorganized forms. Satyagraha emerged as an alternative to rebellion, offering a means to seek

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correction of wrongs perpetrated or ignored by the political authority.

In his own application of Satyagraha, Gandhi identified two essential aspects. Firstly, it imposed upon individuals the duty to eradicate evil, to actively work towards the removal of injustice and oppression. Secondly, it reminded individuals of their obligation to serve the community and work for the betterment of society as a whole.

Satyagraha aimed not only at changing the heart and mentality of the opponent but also at exerting a transformative and purifying influence on those who engaged in it. Participants in Satyagraha, even if initially unaware or illiterate, became politically conscious and developed a heightened sense of discernment between justice and injustice, right and wrong. The process of Satyagraha helped individuals acquire a better understanding of the conflict at hand and fostered a sense of moral responsibility.

Furthermore, Satyagraha had a broader impact on the onlookers and society as a whole. It stimulated their conscience and facilitated a deeper comprehension of the positions held by conflicting parties. By doing so, it enabled individuals to make informed and rational decisions based on a correct understanding of the facts. Satyagraha aimed at cleansing the entire social and political atmosphere and fostering a voluntary change of heart and mentality for all parties involved in the conflict.

Ultimately, the purpose of Satyagraha extended beyond the immediate resolution of a particular conflict. It sought to create a transformative and harmonious society, where justice, truth, and nonviolence prevailed. Through its practice, Satyagraha aimed to uplift individuals, purify social relations, and inspire collective action for the betterment of humanity.

### **Range of Satyagraha**

Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha is indeed comprehensive and universal, transcending limitations of time, place, and person. It can be practiced anywhere, at any time, and in any circumstance. It is not limited to specific individuals but can be employed by anyone who possesses the necessary qualifications or follows a leader who embodies those qualities. Gandhi believed that both men and women could effectively engage in Satyagraha, suggesting that women may even excel in its practice.

Satyagraha can be conducted by an individual or a group, allowing for collective action in pursuit of justice. It can be employed by minority groups against majority groups, and vice versa. Gandhi did not impose any restrictions on the targets of Satyagraha. He believed it could be directed against any person, body, or agency, including those who are close or dear to the practitioner.

However, Gandhi did present one exception to the rule of Satyagraha being applicable to any person. He stated that Satyagraha should only be offered against individuals or agencies whose causes and means are prima facie wrong, or in other words, when their actions are evidently unjust. It seems that Gandhi did not consider the possibility of the opponent also being a practitioner of Satyagraha, possibly because he had not encountered a Satyagrahi among his opponents. As a result, he regarded the notion of counter Satyagraha as unlikely.

In summary, Satyagraha is a versatile and inclusive method of resistance that can be employed by anyone, regardless of gender or group affiliation. It can be directed against any person or agency whose actions are deemed unjust, with the exception that Satyagraha is typically not envisioned as a conflict between two practitioners of the same approach.

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### Essentials of Satyagraha

The essentials of Satyagraha, as outlined by Gandhi, are as follows:

- **Truth:** Truth is the foundation of Satyagraha. It is the core principle that guides and informs all actions. Satyagraha is rooted in the pursuit of truth, both external and internal, and the commitment to uphold it in all circumstances.
- **Non-violence:** Non-violence is inseparable from Satyagraha. Gandhi believed that non-violence is the most powerful and effective means to seek and uphold truth. Satyagraha rejects the use of physical force or violence and emphasizes the power of non-violence in creating lasting change.
- **Supremacy of moral law:** Satyagraha operates on the basis of moral force rather than physical force. It is grounded in the force of truth, justice, self-purification, self-suffering, love, service, courage, and discipline. Satyagrahis rely on the strength of their moral convictions to bring about transformation and change.
- **Faith in God:** Gandhi believed that a Satyagrahi must have faith in God. The belief in a higher power helps to anchor and guide one's actions, reinforcing the moral and spiritual aspects of Satyagraha. It provides the strength, inspiration, and guidance needed to persevere in the pursuit of truth and justice.
- **Brotherhood of Man and Faith in the Goodness of Man:** Satyagraha is based on the recognition of the unity and interconnectedness of humanity. Gandhi believed in the principle of the universal soul, seeing all humanity as one family. Satyagraha promotes the idea that injuring others is akin to injuring oneself, and it emphasizes the inherent goodness in every individual.

