

SATYAGRAHA

VINOBA

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Publisher's Note

Satyagraha is Gandhiji's invaluable gift to the world. It is a wonderful discovery in the twentieth Century. Gandhiji showed to the downtrodden and the dispossessed a way to fight against injustices. That way succeeded in ending British Raj in India. It became a source of inspiration to the whole world.

The way of satyagraha is not only a way to resist evil, it is a way of life founded on the search for Truth and insistence on Truth. It is a complete philosophy of life. It has shed light on the next step in human evolution.

Vinoba's contribution to Gandhiji's theory of satyagraha is significant and unparalleled. When the word 'satyagraha' began to lose lustre in Independent India because of wrong interpretation and application, it was Vinoba who continued to caution the people and put before them the true meaning and implications of satyagraha. In the process, he interpreted and elaborated the theory in a radical and innovative way.

Fruitlessness of violence has become abundantly clear now; and the problems not only persist, but are also growing at an alarming pace. Search for nonviolent solutions has become imperative. Vinoba's presentation of the theory of satyagraha will certainly be found worth consideration in this context.

1. Historical Background

Discovery of agriculture

In the bygone era human beings used to live on hunting like other animals. Violence was as inevitable to them as to other animals. The idea to extricate himself from this occurred to man for the first time in India: cultivation of land was that idea. We do not realize today the great spiritual secret hidden in agriculture. To sow a few seeds, reap hundreds of them and live on them was an extraordinary discovery. That idea guided Indians on the path of nonviolence. This was followed by the campaign to abjure meat-eating, which the Jains took to perfection. Lord Buddha added nonviolence and compassion to it and the Vaidiks made agriculture a spiritual pursuit. Agriculture does involve violence to some extent, but there is much more scope for nonviolence in it than the earlier means of livelihood. Indian people thus advanced progressively in the quest for nonviolence.

Science widened the horizons of mutual relations, trade and intercourse in general. Means of communication became much speedier and there was huge growth in population. The issues and conflicts arising out of this situation did not remain in bound. Need to resist various injustices became a burning issue. It became imperative to find ways and means to resist injustices and to find remedies for the problems arising in society.

Many of the problems that are arising today are extremely extensive. And no way except violence occurs to most of the people to tackle them. In such a situation, a discovery was made in India—discovery of satyagraha— through which problems of the country, society and of the world also could be solved.

On the path of nonviolence

Just as a discovery in the ancient times prepared us for a nonviolent life, a method to solve social problems nonviolently became available to us in modern times. In the ancient times, agriculture must have been an arduous task, but there has been much progress in it. Likewise, we have not yet found a simple and systematic technique for satyagraha. But as science has evolved simple techniques for agriculture, such techniques for satyagraha also would get evolved in the course of time. A systematic science of satyagraha, accessible to the masses, is not yet in place. It is not easy to build it. It needs a lot of exploration and experimentation. We will have to engage in this task. If we do this, it would be a significant step, which would save the society from violence.

A way to do away with violence as regards livelihood was discovered in the form of agriculture, yet people have not completely abjured meat-eating. Likewise, discovery of satyagraha has opened a way. We will have to go on developing it. Development in agriculture has been proceeding since five thousand years, and still there is scope for further development. No wonder, development of satyagraha too will have to go on for thousands of years. But it is clear that we have grasped the basic principle.

Human beings developed the power of violence from ordinary bows and arrows to atom and hydrogen bombs. Intelligence of many scientists and energy of many statesmen have been expended in this task and many brave persons have sacrificed their lives in its course. The power of violence has thus been getting developed since thousands of years. But its demonic nature has become evident now. Consequently, the world is wary of this power.

Violence has lost its sheen, but the problems persist; therefore, a way has to be found to solve them through nonviolence.

Efforts to develop the power of nonviolence have so far been done on the individual level by great individuals. As a result, there is respect for nonviolence in the society. But there have hardly been any experiments which could generate faith in its efficacy to solve social problems. There have been instances of saintly men braving attacks and emerging victorious in the end. There have been instances of small communities offering non-cooperation. In our country, we won our freedom through non-cooperation. Many sages have pondered over developing the power of nonviolence and experimented to limit the scope of violence in individual life. It was laid down that only one class (kshatriyas) would be entitled to use violence; the rest should refrain from it. Such experiments were carried out at various places. We can learn much from them. Yet, none of them appears relevant to the present times.

Therefore, it is our duty to think over the development of nonviolence. Gandhiji made a beginning. That paved the way for collective nonviolence. Much needs to be done in this respect. That country, which could fashion effective techniques of satyagraha, would show way to the world.

Confluence of two traditions

In India, two traditions were prevalent: (1) Injustice, wherever it may occur, must be resisted, (2) Enmity reinforces enmity, so one should be free from enmity towards anyone. Both these traditions have existed parallel to each other.

As a corollary to the idea of resisting injustice, use of arms for defence was justified. It was believed that although one should not commit an armed aggression, one may, rather one must, use arms for self-defence and for the defence of truth against a tyrant. This line of thinking produced warriors like Rana Pratap and Shivaji. They did not commit aggression on anyone, but believed that injustice must be fought even with weapons, if need be.

The second tradition, which believed that enmity could never end enmity, produced saints like Kabir and Tulsidas.

We find these two streams in the history of India. A few men like Prophet Mohammed, Vidyaranya and Basava appear to belong to both the traditions. But they were exceptions.

Security of society is one viewpoint; reformation of and revolution in society is another viewpoint. Certain contradiction in these two is inevitable; and so we see two different parallel streams in history. Shivaji and Tukaram were contemporaries. Shivaji belonged to the first tradition and Tukaram to the second. Both had respect for each other. Shivaji would often attend Tukaram's devotional discourses. But Tukaram never took part in Shivaji's work of resisting the injustice, nor did Shivaji join Tukaram's community of devotees. Had Tukaram been asked whether Shivaji's work was appropriate, he would have replied in the affirmative. But he would have declined to join that work, holding that it was not his natural duty, although he would not dissuade Shivaji from doing that in the prevalent situation.

Gandhiji joined the tradition of saints to resistance. He said, 'We will fight injustice and yet will remain free from enmity.' This was a great contribution to the world of ideas. A new ground was broken. The schism in society was cemented. Confusion was done away with. Freedom from enmity augmented the strength to resist, and resistance added to the potency

of absence of enmity. Gandhiji taught that the saints' love and the warriors' valour could come together, fuse together and become virtually one; love and valour could become synonymous.

People know the greatness of love, but do not believe that it can protect them. They know the greatness of knowledge, but are not convinced about its efficacy in offering protection. So, there exist two departments: defence and education—education for reform and army for protection. Some great men try to bring them together. But such an effort, at the most, stitches them together; it cannot weave them to make a single whole. In Sarvodaya, the two streams become one. There is then no question of opposition between them. Conflicts arising from the schism between them are naturally obviated. When virtues are divided into two separate compartments, no individual and no society can attain perfection.

In Sarvodaya, nonviolence is considered the only power, which would protect, nurture and love. The discovery of satyagraha did away with stitching. The two streams were woven together to make one single whole cloth. This is the beauty of satyagraha. We had a glimpse of this because of Gandhiji.

Demand of the time

After conquering India, the British did something extraordinary. They disarmed the whole country. None had dared to do such a thing in the past. This experiment had terrible repercussions for both, the rulers and the ruled. Indian people became timid and incapable of raising their heads. This dreadful experiment broke India's back.

When a whole country with a large population, long history, distinctive traditions and refined culture is disarmed, to find a way whereby the tyrannical rule could be fought and freedom be gained even without arms is the only alternative before it. A country like India could never have been kept in bondage for ever. It was bound to occur to someone that soul-force must be utilized on a wide scale to end the tyranny.

Mahatma Gandhi came at this juncture. He said, 'Soul is powerful. We do not need arms. The foreign rule is continuing because we are supporting it. If we withdraw that support, it will fall. No government can go on without cooperation from the subjects. We will unite and lay our demands before the rulers and will non-cooperate with them if the demands are not met.' Had Mahatma Gandhi not appeared, someone else would have. This great country would never have remained slave for ever. Discovery of the soul-force was inevitable.

Benefitting from experience

New situation demands new response. A new thought occurred to Prophet Mohammed and he started propagating it. Consequently, he and his handful of disciples had to face many hardships. When the Prophet saw that his disciples were getting unnerved and panicky under pressure, he permitted them to offer armed resistance also. The results are there for all to see. We need not go into that. We should believe that the Prophet did what was best under the circumstances. We should not judge his action in the framework of present context. We do find an exhortation in Koran that 'evil should be fought with good alone. Evil can be ended only through goodness. This is the better way. But if this is not possible, one may use arms strictly for self-defence, avoiding any excess.' I believe that what

the Prophet did was in the interest of nonviolence; he did not discard the principle of ending evil with good.

And what did Jesus say? 'Resist not evil.' But we do find him using caustic words: 'Woe unto you, woe unto you'. Bible has called them 'Eight woes'. If I say that Jesus should have used milder language, it would be presumptuousness and vanity on my part. We must understand that such words rose spontaneously from a deeply pained and compassionate heart. They were certainly not excessively strong, nor did they have an element of violence in them.

We should derive benefit from previous experience and move ahead. Lord Rama used bow and arrows, but Lord Krishna did not think it necessary; he used a flute. Lord Buddha used neither, and preferred to remain silent.

Examples in history

Gandhiji would often mention Prahlad as an ideal satyagrahi. I would tell him that not Prahlad, but sage Shuka was the ideal satyagrahi. It is true that Prahlad silently suffered torture, but he resisted a sinner. It is creditable to resist a sinner, but it is more creditable to resist a virtuous man, as it is more difficult. When Shuka left home and headed for the forest, sage Vyasa (his father) followed him, beseeching him to return. Who could teach detachment to a great sage like Vyasa? Shuka did that, and hence his satyagraha was the best.

One has to mention the name of Jesus Christ in connection with satyagraha. While being crucified, he asked God to forgive his tormentors, and thus showed how an ideal satyagrahi should behave.

Another name that occurs to us is that of saint Eknath. His Bhagavat ends with the incident wherein a hunter mistakenly regards the Lord's feet as a deer and shoots an arrow, wounding the Lord fatally. But the Lord forgives him. Eknath has said that the Lord has thereby put before us an ideal for forgiveness. It appears to me that Eknath's satyagrahi life must have been inspired by this incident.

Eknath, of course, did not know the word 'satyagraha', but his psyche and the whole life were infused with the spirit of satyagraha. The story of a rogue^s repeatedly spitting on him is no imaginary tale. It shows the arrogance of the then ruling class. I think this is the best example of satyagraha.

In this connection, one point needs to be clarified. People often consider the Jesus' teaching, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" or Eknath's conduct in this incident as examples of refraining from resistance, whereas

§ India was ruled mostly by Muslim kings at that time. Once when Eknath was returning after bathing in the river, an arrogant Muslim spat on him. Eknath did not get angry; he went back to the river and bathed again. The man again spat on Eknath and he again went for a bath. The rogue went on repeating his vile act, but Eknath remained unperturbed and continued to take bath again and again, which ultimately put the man to shame.

Gandhiji's teaching involves resistance, even if nonviolent. I think this is an erroneous interpretation. If you take Jesus' teaching literally, you will find that it also involves resistance. Jesus is not asking us to disregard the action of smiting on the cheek or to remain silent; he is asking us to turn the other cheek to the attacker. Those who are in love with the word 'resistance' should be happy with this interpretation! But to me, both this interpretation and the happiness it gives are pointless. Howsoever may the conduct of a person perfectly devoid of fear and enmity appear, that hardly matters. One such person may spit on his own body if a rogue spits on him; another may totally disregard the spitting; yet another may behave as Eknath and another one may twist the culprit's ears with a loving heart! All these responses can be imagined.

Collective experiment

Jesus, Eknath and Gandhi followed satyagraha in their respective fields. Gandhiji's satyagraha was collective – that is its distinguishing characteristic. Satyagraha of others was on individual level. But this difference is mainly because of circumstances. Every era has its own needs and certain potentialities. Even to great men in the era, ideas occur in the context of those needs and potentialities. We find that scientific experiments are first conducted in laboratories and they are applied widely only thereafter. There is no difference in individual and collective experiments as far as the principle is concerned. It was not possible for Eknath to think of collective satyagraha because circumstances were different in his time. Had someone sought his advice in the event of aggression, he might probably have given consent to armed resistance. In fact, there is a story that once he actually fought with an aggressor army, riding on a horse. We need not give much importance to this story as far as the life of Eknath is concerned; it just shows the response of a dutiful citizen of that time. The essence of Eknath's life lies in satyagraha; and people remember that aspect only.