So, the essentials of Satyagraha involve a commitment to truth, non-violence, the supremacy of moral law, faith in God, and recognizing the interconnectedness and inherent goodness of humanity. These principles provide the foundation for Satyagraha as a powerful force for social change and transformation.

### Qualifications of Participants

The qualifications of participants in Satyagraha, as highlighted by Gandhi, are as follows:

1. **Sufficient moral strength:** Participants in Satyagraha must possess a strong moral character and a firm commitment to upholding truth and justice. They should be guided by ethical principles and have the strength to act in accordance with them.
2. **Intelligent and creative belief in the efficacy and pervasiveness of the methods:** Satyagrahis should have a deep understanding and belief in the effectiveness of Satyagraha as a means of bringing about social change. They should approach it with intelligence, creativity, and a strategic mindset.
3. **Reliance on God and fearlessness:** Participants should have faith in a higher power and rely on God for strength and guidance. They should cultivate fearlessness, being unafraid to stand up for what is right, even in the face of opposition or adversity.
4. **Cultivation of habits of toil, vigilance, self-control, and self-sacrifice:** Satyagrahis must be diligent and hardworking in their pursuit of truth and justice. They should practice vigilance, being watchful and alert to the challenges and opportunities that arise. Self-control and self-

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sacrifice are necessary to overcome personal desires and dedicate oneself to the larger cause.

5. **Belief in non-possession and holding assets in trust:** Satyagrahis should embrace the principle of non-possession, recognizing that material possessions can hinder the pursuit of truth. They should hold their assets in trust, utilizing them for the benefit of others rather than for personal gain.
6. **Belief in constructive programs and refraining from taking the law into their own hands:** Satyagrahis should have a commitment to constructive programs that aim to build a just and equitable society. They should actively engage in positive actions and avoid resorting to violence or taking the law into their own hands.

These qualifications ensure that participants in Satyagraha approach their actions with a strong moral foundation, strategic intelligence, faith, fearlessness, diligence, self-control, self-sacrifice, non-possessiveness, and a commitment to constructive change. They form the basis for effective and principled participation in Satyagraha.

### **Preliminaries of Satyagraha**

The preliminaries of Satyagraha, as advocated by Gandhi, encompass a series of steps to be taken before resorting to direct Satyagraha action. These preliminaries are aimed at exhaustively exploring and utilizing the constitutional means available for redressal of grievances. The following are the suggested steps:

1. **Wait, watch, and pray:** This involves patience, observation, and seeking divine guidance. The Satyagrahi should carefully assess the situation and explore all possible peaceful avenues for resolving the issue.
2. **Assessment of facts:** It is crucial to gather accurate information and facts about the issue at hand. The Satyagrahi should engage in a thorough examination of the circumstances, studying relevant laws, policies, and documents, and consulting experts if necessary.
3. **Tours, including walking tours or padyatras:** Gandhi advocated physically visiting affected areas and engaging directly with the people involved. This could be done through tours, including walking tours known as padyatras, to gain firsthand experience and understanding.
4. **Negotiations:** Engaging in negotiations with the concerned authorities or parties involved is an important step. The Satyagrahi should attempt to present their grievances and seek a peaceful resolution through dialogue and discussion.
5. **Arbitration:** In cases where negotiations fail, arbitration can be explored. The involvement of a neutral third party can help facilitate a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict.
6. **Promoting communal unity:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of fostering communal harmony and unity. Efforts should be made to bridge divisions and promote understanding among different communities to address the issue collectively.
7. **Promotion of political associations:** Encouraging the formation and active participation in political associations can strengthen the collective voice and create a platform for raising concerns and advocating for change through democratic means.
8. **Protest, meetings, and processions:** Peaceful protests, meetings, and processions can be organized to draw attention to the issue and garner support from the larger community. These activities should adhere to the principles of nonviolence and be conducted in a disciplined

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manner.