People in that time could not contemplate collective satyagraha, because science had not brought them as close as it has now. Government was not as developed and powerful as it is now. Therefore, the use of spiritual power remained confined to individual and familial spheres. When it was adequately tested in those spheres, Gandhiji used that power in social and political realms.

This *mantra* of collective satyagraha is the result of the experiences of mankind in its long history. It will save the world and augment the strength of nonviolence.

India, even when she was in bondage, gave three great ideas to the world. Ramakrishna Paramhans taught that deliverance of the world lies in the synthesis of all the religions. Sri Aurobindo professed that deliverance of the world lies in rising to supramental level. And Gandhiji averred that its deliverance lies in the manifestation of nonviolent power of satyagraha. These are three great spiritual discoveries in the life of mankind.

Satyagraha, in essence, means that the spiritual ideals could be and should be followed in actual life. Gandhiji demonstrated this effectively.

Gandhiji was benefitted by the spiritual background in India. His weapon of satyagraha was in conformity with Indian culture. Had there not been the tradition of spiritual quest, society would not have listened to Gandhiji's words. History provided no example of

successful overthrow of a foreign rule through nonviolence. Yet people accepted nonviolence, because of the spiritual traditions. Gandhiji's experiment could succeed because of the spiritual ethos in the country, compassion for all the living creatures, and the faith that the same Self resides in every living being. The innate spirit of this country found expression through Gandhiji, and favourable circumstances made its manifestation possible.

The discovery of satyagraha

Gandhiji showed the powerful way of satyagraha, which can solve conflicts and establish peace. We want both, peace and revolution. If we want peace, we have to demonstrate that peace is inherently capable of changing the structure of society, not gradually but rapidly, as is expected in a revolutionary change. If this could be proved, violence would no more be considered unavoidable in revolution, and the society would be saved.

Gandhiji taught us a lot. Perhaps satyagraha would be considered the most significant of his teachings. The meaning of satyagraha is very wide in scope. Gandhiji used to say with his characteristic humility that he had understood only a fraction of it; it was a science that held many secrets and one had so much yet to explore. This was not merely out of humility; this was a statement of fact. What we did up till now in the realm of satyagraha was like groping in the dark. We could move only a little forward in the light of a few rays.

Gandhiji undertook collective satyagraha for the first time in South Africa. He has himself written the history of that experiment. The word 'satyagraha' originated during that struggle. The agitation in South Africa was initially known as passive resistance. This term conveyed an altogether different meaning. That was why the word 'satyagraha' was coined. Gandhiji has explained the difference between satyagraha and passive resistance as follows:

(1) Love has no place in passive resistance; ill will has no place in satyagraha.

(2) Passive resistance is frequently a sort of preparation for the use of arms; satyagraha can never be so used.

(3) Passive resistance cannot be offered against one's own kith and kin. Satyagraha can be offered even against the loved ones.

(4) Passive resistance seeks to harass the opponent; there is no such idea in satyagraha.

Passive resistance has all the negative features of violence, besides it is weak in spirit. That makes it impotent.

Convinced about the efficacy of satyagraha, Gandhiji first employed it in South Africa, and after attaining success there, he came to India and presented this new means before the country with full conviction.

Satyagraha in Gandhiji's time

The sun of satyagraha rose during Gandhiji's time, but it was not quite bright. Now the circumstances have changed. Today we are Independent. There is freedom to propagate one's views. Lack of such background conditioned satyagraha in Gandhiji's times, although he was the ideal satyagrahi.

We must ponder over what Gandhiji said during his last days. You will find it in Pyarelalji's 'The Last Phase'. Gandhiji had said that God wanted to utilize him in attaining freedom for India, so He blind-folded him, making him incapable of seeing that his

satyagrahas were those of the weak, not of the brave. They were rather kinds of passive resistance.

Gandhiji fasted against the Communal Award[‡] (1932). Everyone was anxious for his life. Rabindranath Tagore also reached there (at Yervada where Gandhiji was fasting). It appears from subsequent events that he consented to Pune Pact even though he was not in its favour in his heart of hearts. Rabindranath was not a man who would allow him to be unduly pressurised by anything. He was India's sentinel. He always tried to keep India free from parochial patriotism. Yet he agreed to something which his reason did not accept. It is clear that Gandhiji's satyagraha exerted undue pressure in this case. It impeded the process of transformation of heart.

Whenever I thought differently as regards any of Gandhiji's satyagrahas, I discussed the matters with him and tried to understand his viewpoint. Regarding some satyagrahas, he admitted his errors. He conceded that satyagrahas at Rajkot and Ahmedabad exerted pressure on the opponents. However, I did not have the opportunity to discuss his fast against the Communal Award.

Pressure is one thing and impact is another. Satyagraha should not exert pressure, but it must have an impact. On the whole, Gandhiji realized that his satyagrahas were forms of passive resistance rather than satyagrahas. We should learn from this experience.

Satyagraha was employed for attaining political freedom, and we did win freedom. But that is no proof of its efficacy; for several forces working in the world at that time also contributed to our freedom. Moreover, there were incidents of violence during our freedom struggle, not to speak of mental violence. Yet we remained within certain bounds. And satyagrahas certainly had their own impact. But they gave only glimpse of its potency.

Positive idea; negative work

No experiment in nonviolence can ever be perfect; every experiment is bound to have some fault or shortcoming. That happened with Gandhiji's satyagrahas too. But his idea was basically positive.

Satyagraha is basically positive, not negative. It involves erecting the whole edifice of life on the foundation of truth. Gandhiji's satyagrahas were negative because of the circumstances. Our people were paralysed by fear, and it was not possible to make them fearless and capable of employing nonviolence of the brave instantly. Therefore, it was good that this intermediate way of negative satyagraha came in handy. Secondly, there were patriots who believed in violence. It was necessary to wean them away from their ways. Moreover, Gandhiji linked satyagraha with constructive programmes. He would often say that if these programmes were fully implemented, there would be little need for (militant) satyagraha. That provided some protection against its abuse. Everybody wanted freedom, and armed struggle was also considered right for the purpose. Satyagraha, even if negative, was decidedly preferable in such a situation. Through it, Gandhiji succeeded in removing fear from the people's minds to a great extent and prepared them for resistance.

[‡] Provision of separate electorates for the dalits by the British Raj. Gandhiji opposed the divisive ploy and undertook indefinite fast against the provision. His fast resulted in the Poona Pact, which did away with separate electorates for the dalits, but gave them many more reserved seats in the legislatures.

Prophet Mohammed did not initially give permission for armed resistance to his disciples; later he allowed it for self-defence. Many defensive and offensive wars for the propagation of Islam, and even wars for extension of political power, then followed. There was at least no such possibility in negative satyagraha. In fact, at least a few protagonists of revolutionary violence took to Gandhiji's path.

Gandhiji joined satyagraha to constructive work. People would often ask him, "Khadi, removal of untouchability, village industries etc. are for social reform; what have they to do with freedom struggle?" But these programmes were also parts of satyagraha for Gandhiji. It was his genius, which realised that if we did not have a constructive attitude even while doing a negative work, that would be fraught with dangers.

Had Gandhiji's idea of satyagraha been negative, he would not have connected it to constructive work and selfless service. He would not have then chosen me as the first satyagrahi (in 1940). People did not know me. I had hardly done any political work. Whatever other qualities he might have seen in me, he must have seen at least one quality – that my mind was constructive, not destructive. Clearly, to him, constructive work was essential for a satyagrahi.

The present situation

Gandhiji had often said that the science of satyagraha was in the making; it needed to be developed. Unfortunately, instead of developing it, we have brought it to a lower level.

India is now in a precarious condition. Reason is becoming wayward and thinking is lacking in depth. Conduct of people is crossing bounds. Old tenets are being discarded and new ones are not taking their place. Consequently, one cannot say which mishap would occur and when. Only satyagraha can save us in this situation.

So-called satyagraha has become a routine exercise. No one is affected by the news about satyagrahas and consequent arrests. Programmes like courting arrests, in fact, blunt this weapon. If one becomes angry off and on, his anger has no impact. Such exercises do not augment the power of satyagraha; service, compassion, self-purification, penance are needed for this purpose.

When we use any epithet for a thought, we weaken that thought. Take satyagraha. Some people call it a Gandhian concept. But we should bear in mind that Gandhiji was after all a human being, while thoughts know no bounds. No individual, howsoever great, can be as extensive as a thought and cannot be bracketed with it. We constrict satyagraha if we associate it with Gandhiji exclusively, and such conditioning of thought can have retrogressive effect on it. Let us, therefore, consider satyagraha a pure and noble idea and then deliberate on it.

2. Meaning and Process

What is truth?

It is not possible to define Truth. It is natural and self-evident. Truth is that through which we perceive our inner spirit and which satisfies this inner spirit. Where inner spirit is not satisfied or is disturbed, there is untruth. In other words, inner spirit stands witness to what is truth or untruth.

Truth is necessarily accompanied with balance and equanimity. This is the second test. There is balance and objectivity in truth, and it is characterized by inner peace. Truth lies in a balanced and objective decision.

I broadly describe truth by the following seven characteristics:

1. Absence of Self-deception.
2. Receptivity to new knowledge and experience.
3. Strict adherence to facts in speech.
4. Efforts to practise what the reason accepts.
5. No obstinate insistence on one's viewpoint.
6. Readiness to rectify errors.
7. Restraint in body, speech and mind.

Truth is the highest ethical principle. It alone is the foundation of society. Society cannot exist without truth. Truth is particularly important in the quest for Self-realisation. One can have vision of the Self only if one's life stands on the foundation of truth. The way to God-realization is made of truth.

Life is meant for the pursuit of truth. Gandhiji had described his life as a series of experiments with truth.

How to find the truth?

How can one find the truth? Gandhiji said, 'through nonviolence.' I will say, one can find the truth through humility, objectivity and an open and detached mind. Science has an open mind. It accepts the deductions of experiments.

Nonviolence is associated with truth. Where the Gita talks of dedication to the welfare of all beings (12.4), Shankaracharya interprets it as nonviolence. Nonviolence does not mean only absence of violence; it has three facets: fearlessness, love and cooperation and faith in constructive work. One of its aspects is love and another is compassion. Love means becoming happy with others' happiness. Compassion means getting dejected by others' sorrow, and doing something to alleviate that sorrow. Nonviolence is not an external action; it is a sincere inner commitment.

Nonviolence is the power of the soul, not of the body – there are no two opinions about it. But we identify ourselves with our bodies. If we get out of this identification with the body and concern ourselves with what lies beyond, our outlook, the way of our reasoning, our conduct – all these would undergo change. So if we have faith in nonviolence and want to apply it on the collective plane, its application in our own lives should be our prime concern.

A man, who sees himself as separate and distinct from his physical body, can see others too as separate and distinct from their bodies. He, therefore, neither dominates anyone nor allows anyone to dominate him. He neither fears anyone nor arouses fear in anyone. Self-knowledge springs from the realisation that one is separate from the body. This realisation is the foundation of the power of satyagraha.

Some people, who consider themselves practical, say that truth is all right, but it is risky to follow it unilaterally. They say that if the opponent is resorting to untruth and violence and we stick to truth and nonviolence, we would be the losers. They really do not know the value of truth; otherwise, they would not have advanced such an argument. They know that one who eats would gain strength. They have nothing against unilateral eating, but are apprehensive about unilateral love and truthfulness. They would do what the opponent does. It means they would dance to the opponent's tunes. They would place initiative in the hands of the opponent. This is a cowardly stand. It creates a vicious circle—evil begetting evil. We must have courage to break this circle, and be ready to love unilaterally without thinking of its consequences. We must be large-hearted. This is what satyagraha entails.

Guidance of truth

Satyagraha involves quest for truth. For this purpose, it is essential to keep our minds and hearts open to see and accept the truth. In addition, we should immediately follow and practice the truth as we have perceived it, continuously and persistently. If I understand something, I act upon it at once. If I know that there is a snake in my bed, it takes no time for me to leave the bed, howsoever soft and warm it may be.

We should accept the guidance of truth in our life. We should not give up the truth. We should stick to it and be firm on it. We should proclaim and propagate that truth, explain it to others, invite them to think, arouse reflection on it in the others' reason, try to convince them and convert them to our views based on our perception of truth, with patience and perseverance. The truth we have perceived gives us satisfaction and joy and we should invite others to share that discovery. Satyagraha is essentially a joint collaborative effort for finding the truth, which liberates us as well as others.

Consequence of the word 'agraha'

In satyagraha, *satya* (truth) is important, not *agraha* (insistence). Basically, truth is good, insistence is not. The word 'agraha' does not carry a lofty meaning in Sanskrit. In Telugu, 'agraha' means anger. However, the word has now been purified through its practice.

But words do have an impact. Patanjali, the great grammarian, says that even if one word is understood and used in a perfectly proper manner, it would fulfil your heart's desires in your heavenly abode. If the word is not so used and has scope for wrong associations, it could have serious consequences. We have seen this in the so-called satyagrahas in Independent India. Not one percent of them were true satyagrahas of Gandhiji's conception. This was a result of the association of the word 'agraha' with truth.

'Satya-dhriti' is a better word

The word 'dhriti' occurs in our scriptures. There is a story in Katha Upanishad. Nachiketa entertains Yama, the deity of death, to impart him Self-knowledge. Yama tempts

him with the offer of many things, but Nachiketa flatly refuses and remains firm on his request. That pleases Yama, who calls him '*satyadhriti*' – one who is firm on Truth.

The word '*satyagraha*' has come to stay, but it is not as unblemished as '*satyadhriti*'. We can, therefore, profitably use the word '*satyadhriti*' instead of *satyagraha*.

Receptivity to truth

'*Satyagraha*' entails acceptance of the portion of truth in others' stands. When we learn to see and accept truth in others' stands, we can have the truth in its fullness. It needs an open mind. Currently, it is nowhere visible; but it is direly needed. Mind is conditioned by attachment to different nations, languages, denominations, politics etc. Such a mind cannot think freely.

A *satyagrahi* will not give up his claim on truth, but he will not believe that the position of his opponent is totally devoid of truth. In fact, he will believe that the opponent too has a portion of truth with him. A *satyagrahi* should be firm on the truth as he has perceived it, but should be ready to grasp and accept the portion of truth with the other party. Therefore, he should always be ready for a dialogue.

It is not that we have a monopoly over truth. We should be ready to accept the truth with the other party; then the latter will also be receptive to the truth in our stand.

It means that before becoming a *satya-grahi*, one should be a **satya-grahi** (one who is receptive to truth). If one is not receptive to the truth with others, one cannot enter the hearts of others. If we accept the truth in the opponent's stand, then untruth will fall away automatically.

People feel that they have monopoly over truth; the only thing that remains to be done is to insist on it! This is a misconception. Truth is wide in scope; it is everywhere. We should be ready to accept truth from all quarters. We should be concerned with truth alone and prepared to consider any viewpoint for this purpose. We should be guided by truth as such and not by its particular version, which we happen to hold.

This word **satya-grahi** occurred to me when I came across the word '*bhava-grahi*' (one who understands and accepts the inner feelings) in the devotional literature of Bengal and Odisha. This epithet is used for God. I was in search of an appropriate word for explaining the meaning of '*satyagraha*', and was happy when I hit upon this word.

Preparedness to accept truth with others is not possible unless we rise above the mind.

In Rig Veda, there are many synonyms for '*war*'. One of these is '*mama satyam*' – '*truth is with me alone*'. When one takes this stand, war becomes inescapable. The war may be fought without arms – that does not make it a *satyagraha*.

Jains believe in '*Syad-vada*' – '*this may be right, and that also may be right*'. This is exactly what **satya-grahi** attitude implies. Only when we value every aspect can we reach the truth in its fullness.

The basis of satyagraha

Our opinion is what our mind tells us. But the mind invariably reasons in accordance with the inclination of the senses. Therefore, what we assume to be our opinions are not really our true opinions. When the mind reasons without letting the senses overpower it, we arrive at objective opinions. An objective opinion is possible when the mind has subjugated

the senses. And such opinions can be propagated mainly through practice, through action. If our opinion is right, it would propagate itself if we act upon it. We should have faith in the truth. There is an inherent power in the truth to propel itself. Truth is self-luminous like the sun. Just as we cannot cover the sun, we cannot cover the truth.

A human being may have distorted opinions, but he is not so. Many times, we change our opinions in the course of time. My opinion today is different from what it was yesterday, my opinion tomorrow may be still different. That does not mean that one should never have settled opinions. I must act on what I feel right at the moment. But at the same time, I must bear in mind that just as the Supreme Lord cannot be contained in any one particular form, the complete truth cannot be contained in my opinions alone. God is present everywhere; so is truth. Truth is there in my opinions and in others' opinions as well in some degree.

This faith is the basis of satyagraha, and this also defines its bounds. As no individual, community or organisation is totally devoid of truth, we must use non-violent means for resisting what we find untruth in them. In short, while judging opinions of any individual or while resisting him, we should distinguish between the individual and his opinions and actions. This is an important aspect of satyagraha.

Process of love

Love is essential in satyagraha. It is wrong to hate anyone. If there is hatred in the heart, we should better fight with the arms. Removal of hatred from the mind is the first prerequisite for satyagraha. That is why Mahatma Gandhi had said that in the term 'satyagraha' one word is hidden; and that is 'love'. Satyagraha means not just insistence on truth, but insistence on truth with love, with nonviolence. Satyagraha is thus an experiment with nonviolence.

Satyagraha is the height of love. It presupposes an attitude of giving a place to the opponent in our soul. If you have love in your heart, you can undertake satyagraha in your home too. Satyagraha is the love's pique for the sake of truth. Of course, you would have to suffer for this. You should have strength to bear this suffering. Power of love is invincible.

Satyagraha is no threat. If a mother begins fast to wean her son away from bad habits, does it mean that she is threatening him? When there is no trace of enmity and yet resistance is involved, there is no question of threat; the question is to bring someone to senses, to awaken him. How does a mother awaken her child? First, she gently asks him to get up. If he does not get up, she touches and shakes him gently. This touch is no indication of threat or violence; it is a touch of love. When love in a small measure fails, it takes more intense form. Manifestation of consciousness has to be proportionate to the dullness and senselessness opposite you.

When your opponent does not take your satyagraha as a threat, but sees it as a greater manifestation of love, that will be a true satyagraha. Those against whom you are doing satyagraha should be grateful to you. If a mother fasts to reform her son, the son will take it as a kind-hearted favour.

Satyagraha is the way of justice and righteousness. There is no place for hatred in it. Hatred reduces the efficacy of satyagraha. Your right to offer satyagraha is directly

proportional to the love in your heart. If satyagraha is giving rise to hatred, it cannot be called satyagraha.

Power of nonviolence becomes manifest when we have love for our opponent and our actions are prompted by a desire for his well-being. We should feel that our actions are beneficial to us as well as to him. Then only the opponent is likely to change.

Faith in human heart

Never think that someone is beyond redemption. We must trust each other. We should believe that there is goodness in every heart. It is not a question of blind faith; it is a scientific approach. We cannot behold the virtues and vices in others so long as we have not transcended the plane of mind. Until one acquires such a capacity, one should better have faith. One should have a positive and constructive outlook, a mentality of seeing the good and the auspicious in the world. It is the foundation of satyagraha. One's life may be sinful, but one's heart is not. And it is heart which really matters. It is in the heart that various virtues reside. But there is a veil over it, which prevents us from seeing what lies beyond. Only when you remove the veil, you will see that. When I go to people with faith, my faith is vindicated. We should ignore the outer shell and see the kernel within. This is the way to comprehend the true nature of a man also.

Some people say that it is Vinoba's illusion to think that human heart is pure. I reply that I prefer to remain under the spell of this illusion. This illusion has never harmed, and will never harm me. Such a belief has never harmed the world, and will never harm it. Upanishads say, 'You are Brahman.' If we tell someone that he is pure, that will actually make him pure.

It is a basic tenet of law that ten culprits may go scot-free, but no innocent man should ever be punished. Benefit of doubt must be given to every accused. This is a very good characteristic of law. It is based on humanity. The goodness in human heart does not need any evidence to prove it. Evidence is needed for evil. Had human heart been vicious, there would have been no punishment for viciousness. But law punishes viciousness. This goes to prove that human heart is basically good.

Identification with others

Insistence on truth and resistance to untruth are evident in satyagraha. But while accepting the truth and resisting the untruth, one should never forget that the Self pervades the whole universe. The awareness that the individual in front of me is a form of mine should always be there. I should, therefore, try to remove faults in others with the sensitivity and gentleness that I have while plucking a thorn out of my own palm. Never forget that satyagraha is not an act to reform others, although it may appear so; it is an act to reform ourselves. Wherever you find evil, see the good associated with that. Gain access to the hearts of others through that good. Then alone can you effectively counter the evil.

Removal of pressures

Satyagraha is presently looked upon as a threat. If one hears of any satyagraha, it does not *prima facie* create a favourable impression. Satyagraha is associated in public mind with exertion of pressure. But satyagraha is, in fact, synonymous with the removal of all kinds of pressures. There are many pressures on a man's mind. Many situations put pressure on

human reason. Consequently, his reason is not free. Satyagraha is the process of removing these pressures. It does not involve creating an additional pressure. It seeks to make the reason capable of independent thinking. Such a satyagraha would have a soothing effect on the people. The veils covering their hearts and reason would be removed. Satyagraha is essentially for removing those veils.

Lack of assertion

Satyagraha implies lack of assertion on our own part. Let us allow the truth to assert itself. We should only refrain from coming in the way of such assertion by truth. Normally, we talk of asserting the truth, but it is 'our' assertion, not the truth's. We should let the truth assert; then untruth cannot stand against it. When our assertion comes in the picture, it blocks the way of truth and blunts the power of satyagraha. Let us step aside from the way of truth and let it operate unhindered. That is what satyagraha is.

Believers in satyagraha should have faith that if they insist on truth and practise it, it would not go in vain. Let us have faith in truth, faith in God, and let us work with the belief that truth always emerges victorious in the end. That is what satyagraha is.

Constant contemplation of higher things in life and ignoring trivial things, being neutral, uttering the truth as we see it and refraining from our own insistence—all these are characteristics of satyagraha.

Faith in the power of thought

We, who believe in the philosophy of Sarvodaya and desire well-being of the people, want to build their power through satyagraha. For this purpose, we must have a living faith in the theory of satyagraha. Secondly, we must be ready to suffer for truth. The courage of transforming the heart is the third requirement. We can transform the hearts of human beings. Everyone has a Divine flame burning within their hearts. It may get covered and appear dimmed, but it is never extinguished. We must have faith in the consciousness of human beings; in other words, in the God immanent in them. When these three things come together, we can have a peaceful revolution in society. This is what satyagraha is about.

Contemplating and articulating pure thoughts is itself a great pursuit. It should be invariably followed by action in accordance with them. As far as others are concerned, our only duty towards them is to explain our views. Nothing more.

There is no other power except that of reason to establish truth. I should explain my views to you, you should explain your views to me—this is the only way to establish truth. In this age of science, we must realise this and keep on explaining our views patiently. If society does not understand when we explain in a particular manner, we should explain more skilfully. That is the purest form of satyagraha.

We should explain our ideas, undertake service necessary for the purpose and have a friendly heart towards the opponent so as not to arouse fear in the latter's heart.

We should understand how anyone's thinking gets transformed, and avoid insisting unduly on what we consider right. We should have faith that if we can perceive the truth, everyone else can. Unless the intellect is open and receptive to truth, others would not grasp it, howsoever hard we may try to explain or whatever we do. We need not, therefore, be worried about the revelation of truth; it is enough if we concern ourselves with

comprehending the truth. Others would also then comprehend it. I think this process is more in tune with nonviolence. And as far as truth is concerned, there is nothing wrong in this process; in fact, it facilitates its revelation.

I had said that if the power of words gets blunted, power of arms would take over. Power of words is built up through meditative contemplation. It is not necessary to increase gross activities for this purpose. It is purity of spirit that is necessary. Speech backed by the purity of spirit is endowed with power.

Satyagraha essentially means appealing to and convincing the heads and hearts of the people through right conduct, right speech and right thinking. One is not a satyagrahi if he has no faith in the power of thought. Power of satyagraha stems from the fact that the darkness of falsehood cannot withstand the light of truth.

In the last resort, we can rely only on our capacity of convincing others. Satyagraha is possible only to the extent it retains its nature of explaining. The moment the element of pressure comes in, it is the end of satyagraha.