9. **Satyagraha preparedness:** Finally, the Satyagrahi should be prepared mentally, physically, and emotionally for the path of Satyagraha. This involves understanding the principles of Satyagraha, undergoing training, and developing the necessary inner strength to withstand challenges and hardships.

By diligently following these preliminaries, the Satyagrahi ensures that all possible avenues for peaceful resolution have been explored before embarking on direct Satyagraha action. It reflects the commitment to exhaust constitutional means and promotes a thoughtful and strategic approach to address grievances.

### **Satyagraha Methods**

Gandhi employed and advocated various methods of Satyagraha during his struggle for justice. The following are some of the methods he adopted:

1. **Banned Meetings, Demonstrations, and Processions:** Gandhi organized public meetings, staged demonstrations, and took out processions to protest against unreasonable prohibitory orders and repressive government policies. These activities aimed to mobilize public support and raise awareness of the people's grievances.
2. **Observance of National Days and Weeks:** Gandhi urged the nation to observe specific days or weeks as a means to protest against oppressive policies, seek redress of grievances, and remind the government of its unfulfilled promises.
3. **Pamphlets and Newspapers:** Gandhi utilized the freedom of the press to publish pamphlets, papers, and views that challenged unjust restrictions, conveyed the grievances of the people, and provoked the government to suppress civil resisters.
4. **Hartals:** Hartal refers to the voluntary closure of shops and suspension of business activities as a symbolic expression of disapproval against unwarranted laws and arbitrary orders.
5. **Strikes:** Gandhi recognized strikes as a labor's instrument to demand fair treatment and improved living conditions from employers. Strikes were seen as a means to negotiate for better working conditions and rights.
6. **Civil Disobedience:** Gandhi considered civil disobedience as a non-coercive method to challenge unjust laws and regulations. It involved non-compliance with specific laws or governmental orders while maintaining a spirit of non-violence and being ready to make sacrifices.
7. **Non-Cooperation:** Gandhi believed that non-cooperation with unjust systems and institutions was a sacred duty and an alternative to anarchy. It involved boycotting and withdrawing support from oppressive structures in order to effect change.
8. **Boycott:** Gandhi advocated for the boycott of commodities, titles, persons, and institutions to express protest and exert pressure on the opposing party. Boycotts were employed as a means to seek redress of grievances through economic and social consequences.
9. **Fasting (even unto Death):** Gandhi considered fasting as a powerful and effective weapon in the Satyagraha arsenal. It was used sparingly, as a last resort, and in response to the call of one's conscience. Fasting was employed to bring attention to pressing issues and seek

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resolution through moral persuasion.

10. **Non-possession:** Gandhi advocated for the practice of non-possession, where individuals would disown their property in anticipation of government seizure or confiscation. This method aimed to resist oppressive measures and demonstrate the willingness to sacrifice personal possessions for a higher cause.

These methods of Satyagraha were employed strategically by Gandhi to challenge injustice, create awareness, mobilize public support, and ultimately seek redress of grievances in a nonviolent and principled manner.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Satyagraha is a dynamic and evolving science that Gandhi demonstrated to be effective not only in achieving political freedom but also in addressing various forms of exploitation, oppression, social injustice, and social evils during his lifetime. It is not a weapon of the weak or cowardly but rather a weapon of the strong and courageous. Satyagraha calls for the establishment of a new civilization and culture that encompasses the well-being of all humanity.

Satyagraha remains a powerful and enduring approach to address political, social, economic, and religious problems. It holds relevance even in contemporary democratic societies, offering a means to challenge and rectify any form of entrenched evil. Gandhi envisioned a sarvodaya (welfare for all) social order that would be free from moral degradation, economic exploitation, and political subjugation.

Satyagraha is a profound and transformative force that goes beyond immediate goals and aims to bring about a holistic and sustainable change in society. It requires the unwavering commitment to truth, non-violence, self-sacrifice, and the pursuit of justice. Satyagraha, as demonstrated by Gandhi, serves as an inspiration for individuals and movements striving for a more just and equitable world.

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