A satyagrahi, therefore, has as if has taken a solemn vow, adopting the conviction of Shankaracharya: to go on persuading the opponent until he is convinced. When Shankaracharya was asked, "What will you do if one does not get convinced when you explain once?" He replied, "I will explain again." "And what if one still did not understand?" "I will explain for the third time." In the same way, when Jesus was asked how many times should the adversary be forgiven, he replied, "Seven times." "And what if he still continues to hate us?" Jesus said, "Then forgive him seven times seven." And if that too fails, what next? Then forgive him $7 \times 7 \times 7$, that is, 343 times. Satyagraha is characterised by such an unshakable faith in the power of knowledge and reason.

Process of conversion of heart

Nonviolence is an inner power, which works in several fields. But most of its working is not perceptible. In violence, there is preponderance of external actions, but inner reasoning is weak. As a result, violence cannot withstand an attack on its reasoning. Nonviolence confronts violence in a subtle, imperceptible way. It works through conversion of heart.

We should first identify the points of agreement with the opponent and emphasise them to gain access to his heart. We may point out his faults thereafter lovingly; he would appreciate that. But if we keep on harping on his faults from the beginning, we would fail to gain access to his heart.

We should have the ingenuity to induce the opponent to look inward, whereby his heart would be set in ferment. Cricket players say that playing on a known ground is easier; on an unknown ground, even a good player finds it difficult to play. It is, therefore, important on which ground we should play. These days, it is held that battle should be fought on the enemy's soil, so that he would be put to loss even if he wins. In the same way, I say that the battle of satyagraha be better waged in the heart of the opponent. He should feel that he is committing an error. This is an essential aspect of satyagraha.

A man is not sometimes aware that his heart is being converted. There is place for delusion in the process of the conversion of heart. In worship too, there is such a place for delusion, although that delusion is dispelled in the end. Worship is not possible if there is absolutely no delusion; and it is also not possible if there is delusion alone; it is possible only

when there is admixture of reason and delusion. The same is true about the process of conversion of heart. The opponent may think that we are coming closer to him, even if it is he who is coming closer to us. He can very well think so; for there can be an element of truth in it. It is not that we do not make any change in our standpoint. We are ever receptive to accept the truth in the opponent's view. The fact is that both of us are moving towards each other. We should, therefore, be wary of removing any such delusion in the opponent's mind in the imagined interest of truth. That would be against nonviolence. If the opponent feels that there is agreement between him and us, let him feel so. It would not be proper to harp on differences. When he himself becomes aware of the differences, he would be compelled to think about them. There should not be any confusion in our mind, but it will not be proper if we keep on seeing the differences when the other side believes in the identity between our stands.

The process of conversion of heart is such that one would not normally feel that he is discarding his stand and accepting another stand. He would feel that the standpoint he is accepting is a refined version of what he believed in—a version that has been put in a better language, nonetheless it is basically his own stand. We must not contradict him.

It must also be realised that gaining access to another's heart is impossible so long as we are entrapped in our bodies. Therefore, it must be our constant endeavour to break or loosen that fetter.

When we talk of conversion of heart and reason, we often think that we have to convert others; all is well with us and there is no need of conversion in us. This is absolutely wrong. We also are in need of conversion; it is not that only our opponent needs it. Satyagraha is basically an effort for self-purification, which results in the purification of the heart of opponent. If we seek conversion of the opponent alone, in the first place it would be a hollow pretence; and moreover, it would be found impossible.

As regards conversion of heart, change in circumstances need not be considered a precondition. When we want to get rid of any attachment, we try to change the external environment to make it conducive for the purpose. When we want to concentrate, we search for a secluded place. But it is not that concentration is impossible without being in a secluded place. Similarly, change in circumstances is not an essential precondition for conversion of heart. We may work for a favourable change in the situation if it is necessary, but let us be clear that nonviolence works through conversion of heart, not through change in the external situation.

If the heart of one man is converted, it has an effect on several others. This is what moral pressure means. Such pressure cannot be put in the category of violence.

Suffering for truth

Satyagraha consists of asserting truth, creating a favourable atmosphere for it, and suffering to gain entry into the opponent's heart. In a way, this is like entering the bodies of others.

People should have the capacity to hold on to truth despite calamities. This power of withstanding all odds for the sake of truth is the only power, which can save the world from violence. This power can also serve to solve the problems in society. Commitment to truth is tested when treading on the path of truth involves dangers and hardships.

Forgiveness involves self-suffering. If I suffer quietly and forgive the wrongdoer gladly without even being conscious of the act, that forgiveness is a potent quality. It can transform the enemy into a friend. If I get angry with you and then control my anger and forgive you, it is well and good; but when forgiveness becomes our second nature, when we cannot do anything else but to forgive when a wrong is done to us – in fact, when we forget the harm done to us, that forgiveness becomes a power. A tree remains quiet even when it is being cut.

The earth should be our ideal in this respect. We should not only forgive, but do good to those who harm us. Such forgiveness is a subtle and gentle form of satyagraha. Love becomes powerful when it takes the form of forgiveness.

For one who is engaged in the pursuit of truth, such pursuit is joyful. A pilgrim has to face hardships while crossing difficult terrains, but he is least bothered by them; his mind is fixed on the destination. This is true about a seeker of truth as well; he is not conscious of the suffering undertaken for the cause of truth.

Satyagraha involves self-suffering rather than inflicting suffering on others. Satyagraha is preparedness for sacrifices that become necessary for the sake of truth.

In satyagraha, we suffer to bring out the goodness in others. Should not there be goodness in them in the first place? It is, therefore, a fundamental faith of satyagraha that there is innate goodness in others. If we try to strengthen virtues in others, faults in them would, as a matter of course, get reduced. Satyagraha involves strengthening virtues in others through self-suffering.

Satyagraha involves self-suffering, but that self-suffering is purely for making the opponent think. Pursuit of Truth is the seed of satyagraha, faith in reason is its motive power and freedom from enmity is the pillar supporting it. It is freedom from enmity which takes the form of conscientious self-suffering, when the need therefor arises. Commitment to truth is tested when dangers appear in the path of truth and suffering becomes imperative.

Resisting good men gone astray

Science had not progressed much in the bygone era. So, there was perhaps some possibility of checking violence. But now science has advanced so much that it cannot be checked. Good men also do not now have the capacity to use violence judiciously and impartially and check it when needed. In other words, in this era of science no one can control violence and use it in the way one desires. When this fact becomes clear, there arises the question of resisting those who have not realised this and encourage violence directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally.

In fact, today the question confronting us is not how to resist evil-doers; the question is, how to resist good people who are intent not on pleasure, but on power, and have thus gone astray? This is possible only through the power of reason. It needs a heart longing for conversion of such individuals. It needs self-suffering. It is necessary to go on purifying our mind and suffering humbly, considering it a righteous obligation. This is the way of satyagraha. It is an extremely pure, positive, constructive power, full of love. This is the only way to fight good men who, in our view, have gone astray.

Such fight is likely to create misunderstanding in people, as these good men are likely to enjoy their confidence. If we speak against them, people are likely to get confused. We

cannot be sure about their reaction. So it is better to avoid vocal criticism. But we should stick to the truth as we perceive it, and try to follow it with all our strength.

Resistance to injustice

It is a duty of public-spirited non-partisan workers to point out the wrongs in societal affairs and governmental working. This may, at times, necessitate active resistance. But it would be so natural that those who are resisted would welcome it, as it would be to serve them. Such resistance may better be termed 'operation' than 'resistance', as one who is operated upon also welcomes it. Satyagraha is, essentially, an operation in this sense.

We often venture to help people to resist injustices in petty matters. When we fight officials' tyranny, court cases follow and a lot of our energy is dissipated in them. This adversely affects our main task. Therefore, we should help people in such a way that our energy is not wasted.

There are four ways of resistance:

1. Resist evil with greater violence.
2. Resist evil with equal violence.
3. Resist evil with nonviolence.
4. Resist not evil.

The first way is that of the politicians. They seek to counter evil with greater evil, violence with greater violence, as they want success at any cost.

The second way is that of Moses: 'Tooth for tooth' and 'eye for eye'. Violence is there, but it is defensive, and is not more than the opponent's violence. There is righteousness in this position. There is no guarantee that it would succeed, yet more violence is not employed.

The third way, it can be said, is that of Tolstoy and Gandhi. It is really difficult to say what exactly was Gandhi's stand, as he had consented to the despatch of army to Kashmir. It appears that his thought has affinity with both the second and the third way, and that he had also realised the significance of the fourth way. Yet, on the whole, it may be said that he stood for resisting evil with nonviolence.

The fourth way is to ignore evil, disregard its existence and pursue our positive and constructive programme of love and friendship. We should not waste our energy in resistance. This results in the end of evil.

Nonviolent assistance in right thinking

I have spoken about the fifth way; it has affinity with the third and the fourth way. Do not resist at all; assist the opponent in right thinking. Assist him so that he should not commit an injustice and takes the right path. Even when resistance is necessitated, it should be as a component of assistance.

Jesus said, 'Resist not evil', and stopped. We took that to mean: 'Resist not evil with evil'. Gandhiji interpreted Jesus' saying in the same way. That was right. But now the situation in the world has changed. Ideological wars are now being fiercely fought, even with arms. In this background, it is necessary to stop where Jesus stopped. I fully concur with Jesus; for when we tend to oppose the evil, the evil gains an entry into us. Therefore,

we should prefer 'nonviolent assistance in right thinking' over 'nonviolent resistance'. If, in the course of assisting in right thinking, opposition or non-cooperation is called for, the same may be resorted to; but that should be an ingredient of assistance in right thinking, and the opponent should also feel that we are assisting him.

Refraining from taking part in wrongdoings is not really resistance; it should not be so called. Assistance is to be provided to their perpetrators in right thinking. If they ask me to set my neighbour's house on fire, I will refuse to do so. I will explain to them how such an action is injurious to the neighbour and to them and to me also. This is not resistance. But if some people prefer to call it resistance, let them do so by all means. Whatever word may be used, what is important is the attitude. Crux of the matter is that we are desirous of the well-being of the whole world, including our opponent. Then we are bound to gain access to his heart.

A way of life

An individual who perceives Divine presence everywhere and at all times may be looked upon as a philosopher's stone, whose touch turns everything into gold. Saint Eknath has used the simile of sandalwood. A sandalwood tree imparts its fragrance to the trees nearby. Eknath asks, "If you are like a sandalwood tree, how is it possible that the trees nearby will not become fragrant? If you have attained perfection, why will anyone not become like you?" This is the faith of a pure satyagrahi. One who desires to serve all as Divine manifestations must have such faith.

Patanjali says that there cannot even be a trace of enmity, when one attains perfect nonviolence. Eknath says that when one sees God everywhere, he sees no evil. These statements verily mean the same thing.

But seeing God everywhere and transforming the world in one's own image is bound to be an unattainable goal in human life. Greatest of the great are destined to remain imperfect to some extent. And to the extent they are imperfect, they will have to engage with the evil. The question of resisting the evil will then naturally arise. What is to be done then? The only remedy here too is satyagraha.

Resistance to evil-doers means resisting the evil. In other words, it means searching inside our own hearts the evil, which appears outside. If this is fully grasped, resistance will, in effect, mean self-suffering, continuous efforts and imbibing a host of qualities like forgiveness, generosity, freedom from vanity, humility, open mind and imperturbable peace, and renunciation of the fruit of actions. This is the way of life of the devotees. The normal way of life and the occasional method of resistance thus merge together.

It will thus be clear that satyagraha is basically a way of life. In the flow of events and as a response to attack, it appears to turn into a way of resistance. But that is because of a particular situation. I do not know whether I am conveying properly what I mean. The concept of satyagraha ultimately merges into the philosophy of non-dualism and becomes so subtle that it becomes difficult to put it in words.

To sum up, satyagraha is a way of life, a method of working and a technique of remedial action in particular circumstances.

Satyagraha would be against (rather, with) one's own mind, against one's kith and kin, and against others as well; but those 'others' would be considered as one's own. Therefore,

cooperation and mutual aid is the normal form of satyagraha. Non-cooperation or resistance would be occasioned only sometimes.

Satyagraha entails consistency. It is not a short-time affair. It has to be continual and not occasional. It should go on every moment. It is a living faith. Our daily life itself should become a satyagraha.

Nai Talim: a part of satyagraha

While defining satyagraha, I had once said that Nai Talim (Basic education—the craft-based education system devised by Gandhiji) is a part of satyagraha. This single sentence is so full of meaning that I could have written a treatise on it. But when I refuse to see Nai Talim as something apart from satyagraha, that gives an indication of the picture of Nai Talim in my mind.

Importance of equanimity

Importance of nonviolence in satyagraha is indisputable, as both the warring parties often claim that truth is on their side. During the World Wars, we saw devout Christians from both the sides praying for the destruction of their enemies. It is, therefore, better to let God decide which side is right, and see which side is using nonviolent means. But it is also possible that both the sides may claim that their side is right and also that they are nonviolent; and they may resort to fasting against each other! In that case, equanimity and balance of mind would become the deciding factor. Presence of equanimity will then become the criterion to find out truthfulness and nonviolence in both the sides. In fact, truth, nonviolence and equanimity together constitute a single concept.

The language of violence

The language of violence is often used in connection with satyagraha. There seems to be no alternative to it. But we must remember while using this language that satyagraha has nothing to do with violence. In Bhagavata, the Lord and the devotee are likened to husband and wife. The language of sensual love is used in describing pure devotion, although these two are diametrically opposite to each other. This had harmful consequences. This led to rise in sensuality. The same risk is there when we use the language of violence while talking of satyagraha. We must have clarity in our mind in this regard.

Aim of a violent war is to harass the enemy and make him submit and concede defeat. But in satyagraha, there is no such objective. We do not even want to humiliate the enemy. We want to gain access to his heart. In fact, the very word 'enemy' is wrong. Such words are likely to vitiate our outlook. People look upon satyagraha as an alternative to war, a manner of struggle or a way of dominating others. But, in reality, satyagraha is the opposite of war. In a war, one of the parties emerges victorious; in satyagraha, both the parties win. In war, the parties remain estranged; satyagraha results in establishment of cordial relations between the parties. In satyagraha, reason is freed from conditioning factors while war hampers thinking. In fact, satyagraha is successful when any of our actions, arguments or views sets the other side thinking.

Nonviolent battle is not fought outside; it is waged in the heart of the opponent, as well as in our own hearts. In a violent battle, degree of violence goes on increasing; in a nonviolent battle, degree of purity of means should increase progressively. In a violent

battle, when we find our weapons ineffective before the weapons used by the opponent, we try to counter him by inventing and employing weapons which are still more terrible. A nonviolent battle is waged differently. In it, intensification of battle means a greater effort for self-purification.

It is often loosely said that satyagraha is being offered against someone. But this is a verbal inexactitude. The word 'against' does not exist in the lexicon of satyagraha, for there is no question of opposition to anyone. Satyagraha is not 'against' anyone; it can be 'in front of' someone or 'with' someone. The main thing in satyagraha is setting the other side thinking. A true satyagraha, therefore, consists of right thinking on our part, explaining our views to the other side and convincing them and removing the deficiencies in our own thinking, which come to light through dialogue with them.

Duties in normal and critical times

The other side may not sometimes be ready to listen because of imaginary self-interest or because of tendencies like anger or delusion. This necessitates nonviolent action like self-suffering or penance. But the moment the other side becomes amenable to reason, because of such penance or without it, the rest of the work lies solely in the realm of persuasion. That is why one should practise what one finds to be truth and should be ever prepared to explain one's views to others and be receptive to other's views as well. Satyagraha begins with thinking and ends in thinking. In the intervening period too, thinking has the main role; however, sometimes nonviolent penance becomes unavoidable. It should be taken as a contingent duty necessitated by a particularly grave situation.

Fire in water

Satyagraha is like fire in water. Being within the water, it cannot burn anything; it can only heat the water. And howsoever hot the water may get, it cannot set the house on fire. This is the nature of satyagraha. It is the speciality of satyagraha that it has no nuisance value.

3. Satyagraha in the Present Age

A negative conception of satyagraha is settled in the people's minds. This poses a danger to nonviolence. People look upon satyagraha as nothing more than a kind of obstruction and a tactic for coercion. And for this very reason, some people find it attractive.

Three developments

But it would not be right if we blindly follow external features of the satyagrahas in Gandhiji's times. It would be like emulating Shivaji and Rana Pratap in building forts. In their times, forts provided protection. Today, they would be easy targets for bombing. How can then we imitate indiscriminately what Gandhiji did? People ask, 'Gandhiji worked in the recent past only; have the times changed so drastically as to warrant totally new ways of working?' Yes, they have. Times have undergone a profound change. Gandhiji had to work under foreign dominion. We were not free then. Now we are working in an Independent country. The second difference is that he had to work under an autocratic rule, while we are working in a democratic set-up. And the third difference, which is the most important to me, is that science and technology had not advanced much at that time, while we are living in the atomic age. These differences are not minor, they are fundamental. International situation has also drastically changed. The form of satyagraha today cannot therefore be the same as it was in Gandhiji's times. The outer form will be different; the inner essence will, of course, be the same.

Attainment of Independence, establishment of democracy and the stupendous progress in science in recent times are the three developments which impel us to rethink and refine the form of satyagraha.

What should be the form of satyagraha in an Independent country is a matter of deliberation; what should be its form in a democracy is another such matter. And the form it should have in the era of science is another issue that should engage our attention.

Science has always been there; so we cannot really call any particular era as the era of science. However, science has made so great strides in the last two hundred years that the present era can legitimately be called an era of modern science.

Satyagraha after Independence

In Gandhiji's times, we had to overthrow the yoke of foreign rule. By its very nature, it was a negative task. Today we have to bring about transformation in the lives of our own people. We can freely propagate our views now; this was not possible in those times. Gandhiji used to say, 'End or mend'. We cannot use such words. He could say 'Quit India' to the British. We cannot ask the capitalists and the landlords to quit India. We all have to live here together and have, therefore, to devise a way for this purpose. When the country has become free and there is no obstacle in educating and awakening people, it will not be appropriate to entertain a negative conception of satyagraha.

Satyagraha in a democracy

In democracy, you are free to propagate your views. You can put your principles before the people and ask them to vote for you. But we have taken an ideological stand to keep

away from power politics. Therefore, satyagraha is the only way available to us to reach the people. The point is, what should be its form.

In democracy, satyagraha cannot be of the nature of pressure and coercion; it has to be of the nature of conversion of heart. There should be no question of pressurising anyone. And for conversion of heart, we have to gain access to the heart of the opponent through constructive work. Otherwise, development of democracy would be stunted. We would have to be patient. To educate the public, we may organise a movement, but that movement should not create obstructions. We should win over the hearts of individuals with patience and love.

Satyagraha being the power of love, it does have a place in a democracy. To deny that it has such a place is tantamount to holding that there is place for hatred in democracy! But no one will accept this.

However, satyagraha has been reduced to a threat, and therefore people respond to it as such. If an individual, engaged in selfless service of the people, sees injustice and tries to persuade the perpetrator to mend his ways and yet there is no response, he can very well undertake satyagraha with a heavy and compassionate heart; and no one can deny his right to do so.

When democracy respects public opinion and elections are held periodically, militant satyagraha will rarely be necessitated. But when democracy commits a grave injustice and becomes insensitive to public opinion, and wise men are convinced about the injustice, satyagraha would become imperative. And no one can object to it.

I repeatedly say that the present democracy is flawed. The presence of nonviolence in it is limited. Decisions are taken on the basis of majority. Satyagraha would have no place in a polity wherein decisions are taken through consensus—I mean, collective satyagraha would be unnecessary therein. We should, therefore, prepare ourselves for consensus decision-making. This is a somewhat new idea, and therefore needs to be deliberated thoroughly. Our outlook and our lives would have to be moulded accordingly. But as long as this principle is not accepted, it is dangerous to hold that satyagraha has no place in a democracy.

Even when collective decisions are taken by consensus, there will still be place for satyagraha at individual level. In such a society, a mother can offer satyagraha against her son, or a son against his mother. One can offer satyagraha against one's neighbour. Here the word 'against' does not, of course, have the same meaning as in a violent conflict. A satyagraha against a neighbour would denote loving sacrifice for mending his ways. But a mass satyagraha would obviously have no scope in a polity where all the decisions pertaining to the community are taken by the community collectively through consensus.

Thus, satyagraha does have a place in a democracy. However, its form in a democracy will have to be different. It is wrong to believe that negative satyagraha has much scope in a democracy, and that it will have much impact. Satyagraha in a democracy will have to be positive and constructive.

Satyagraha in the era of modern science

Advent of the era of modern science is a development which would drastically alter the societies and mindsets all over the world. In this era, human mind must change; otherwise,

humankind is doomed to perish. This era is exhorting human beings to throw their old minds away and have new minds; to start thinking in a new way. Old mindset and old outlook would lead you to ruin. This situation calls for deep and subtle thinking.

A man's mind is individual in nature, but his intellect is social, as it develops in society. Only if man follows collective understanding instead of going along with the individual-specific mind in this era, clash between different minds can be averted. And it has to be averted in the era of science, as conflicts in this era would instantly lead to serious conflagrations. Such weapons have been developed that man has come under their control; he is unable to control them.

In these days, conflicts involve more violence, but less cruelty. Wars in these days are not violent in the sense they were in the past, although extent of violence in them is more than what it was earlier. Ballistic weapons are directed towards the targets from distant places. That involves precise mathematical calculations. If minds of those directing the missiles are agitated, they would miss the target. Thus, modern warfare is a thoughtful undertaking. It can be combated by right thought alone. Old forms of satyagraha, consequently, cannot be efficacious in the present times.

Now satyagraha has to be rooted in compassion. Absence of hatred for the opponent is not enough; there should be positive love and compassion for him in our minds. Our attitude and actions should radiate compassion.

In Gandhiji's times, there was direct eye-to-eye contact between the satyagrahi and his opponent. The latter could see the love in the eyes of the satyagrahi and could perceive the love in his words. Narada converted Valmiki in this way. But a man who drops a bomb from a plane or detonates it from a safe hideout is not confronted by his victims. Among his victims, there may be a satyagrahi whose eyes reflect infinite compassion and whose speech is full of kindness; but of what avail could it be? So, new ways of satyagraha, which could work today, have to be developed. Just as the whole world can be set on fire by launching inter-continental ballistic missiles while being fully calm and collected, we will have to devise a way to save the world and establish peace in the world, while sitting at one place. And no power except the spiritual one can make this happen. Our nonviolence must be potential enough to meet the challenges of the atomic weapons.

The so-called satyagrahas, which are taking place in our country, are following the well-worn path; they have got into a rut. It is, therefore, essential to avoid confusion and delve deep into the realm of spirituality. This is what the era of science demands.

Change in the form imperative

Satyagraha had not developed in such a way during Gandhiji's times. But he was a visionary, who knew the limitations of the time and potentialities in the time to come. He used to say that there was nothing like 'Gandhism'. If we associate satyagraha with Gandhiji's name alone, that may give us inspiration, but at the same time it would inhibit its development.

When I say this, some of our friends retort, "You say that Gandhiji's satyagrahas also had certain shortcomings; how can then you expect perfection from us? You may call our satyagraha negative, a form of passive resistance, a kind of coercion; you may consider it imperfect; but it is right, looking to our ability." But we must be aware of the change in

circumstances. And we must also realize that Gandhiji was extremely sensitive to situation and was flexible enough to make necessary changes as demanded by the situation. I have not the slightest doubt that had Gandhiji been alive today, he would certainly have changed the form of satyagraha.

Satyagraha in the international domain

We would not find any example of the application of satyagraha in the conflicts between nations in Gandhiji's lifetime. We would have to apply our own mind. If an aggressor invades, I would tell him, "Come with love. Let us discuss (contentious issues). We will not be afraid of you. But you cannot compel us to do what we consider wrong."

After the Chinese aggression (1962), some of our friends think that to go to the front and stand between the two armies is a programme better than bhoodan. But I find it a crude and unscientific idea. Is satyagraha based on physical strength or spiritual strength? A man desirous of joining army should have good physique. Is it necessary in satyagraha too? Can physical strength work in it? In that case, your best individuals will prove to be worthless. But satyagraha claims that it is based on spiritual power. Gandhiji held that a satyagrahi must have a healthy body, but not necessarily a strong body.

Therefore, we should realize that this idea of going to the front is crude, as it relies on physical strength. We will have to search for a spiritual technique for satyagraha in the international realm.

Satyagraha is a spiritual power; it is neither physical nor mental. Science has relegated mental plane to a secondary place. To solve international conflicts through satyagraha, it has become imperative for us to rise above our minds and ascend to the supramental level. When even a single individual rises to that level, it will generate such a power as to influence the whole world.

Avoid mental perturbation

The present era demands avoidance of mental perturbation in any work. Differences of opinion should not affect the mind; they should be brought to the realm of reason. I am putting before you a different interpretation of Gandhiji's principle of purity of means: That which does not excite perturbation in anyone's mind is a pure means. Differences of opinion should be resolved in the domain of reason only.

A satyagrahi must keep his mind unperturbed. Also, the truth with him should keep the mind of his opponent unperturbed. To have a mind free from nervous excitement, it is necessary to have scientific attitude and global outlook. And spiritual foundation is also a must. A global vision will give breadth to our thinking and scientific attitude will bring objectivity to it.

Q.: You have said that a satyagrahi will do nothing to exert influence. He will go on doing what is right with the hope of having desired results. Dr. Lohia and some others, on the other hand, say that 'Gandhiji used to follow truth as perceived by him and never backtracked. He was not concerned whether his words or actions would arouse anger or tranquillity in the opponent's mind. Vinobaji's contention that satyagraha should not arouse fear or anger in the opponent is wrong.'

A.: There is difference between having an estimation of results and craving for results. When we want to do something, we do it with the expectation of some result. If there is no concern for the result, why should we do anything at all? When we think of any programme,

we do think of its possible outcome. As regards any work, one has to think of its purpose, form and result. First, appropriateness of its purpose has to be seen. If the purpose is right, one has to think about the form of work. In the same way, one has to figure out the result of work. But when a particular programme is decided upon, it should be carried out irrespective of the results. There should be no attachment to the result. It is wrong to hold that Gandhiji did not think in this way.

Q.: But it is possible that a satyagraha has an adverse immediate impact; it may arouse fear or mental perturbation in the first instant, which would eventually disappear.

A.: There is difference between fear and mental perturbation. Fear is not altogether bad; a little fear may help in certain circumstances. If we have to pass through a jungle, and being afraid of tigers, we take some precautionary measures, there is nothing wrong in it. Of course, we should not be seized with fear if a tiger appears before us. But there is nothing wrong in being a little afraid of a tiger. There is a striking dictum in an Upanishad: 'Give with abashment, give with fear, give with faith, do not give without faith.' Abashment or fear shows that the concerned man has started thinking.

But nervous excitement or perturbation is a different thing. It dulls the brain. The very purpose of satyagraha should be to set the man thinking. If his reason is not working, the whole purpose would be defeated. Mind is perturbed when any emotion reaches a fever pitch. Desire or anger in a small degree is not much harmful, but they should not grow to such an extent as to perturb the mind and paralyse the intellect. We should be careful to avoid such a consequence of our actions. If the opponent has advanced lethal arms in his hands and he loses his balance, it can have dangerous consequences.

Satyagraha may arouse a little fear in the opponent; he may feel sorry – not for what he had done, but because we have been compelled to offer satyagraha against him. But we must be careful not to cause perturbation in his mind.

Satyagraha should elicit instant welcome

It is not right for you to justify your satyagraha, citing your weakness. If you find weakness in you, you better desist from offering satyagraha. If you want to be entitled to offer satyagraha, the very utterance of your intention should not arouse fear; it should rather create an atmosphere free from fear. If I declare that I am going to start a satyagraha tomorrow, sympathy for me in the people's minds should increase thousand-fold; opposition to me should get reduced. This should be the instant reaction. What happens later is a different matter.

Sight of a mother feeding her child delights everyone. If one hears that someone has nursed a critically ill patient and the patient has been cured, one feels delighted. Activities full of love, tender affection or compassion are pleasing in the first instant. Satyagraha should give rise to such a reaction. Its conception, inception and very mention should elicit welcome and acceptance. When one hears of a murder, there is an instant reaction of revulsion. Whether the murder was justified or not is considered later. In the same way, one should feel happy on hearing about satyagraha. This is an acid test for satyagraha. And only those satyagrahas, which can pass this test, can work in a democracy. However, we find that the prospect of a satyagraha evokes an opposite reaction, even in persons like me. It is not

then surprising if it has an adverse reaction in the minds of those who are concerned with the maintenance of order in the society.

We believe that there is a power in satyagraha. What is it? It is a power that disarms the enmity and opposition of the opponent. Just as darkness is dispelled when the sun rises, a man who was not amenable to reason or was thinking in a distorted way, starts thinking in a right manner when confronted by a satyagraha. The veil of delusion on his reason is removed and he becomes favourably inclined to listen to us. This is how satyagraha works. If this does not happen, if there is some or the other form of coercion, the power of satyagraha gets dimmed.

In short, satyagraha should be such as to evoke respect right from the outset; it should be welcomed instantly.

From gentle to gentler

In which direction should satyagraha proceed? In a violent conflict, a comparatively gentle step is taken first. If that does not yield the desired result, a harsh step involving more violence is taken. Thus the degree of violence is progressively increased. Will the same process work in nonviolence? Or, should a gentler step follow when the first step fails to give access to the opponent's heart? Will a drastic step be more effective than a gentler step? In Homoeopathy, potency of a drug is increased by adding more and more sugar to it, followed by succussion. Quantity of the drug in the mixture is reduced, yet its potency increases. Nonviolence works in the same way.

It follows that we should not think of drastic steps to make satyagraha more efficacious. We should rather go on making our satyagraha gentler and gentler to make it more and more potent. If we are not succeeding, we should take it as the result of some deficiency in our gentleness and should increase the degree of gentleness—that is, the degree of love, reason, truthfulness, tenderness, sensitivity—to increase the potency of our satyagraha. If we go on taking more and more drastic steps instead, that would bring us to the borderline between violence and nonviolence: a single step ahead would then land us in the domain of violence. Nonviolence cannot follow the same process as violence.

In the context of Independence and democracy, and taking into consideration the nature and impact of the forces currently working in the world, we would have to make satyagraha progressively gentler. Then alone our satyagraha would be more potent and effective. We would have to discover gentler forms of satyagraha. That should be the direction of our exploration.

In fact, such a process is already manifesting itself before you: the way our work (Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement) is progressing demonstrates how satyagraha should proceed.

I look upon this as a new vision, which needs to be examined closely from all the angles. But some of us have accepted this idea unthinkingly, while some hold that Vinoba, by suggesting this process, has made Gandhiji's concept of satyagraha disappear in thin air!

I have now started walking twice a day (1956). Many people are worried on this account. But Charubabu (Charuchandra Bhandari of West Bengal) has written me that he looks upon this as a gentler satyagraha undertaken to strengthen the workers. I did not take this initiative with this idea, but desire to make the activities gentler is certainly there. When

a man stays at a place for only half a day instead of a full day, he cannot put in equal amount of work. He can only explain his ideas and move ahead. There cannot be much interaction with the villagers, and therefore there is less possibility of exertion of any pressure on them. It is surely a gentler satyagraha.

What we call activity is a means of implementing our ideas. It is also a consequence of an idea. We should be concerned with only those activities, which are a means of implementing ideas; not those which are consequences of ideas. If I understand the idea of equal sharing, if it develops in my life, it would develop in others' lives too in due course. I should restrict myself to understanding and explaining my thoughts and should undertake only that activity which serves as a means of implementing ideas. For example, walking. It is all right if I insist on walking to reach the people to explain my ideas, as it is necessary for the purpose. But if I insist on obtaining land-gifts, that would not be right, as such an activity is a consequent one; it would not be a gentle activity.

We should be concerned with that activity, which is necessary for propagating our ideas. It is for the society to do the rest. I think that if we rely more on thinking and realize the limitations of activity, nonviolence would spread more.

4. The Practice of Satyagraha

There are many means of satyagraha. One is, unremitting service; another is, persistent efforts for self-purification. To comprehend right thoughts, to render necessary service in this regard, to cultivate friendship—all these are the means of satyagraha.

I do consider discipline essential. But it should be in the conduct. As far as thinking is concerned, it should be absolutely unfettered. General rules of conduct in the community should be followed, but why should there not be freedom of thought? We cannot force our opinions on anyone. I cannot force my perception of truth on others, nor can others force their version of truth on me. We can explain our viewpoints to each other; we can try to convert each other to our respective viewpoints. Such freedom of thought is essential.

Fasting: a spiritual weapon

Gandhiji taught us many ways of resisting evil, and employed them in his own life. Fasting is one such technique. It is not something new. It has important place in the scriptures of all the religions. They prescribe fasting for self-purification, for cultivating restraint, as a mode of repentance, or as an aid to devotion. Naturopaths prescribe fasting for physical health. But the type of fasting employed by Gandhiji belongs to a different category.

Through fasting, Gandhiji sought to awaken society's conscience. There can be two types of such a fast. One is for a specified period and another is unto death—fasting till the attainment of objective and dying, if need be, in the process. Gandhiji undertook both forms of fasts. The latter are presently being undertaken on a wide scale in India. I have dissuaded quite a few persons from embarking on fasts unto death. That they are being undertaken on such a scale shows that there is widespread discontent in the country, which is being vented.

But I must say that I hardly found any fasts in recent times which I could justify morally or spiritually. When Gandhiji was alive, he persuaded many persons to desist from fasting. After his demise, our responsibility has increased. We must realize that this powerful weapon should not be used thoughtlessly.

Satyagraha has now been reduced to fasting, just as devotion has been reduced to shouting God's Names with the accompaniment of cymbals! True, Saint Tukaram would go into raptures while singing God's praise with the accompaniment of cymbals and Gandhiji fasted many times. But cymbals cannot be an essential feature of devotion; they may even go counter to devotion if they are creating nuisance to the neighbours. Fasting and self-suffering can also be an indication of *duragraha* (irrational stubbornness) rather than satyagraha, if they are prompted by wrong motives.

This is a vast country with many regions, languages, castes, sects and religions; there are innumerable problems and people are facing numerous difficulties. If in such a situation, individuals begin fasts against the government on every issue, it would have an unsettling effect on society. If the government bows before every such fast under pressure, it would prove to be unfit to discharge the responsibility entrusted to it. And if it refuses to bow, life of an individual is at stake, the question of saving it arises and situation becomes delicate. A Bengali brother is now fasting (1953) for inclusion of a part of Bihar in Bengal. A Bihari brother may likewise start a fast for inclusion of a part of Bengal in Bihar! Individuals may

feel strongly about some or the other issue, but if they take recourse to fasting against the government for every such issue, it would not be in accordance with nonviolence.

Fast is a spiritual weapon, and it does have a place in the armoury of nonviolence. In fact, the word 'weapon' is not proper when we are talking of nonviolence. But we make use of the current terminology. What is meant is that nonviolence has certain spiritual instruments at its disposal and fast has a special place among them. But nowadays it is used for exerting pressure, or simply for attracting attention towards a particular issue. To use such a powerful weapon for petty matters is unseemly. Its misuse erodes its dignity. Fast is a great moral weapon, which should be considered the last option; it must never be used unless absolutely warranted; not otherwise.

Entitlement necessary for fasting

Just as fasting requires a suitable occasion, entitlement to undertake a fast needs possession of certain qualities. Spirit of service does not, in itself, make one fit to wield this weapon. Certain qualities are required even for wielding an ordinary weapon. A soldier has to get training in firing. To wield the weapon of fast, qualities like purity, discrimination, equanimity and total freedom from vanity are required. One who has selflessly served the world with motherly affection is entitled to wield it; none else.

For being effective, the weapon of fasting has to be properly used. Otherwise, it would be of little avail. When the government has strayed from the right path and the people are in no mood to listen or have lost balance, a great man can fast in a prayerful mood. But when the government is deliberating over some issue, it is willing to have a dialogue, and there is scope to educate the people in order to mobilise them, fasting should be avoided. Fasting, the last measure in satyagraha, can be undertaken only when love is at its highest.

Sensitivity to situation

There is a third aspect. Even if the issue is worthy of fasting and one possesses requisite qualifications, fasting should not be undertaken if the situation in the country and its neighbourhood is not opportune for it. If any of these three conditions is not met, element of violence enters in the fast even though it may outwardly appear nonviolent. Let us not think that violence can be done by a sword only; violence is there in an inappropriate fast also. One who undertakes such a fast may not cause distress to anybody or beat anybody, yet he does commit violence. Sometimes, more violence can be committed without any weapon.

Satyagraha and the capacity for endurance

Suppose, I feel that truth is on my side. The opponent does not accept this. Therefore, I begin a fast. My opponent also begins a fast. Now, how to decide which side has truth with it? If my opponent can fast longer than me, does it mean that truth is on his side? If the capacity of fasting is to be considered the criterion for truth, why not a wrestling match instead? Jains are so adept in fasting that I will be no match to them in this respect. Will this mean that truth is on their side? Will the capacity for endurance be the criterion to judge which side has truth with it? But just as it is wrong to believe that whosoever has more arms has truth on his side, it is equally wrong to believe that one whose capacity for endurance is more has truth on his side. Power of satyagraha does not lie in the capacity to endure suffering. It is true that satyagraha involves considerable suffering, but suffering or fasting is

not a mark of satyagraha. A programme of self-suffering cannot be a programme to establish truth. To establish truth, there is no alternative to the power of thought.

Rising above the mental plane

Fasting for petty issues evokes reactions, which are counter-productive. A fast, which arouses love in everyone, is a true fast; not the one, which evokes adverse reactions and gives rise to conflicts. I should fast only when I have love for the one against whom the fast is being undertaken; and the fast should make him feel ashamed; he should feel that he has erred, that he has done wrong. If such is not the outcome of the fast, my satyagraha is far from perfect. The opponent should feel that there is love for him in my mind.

Sane Guruji fasted for the entry of harijans (dalits) in the Pandharpur shrine (1947). I happened to provide motivation for it. In 1945, I had expressed unhappiness about the ban on the entry of harijans in the shrine. He took up the cudgels for them. Before beginning the fast, he toured the region for six months. He had come to Pavnar also and asked my opinion about his resolve. I had told him, "My satyagraha is already going on. My devotion to Lord Vitthal is second to none, yet I will not fast on this issue. I will not enter the shrine as long as harijans are not permitted to enter; this is my satyagraha." "Shouldn't I fast then?" he asked me. "You may fast", I replied. When he actually undertook fast, I had advised him not to prolong it. I never approved of such fasts.

And now science is making great strides. In these days, every question acquires global dimensions and it has to be tackled without delay. In this context, rising above the mental plane has become imperative. We should realise that we cannot carry out the process of conversion of mind as long as we ourselves are on the mental plane.

A fellow has begun a fast in a village in Rajasthan for securing harijans' access to a well (1958). The villagers have volunteered to dig a separate well for the harijans. My advice has been sought in the matter. I am going to advise acceptance of the villagers' proposal. Normally, anyone would have advised continuance of the fast, for the right of the harijans to use the well is not established by the proposal. I do not find any sense in imagining an opponent and engaging in confrontation. We should better disregard the caste differences altogether. Otherwise, whatever is done in this context would strengthen casteism. In this particular case, harijans would use the new well and others would also begin using it, and all together would, in the course of time, constitute a single community. My advice would appear weak, but it is really potent, as the course I am going to suggest would eventually end the role of the mind.

Picketing

I do not consider peaceful picketing as a form of satyagraha. It falls in the category of ordinary propaganda and can be undertaken wherever required.

Bhoodan-yajna is a satyagraha

I have been saying that the problem of land can be solved through violence, legislation or compassion, and Bhoodan-yajna is an endeavour to solve it through compassion. Some people say that there is a fourth way also—the way of satyagraha. I claim that satyagraha also comes under the category of compassion and that my walking tour is also a form of satyagraha. It is a way of truth, compassion and penance; and satyagraha is there where

these three exist. We have been continuously on the move—we have been walking on in winter, rainy season and summer, explaining our ideas to the people. Even when invited for a major programme, I do not go there. If someone gifts an insignificant portion of his landholding, I refuse to accept it. We accept gifts from the poor also, because we want to build their power. All this is nothing but satyagraha.

Satyagraha is an action which motivates all to think in a calm and collected manner, and removes the veils of delusion barring such motivation. In this sense, I have called the Bhoodan pilgrimage a form of satyagraha.

When I started asking for land, I had some strange experiences. While some landowners would give generously, some would become so apprehensive that they would leave the village before my arrival there. They would be afraid of me just as they were afraid of the Communists. I thought that I was also partly responsible for their behaviour. I was asking for land for the poor from the landowners. Only the owners were expected to give. But righteous conduct cannot be limited to a particular section of society; it should be possible for everyone to engage in it. Everyone should speak truth, everyone should have love and compassion; not just a few. Expecting something from the landowners alone was not a righteous idea. I realised that I should put before the people those ideas which everyone could follow. I began to think whether everyone does not have something to give. This is certainly not the case. God has endowed everyone with some or the other thing. Some have capacity to labour, some have intellect and some have wealth. Everyone should give what they have to the society. This realisation purified my practice of satyagraha.

I ask the poor and small landowners also to give land. When they give land in large numbers, it would exert pressure on the big landlords. If poor landowners keep on clinging to their ownership, bigger landowners would not relinquish their ownership. The remedy is that every owner should relinquish ownership. When small owners would give, it would prove that ownership is wrong. That would exert pressure on the big owners and conversion of their hearts would become possible. Moral pressure is a part of satyagraha. Satyagraha means treading on the path of truth. This generates a power, which has an impact on those who are following the path of untruth.

I surely have not vowed not to think of another form of satyagraha even if Bhoodan fails to deliver the goods. Our master (Gandhiji) has taught us the *mantra* of satyagraha. But Bhoodan would surely have prepared the ground for such an eventuality.

The landless are voiceless also. We have become their voice. The next step can be contemplated only after this voice reaches the whole country.

I wish to point out that my reputation rests on my being a satyagrahi (chosen by Gandhiji in 1940). I would not drag my feet if another step becomes imperative. But it was Gandhiji's motto that one step is enough. That does not mean that I have no idea of the second step. However, when we start contemplating second step from the outset, it undermines our faith in the first step. When I nurse a patient, I do it with the faith that he would recover; I do not contemplate his death and make arrangements for his funeral. Why, after all, do we think of the second step? That adversely affects our work and weakens our resolve. And how can we succeed when the resolve has become weak? I have said time and again that if we ask for land with humility and faith, a gross form of satyagraha would not

become necessary. But if it becomes necessary, I will undertake it at such a time and in such a manner that nobody would oppose it. Everyone would have sympathy for it.

Bhoodan-yajna is a nonviolent technique. But it is not that the armoury of nonviolence has only one weapon. We can discover and employ other such weapons—may be better ones. But we would be able to do so only if we concentrate all our energies on the task in hand and assess the result. Some people ask what we would do if we fail in the present mission. I reply that we do not think in this manner. The spirit of satyagraha demands that we should not visualize adverse result and speculate about the future. Jesus has said that one should not worry about tomorrow.

Role of constructive work

Preparation for a violent war needs sustained constructive work. It is not that the army alone fights; the whole nation has to engage itself in constructive work. The army fights and the whole nation works behind its lines. If such cooperation from the people is needed in a violent war, it is even more necessary in a nonviolent fight. Nonviolent fight is powered by constructive work alone.

Satyagraha means lighting a lamp by igniting a match. But how does a lamp give light? It needs oil. For satyagraha, constructive work acts as oil. When millions of men and women supply oil of constructive work to the lamp of satyagraha, it will continue to burn continuously and brightly.

Constructive work can neutralize 99% power of the evil. This is the programme for 99% people. The rest 1% work belongs to nonviolent resistance. If the former is fulfilled properly, the latter will not be needed at all; and if its need still arises, 1% of population will be sufficient to take care of that. A handful of individuals, who are fearless, have enmity towards none and know the Self will be sufficient for accomplishing this task.

5. Occasions for Satyagraha

If someone is breaking useless or harmful fetters of society, it is incumbent on him, much more strictly and carefully than others, to keep to the bounds which are useful and beneficial. Such attitude and actions invariably earn approval from the people in the end. While breaking the laws considered unjust, a satyagrahi is supposed to abide by the rest of the laws wholeheartedly.

Occasion comes unsought

One does not have to seek after opportunities for satyagraha. The Lord tells in the Gita that to the kshatriyas (members of the warrior class), a righteous fight comes unsought as an open door to heaven (2.32). Similarly, a proper occasion for satyagraha presents itself unsought to a seeker after truth.

Q.: While preparing for a major extensive satyagraha, one may come across some injustice or atrocities. I think it is a duty to resist them in the particular circumstances. What should be the form of satyagraha in such cases? Is it proper for the workers to leave the work of preparation for an extensive satyagraha and attend to such problems?

A.: It is not necessary that a satyagraha with a universal outlook would be extensive in scale. For example, a satyagraha to resist attempt to outrage modesty of a woman would be local in scope, but it can have wide repercussions; for, the principle involved in it is wide in scope.

A hydropower project had displaced some persons. They were paid compensation. The costing of their houses was right, but that much money was not sufficient to build houses in new locations. What should be done in such a situation? I advised the displaced people not to move out of their houses. Herein, a fundamental principle of human rights is involved – if you are relocating an individual, you must create the same facilities for him at the new place, as he was enjoying at the original place. You must build for him at least the same kind of house.

In Bengal famine (1943), 1 to 1.5 million persons died of starvation. Had others shared the food and the wealth they had with the starving people, and if after their exhaustion all had started fasting, it would have been an ideal satyagraha. We were in jail at that time. But that was in my mind.

Q.: Does this mean that there is always a principle of wide application involved in small incidences and satyagraha can be undertaken for the sake of that principle?

A.: No, this is not always the case. Suppose, some area starts getting canal-water for irrigation and an irrigation cess is levied. If people resist such a cess, there is no question of such principle here. If the cess appears exorbitant, it can be opposed through constitutional means; not satyagraha.

Q.: I take it as your advice that we should not usually engage in a direct satyagraha, leaving the work of organising the people. Normally we should restrict ourselves to constitutional means, education of the public opinion and building up people's power thereby. When people become sufficiently strong, they would come forward to resist injustices, and they would then have moral support of the workers. But it is not proper for the workers to assume their leadership.

A.: Yes. We can work in three ways: through spiritual power, through extensive contact with the people and through constitutional means and constructive work.

For universally-accepted principle

If I say that I would fast as long as the landless do not get land, it would be wrong even if my intention is pure. I should first create a favourable atmosphere, earn people's sympathy, obtain as much land as possible through gifts, and have faith that land would be obtained through this course.

Sarvodaya says that when a principle is universally accepted and yet is being disrespected, satyagraha is justifiable. But if a principle is not so accepted, and we believe in it, we should try to create public opinion in its favour. Not all the people have accepted that individual ownership is wrong. They have not accepted the principle of villagisation of land. Even governments are only imposing ceiling on landholdings. There is some opposition to our ideas in this regard. Therefore, it cannot be a valid issue for satyagraha; it requires propagation of our ideas. The principle should be universally accepted; if not universally, at least by an overwhelming majority. If such a principle is being disregarded because of delusion, satyagraha can be undertaken for dispelling that delusion.

Proper issues for satyagraha

The people all over the country are against indecent film posters. Excepting a few crazy people, there is complete unanimity on this point. Every mother desires that her children should not see indecent posters. No one is entitled to commit an aggression on the eyes of the citizens. There is no need of any further propaganda in this regard. I therefore made up my mind to start an anti-poster satyagraha (1960).

If something is accepted both by law and by the public opinion, and is still not being implemented, satyagraha can be undertaken. I had given green signal to the workers from Tamil Nadu and Vidarbha to go ahead with satyagraha against illegal eviction of the peasants. We can prevail upon the landlords to see the injustice in evictions. If they cannot be brought to reason, non-cooperation would have to be resorted to. I had told the peasants in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also that they should refuse to move out of their lands and be ready to die, if need be. If the workers see that the peasants are ready to die, that they have been sufficiently educated and the situation is under control, with no possibility of the outbreak of violence, they may undertake satyagraha against evictions.

Prohibition should be enforced everywhere. It is an elementary necessity. All the sins originate in the craving for money. Carried away by this craving, governments also start advancing scores of arguments against prohibition. If constitutional means fail in this regard, satyagraha will become necessary.

(In the Gramdan villages in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, large area of land was held by outsiders including temple managements. A demand was raised that the temples should give lands to the local peasants on long leases, and that outsiders should place their lands under the gramsabha's care. This matter was brought before Vinoba on 16 March 1965, whereupon he opined –)

The proposal that the landlords living outside the village should give their lands to the gramsabha on lease and accept a portion of the produce in return, is fully justifiable. I have given my consent for satyagraha on this issue. I have already said that satyagraha can be undertaken on the issue which majority favours.

If the cows continue to be slaughtered, there will be no sense in talking about gram-swaraj (village self-rule). Ban on cow-slaughter is essential for the country's development. A cow is useful in many respects, and deserves to be protected. Many believe that the Muslims would probably be against such ban. But Hadith clearly says that a cow should not be killed. When the directive principle of prohibiting the slaughter of cows was introduced in the Constitution, all the Muslim members had supported it. Similarly, the assumption that the Christians would oppose such a ban is also wrong. I therefore hope that cow-slaughter would be banned forthwith. If not, I have made up my mind to fast till death (1976).

Ban on cow-slaughter is mandated by Indian culture, it is a directive of the Indian Constitution, Government of India had given a promise and Indian Parliament had passed a resolution in this regard. Workers should begin satyagraha at the Deonar abattoir (Mumbai) for the demand that slaughter of cows and bullocks of any age be banned in the country (from 1 January 1982).

Unnecessary doubt

Many people doubt whether satyagraha, which succeeded against the British, would have succeeded against crueler people like the German Nazis. I reply that I do not hold that the Germans are crueler; but even if it is granted that they are so, satyagraha against them would have been more effective. A lamp burns brighter when the darkness around is more dense. More the cruelty in the opponent, more the scope for compassion and forgiveness. But such verbal argument will not convince people; we will have to provide a practical demonstration.

Our responsibility

Sometimes a worker says that he cannot get along with a particular worker. I retort that you are useless for our task. You should be ready to get along with anyone, irrespective of what others do. This is the power of satyagraha.

We have to nurture this power in our lives. We should have a living faith that truth would inevitably convert our opponent, and would change the situation as well. We want to bring the world on the path of freedom and peace. This calls for building the power of satyagraha in our lives.

A satyagrahi attitude should be cultivated in the students also. Education for the purpose should be a regular feature in school education and also in public education.

Development of the power of satyagraha is the responsibility, the mission entrusted to us by the Providence.

6. My Contribution

I have presented four ideas in connection with the theory of satyagraha:

1. Negative satyagraha will not work in the current times; satyagraha has to be positive now. Approach of satyagraha in the pre-Independence times was negative.

2. If a particular process of satyagraha fails to yield results, we should resort to its gentler forms, not more severe ones. The process of satyagraha should go on becoming gentler and gentler.

3. Satyagraha should elicit instant welcome. On hearing about it, one should feel that something good has happened. It should be comforting.

4. In satyagraha, insistence should not be on our part; it should be on the part of truth. We should be concerned with putting the truth into practice. To make others believe in truth, which we perceive, betrays desire for the fruit of work. We should be firm only on the contemplation of truth.

Some people believe that Vinoba has developed the concept of satyagraha. Gandhiji's concept was negative; Vinoba has made this positive. But this is a wrong notion. I do not claim this. Gandhiji's concept was not negative. I have done nothing except elaborating Gandhiji's concept and giving certain appropriate words, which help in understanding the concept. I believe that Gandhiji would commend my elaboration and introduction of new words and testify that his pupil has not distorted his concept.

We find that Indian history is replete with examples of efforts to provide commentaries on doctrines. This has been the tradition from Vamdev of Rigvedic times to Rabindranath Tagore. Sometimes, commentaries are so novel and refreshing that the words are infused with new life and catch attention. In fact, it is the beauty of words that they are so capable of varied interpretations and commentaries that something new appears to have been revealed. This may be the case with my elaboration of satyagraha, but I have not made any change in Gandhiji's theory of satyagraha. Had I done so, I would not have hesitated to say so. There is no false humility in me. Had I hit upon something new, I would have said that. But that is not the case. I have neither extended, nor revised, nor refined Gandhiji's concept; I have only elaborated it.

I do not aver that we have arrived at the final conclusion and nothing more needs to be added. I only plead for objective thinking. The theory of satyagraha needs to be deliberated upon and refined so that the power of satyagraha remains unhampered.

Annexure 1

Place of Satyagraha in a Polity

Howsoever good a political system may be, its goodness is bound to depend, at least to some extent, on the quality of individuals to whom the authority of governance has been entrusted by the people. Even if the elements desirable for a good polity are there in a polity, many defects, controversies and disputes can arise in the realm of politics due to the human factor. To get over them, people should be able to discern right occasions for cooperation, non-cooperation and resistance, and should have enough strength to resort to them as required by the circumstances, and the necessary nonviolent technique in this regard should have been ingrained in them.

Cooperation is an eternal principle of life, but it is worthwhile only if it is voluntary and given with full knowledge. Only then it can be nonviolent; in fact, only then it can be called cooperation. Cooperation given out of helplessness or ignorance is of no use to a good polity. Although it may appear to be cooperation, it would not last long because it is not cooperation in the true sense. It is bound to result, first in hidden and then in open violence. Everyone should, therefore, feel that 'we have made the law in accordance with the majority opinion and we can also change it; but as long as it has not been changed, we shall obey it happily, voluntarily and unreservedly even if it is not to our liking, provided it is not against morality.' There is no question about the cooperation of those who concur with the law, but those who are opposed to it should also have the attitude described above; then only can their cooperation be said to be nonviolent. And only the individuals who extend such cooperation have the right to non-cooperate or resist when the occasion so demands; they alone are capable of doing so in a nonviolent way, and they alone have a duty to do so.

To impress upon the people the need to cooperate as far as possible, voluntarily and consciously, is one aspect of the education and conscientization of people. The second aspect is to teach them to discern right occasions for non-cooperation and resistance, and take recourse to them on those occasions.

Non-cooperation and resistance are two stages of one and the same thing. The second stage is more drastic; and is not to be resorted to when the first one is sufficient. In non-cooperation, we withdraw our cooperation and give an opportunity to the opponent to remedy the situation. When this is found inadequate, it becomes necessary to break the State laws (i) civilly; that is, within certain bounds, (ii) in an orderly manner; that is, not allowing any breach of discipline anywhere, (iii) openly; that is, without any secrecy or deceit, and (iv) firmly; that is, putting forward the minimum demand in regard to the matter in dispute and not giving in till it is met. Punishment meted out for such violation of laws should be borne gladly and without any ill will. Such training should be ingrained in the life of people; and hence should have a permanent place in education and in the ethical code of the nation.

Although need for non-cooperation and resistance arises in a good State only occasionally and in particular contexts, they have a permanent place in the social life. For they are required not only in politics, but also more or less constantly in social life, family affairs and in dealings between different individuals. Nonviolent non-cooperation and resistance is the most appropriate middle way that avoids both the extremes of bearing

injustice passively on one hand and resisting it violently in a fit of passion, indiscreetly or even calculatedly, on the other. The attitude of mind and the strength required for resisting injustice whenever necessary should be kept alive in the ethical code of society, irrespective of the quality of polity.

For this purpose, children should be taught, from the earliest years, about exceptions to general rules. For example, besides teaching their children to obey them humbly, parents should also tell them to disobey politely, if the orders go against the conscience. Public opinion should be in favour of such exceptions. As Manu has said, the wise should invariably follow eternal moral principles like truth and nonviolence, but rules of conduct need not be so followed. Such rules, whether they pertain to family, society or the nation, ought to be followed so long as they do not conflict with the fundamental principles; and should be disregarded politely when they go against the fundamental principles.

In a good social order, rules are not normally inconsistent with eternal principles. But when a machine is in operation, possibility of friction is always there. So also it is never the case that once an ideal State has been established, it can be trusted of itself to look after the people and make them happy while the people themselves comfortably fall asleep or go about with their eyes shut. Even if this is assumed to be possible, there can be no uplift of the individual in such a State; and therefore, by the grace of God, this is not possible.

In short, it must be considered an essential characteristic of a good polity that people are alert, or kept alert, enough to practise cooperation, non-cooperation and resistance nonviolently, as required by the circumstances, keeping in mind the limitations of these modes of action.

[From 'Swarajya-shastra' (The science of self-rule)]

Annexure 2

Correspondence with Dr. Lohia

(One year after the commencement of Bhoodan, Socialist leader Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, who considered himself the genuine heir to Gandhiji's legacy, wrote to Vinoba, advocating militant satyagraha. Excerpts from his letter and Vinoba's reply are given here.)

Dear Vinobaji

Kashi, 15-4-1952

I had the opportunity to read your criticism in the weeklies 'Sangharsh' and 'Sadhana'. My opinion does not seem to have reached you fully; hence I am writing to you.

I have commended Bhoodan-yajna and have also shown its limitations. Lack of understanding of the limits vitiates a good work. Conversion of heart and social transformation, both have their own limits, although I give equal importance to both of them. If both proceed together, it will be very good.

Bhoodan-yajna is an important initiative for conversion of hearts. Any good man will be happy about it. It also creates favourable atmosphere for social transformation. The first land-gift was given three years ago by Muhammed Zuhair, a Socialist Muslim landowner in Lucknow district. You are doing this work unremittingly. If I criticize you, it will be like criticizing myself.

It was only for highlighting the limit of this good work that I had said that Vinobaji would take 160 years (not 300 years as you have heard) to complete this task. I need not tell you that I ask Socialist landowners, and all those who pay heed to my advice, to give land to you.

But one must understand the limits. Recourse will have to be taken to law or satyagraha. Social transformation will have to be brought about through law wherever possible and through satyagraha wherever needed.

From a few recitations given to you by my colleagues, it appears to me that they pin their hopes on the conversion of heart and then get frustrated and hanker after social transformation. They also lack understanding of limits.

You have related Bhoodan-yajna to the Sarvodaya philosophy. Mahatma Gandhi's actions sprang from two stimuli: anger and love—love for all and anger against injustice. But I feel that Sarvodaya has, at least up till now, adopted love only. Many revolutions founded on hatred have taken place, but human being has remained as he was. And revolutions of love have not yet taken place despite a long wait. Communism based on hatred and Sarvodaya based on love, both appear imperfect.

Only that ideology, which manifests anger against injustice and love for all at the same time, will perhaps be able to change the world somewhat for the better. I used the word 'perhaps' because the night is pitch-dark and the destination is far off. The world will perhaps be in this state forever. And perhaps I had talked of understanding of limits out of my ignorance.

You may, if you so will, express your opinions on these matters.

Yours
Ram Manohar Lohia

Shri Lohiaji

Kanpur, 14-5-1952

I liked your letter. I do not find much of a difference between our opinions.

If Bhoomidan-yajna was to proceed on my strength alone, it would have taken 500 years, as I wanted 50 million acres and expected 100,000 acres in one year—that was the calculation I used to put before the people. This was to impress upon the people that such work does not proceed by arithmetic. When I heard that you had said that it would take 300 years (160 years, as you now point out), I said in a lighter vein that this blessing boosts my hope; I take this to mean that I am going to get cooperation from the people in this endeavour. I had mentioned your name in this connection.

You say that conversion of heart and social transformation, both have their own limits. It is certainly true in the nature's scheme of things. Social transformation surely has a limit. Conversion of heart may also have a limit. But as long as that limit has not been reached, why should I let that affect my heart? Rationally, I may accept that there is such a limit, but why should I give a place to that idea in my heart? Why shouldn't I believe that the Lord who has convinced me about a particular thing would convince others as well? I am nursing my sick father. Shouldn't I nurse him with the hope that he would recover, although rationally I may accept the possibility that my efforts may be of no avail or may only be partially successful? I think you will grasp the differentiation I have made between the reason and the heart.

I have never said that recourse must not be taken to law and satyagraha even when needed. I am not blocking legislation; in fact, I believe that my work would create an atmosphere conducive to good legislation.

I hold certain opinions about satyagraha. I have some experience in this regard and have a particular outlook. If in the context of all three, satyagraha appears inevitable to me, I hope I will not procrastinate. My close colleagues also raise this question. I have explained this to them and restrained them. I do not look at satyagraha as a pressure tactic; for me, it is a penance full of compassion that arises on seeing all as one's own Self, and which spurs thinking. Satyagraha does not only mean occasional resistance; a satyagrahi's daily life is also a satyagraha.

No doubt, both love and vigour are needed in Sarvodaya. If we have not been able to demonstrate the existence of one of these qualities, we must be deficient in the other as well.

You are right in saying that "many revolutions founded on hatred have taken place, but human being has remained as he was". But your next statement needs to be modified. You write that "revolutions of love have not yet taken place despite a long wait". It will be better to say that no worthwhile effort, sufficient to make us expect a revolution of love, has so far been made.

You have charged us with two things: that we have love and that we lack anger. I will pray that, by the grace of God, both these charges prove to be true. Presently, both of them are not quite valid.

Vinoba's pranams