

Gandhi on Non-Violence: Does Merton's Appreciation Appeal Today?

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A re-reading of Thomas Merton, Gandhi on Non-Violence, New York: New Directions Paperback, 1965. Merton selects texts from Gandhi's two volumes of Non-Violence in Peace and War. Quotations below are from Merton's selections (page numbers in brackets).

Reading from a Particular Perspective

Let me start with the conclusion of Merton's detailed introduction to his collection on non-violence from the writings of Gandhi:

Gandhi's 'vow of truth' and all the other *ashram* vows, which were the necessary preamble to the awakening of a mature political consciousness, must be seen for what they are: not simply ascetic and devotional indulgences that may possibly suit the fancy of a few religious pacifists and confused poets, but precepts fundamentally necessary if man is to recover his right mind. (20)

For Gandhi, non-violence (*ahimsa*) is a basic law of life. It is the only true force of life, a fundamental principle of being. It is the goal of human life and identical with love, truth and God. Rather than simply repeating Gandhi's well-known views, we will consider their relevance for today's world, and particularly for India.

The distilled wisdom of thinkers and mystics can be just good bed-time read-

ing. The force of their appeal however needs to be measured by their ability to stimulate and guide those who are actively involved in the heat and dust of a commitment to transform the world. Gandhi's sayings have acquired an almost scriptural value as they are read along with other religious scriptures in interfaith meetings that involve Gandhians. However, the exigency of such sayings can raise disturbing questions when the dilemmas, difficulties and tensions are acknowledged.

It is no secret that this current appraisal of Gandhi is made by an Indian Christian, a presbyter of the Church of South India. My ministry has a special focus on interfaith dialogue with a serious commitment to promote deeper interfaith relations, more clear interfaith understanding, and creative interfaith cooperation in the areas of common life. Of late I have joined those who are involved in grappling with issues of peace and reconciliation and I have been fascinated by the initiatives and outcomes of commissions and studies on truth and reconciliation: peace without justice is superficial, and experiments in the Truth of Life, without being truthful

about basic historical realities, is misleading. No doubt, Gandhi's non-violence has inspired many around the world to have a new outlook on life, and new attitude to certain issues. At the same time it has been used by those who continue to oppress the poor and exploit the innocent. Many Indians have preferred the 'easy way' of seeing Gandhi as a sort of incarnation of God to be lined up with figures such as Buddha and Jesus, rather than the 'hard way' of following his footsteps. In the course of our discussion it will be clear that what Christians have done in separating Jesus from his socio-economic context and Jewish religious tradition, so Hindus have done similarly: Gandhians and admirers of Gandhi also have tended to separate Gandhi from his socio-political-religious context, and all the complexities that he encountered in one of the most exciting and decisive periods of India's history. It is not surprising then that Merton is no different.

It is true that Gandhi's ideal of non-violence inspired liberators like Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela. But let no one be mistaken: Gandhi was a staunch *Vaishnava* Hindu, and Hindu apologist. The last word on his lips when he fell to the bullets of his assassin was 'Ram' - his personal deity, a divine hero, one of the incarnations of Vishnu. Of course he explained that, for him, Ram was another name for God, whilst Kingdom of God he called *ramrajya*; but it is hard to believe that his choice of the word *Ram* was nothing to do with his passionate adherence to the Ram cult within the *Vaishnava* sect. Moreover, he used words such as *dharma*, one of the most popular terms of the Brahmanic Hindu tradition, which has a variety of

connotations ranging from the ritual-oriented, caste-connected Vedic social order, to a lifestyle characterised by justice and love.

Gandhi came to know the Sanskrit scripture, *Bhagavad Gita*, through an English translation, which he soon translated into Gujarati, projecting it as the essential Hindu Bible. This countered the Christian and Muslim claim of one God and one Scripture, a claim which in turn challenged Hindus who were seen to adhere to many gods and many scriptures. We will point out how Gandhi's quite ex-

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traordinary view of the Gita provided him with key words and ideas. Finally, we will point out the need for re-reading the Gita and the Bible in light of this discussion of non-violence.

For Gandhi, true independence in the Kingdom of God should be 'political' (the removal of the control of the British army), 'economic' (entire freedom from the British capitalists and capital, as also from their India counterparts) and 'moral' (freedom from armed defence

forces). Perhaps it is the moral independence that has a universal appeal for Westerners like Merton. He writes:

One of the great lessons of Gandhi's life remains this: through the spiritual traditions of the West he, an Indian, discovered his Indian heritage and with it his own 'right mind.' And in his fidelity to his own heritage and spiritual sanity, he was able to show men of the West and of the whole world a way to recover their 'right mind' in their own tradition, thus manifesting the fact that there are certain indisputable and essential values – religious, ethical, ascetic, spiritual, and philosophical – which man has everywhere needed and which he has in the past managed to acquire, values without which he cannot live, values which are now in large measure lost to him so that, unequipped to face life in a fully human manner, he now runs the risk of destroying himself entirely. (4)

To balance this moral ideal, we have to recognise certain historical factors.

First, it is not actually true that Gandhi achieved independence through his ideal of *ahimsa*. Such assumption might give solace to the British – from whom political independence was gained – and pride to Indians for whom Gandhi came to embody all the best in Indian culture. The national, regional and local uprisings and bloody battles in India, the fact of British lethargy after the Second World War, and the return to power in Britain of the Labour Party, jointly contributed to the achievement of Indian independence. We need to suspect the motivation of those

writers who have projected Gandhi as being the primary cause of achieving independence, with his moral ideal of non-violence. Though he was certainly a central actor in that process, symbolically of great significance, did he posthumously steal the show in the way he is usually depicted?

On the economic front, Gandhi stood for developing rural resources in a rural way, such as using the spinning hand-wheel that guaranteed a non-violent approach: he saw something inherently violent in industrialisation, which may be debated separately in light of both the success and failure of the mixed economy adopted by the first round of Indian leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, in independent India. What is important to note here is that thinkers like J.C. Kumarappa – a colleague of Gandhi who presented a vision of 'Mother Economy' far more realistic than Gandhi's – were overshadowed by Gandhi. So also champions like Ambedkar – an opponent of Gandhi in dealing with the liberation of the Dalits – and V.S. Azariah, an Indian Christian leader who viewed religious conversion at grass-root level as vital for social transformation of rural India. Again we need to note that western writers on Gandhi have rarely tried to delve behind Gandhi and find the alternative visions that would have helped present a truer picture of Gandhi. Merton is no exception.

Dalits and Non-Violence

Dalits (officially known as 'Scheduled Caste') form nearly seventeen per cent of the Indian population. They are the greatest victims of the caste system. Gandhi accepted the suggestion to call them *Harijan*, 'people of God'. Merton notes that

Gandhi identified 'not with the Westernized upper classes nor with the Brahmin caste, but rather with the outcaste "untouchable", or *Harijan*'. (5)

Gandhi adds an interesting commentary to this: "Hinduism excludes all exploitation" (hence it follows implicitly that the caste structure, in so far as it rested upon a basis of crass injustice toward the *Harijan*, was in fact a denial of the basic truth of Hinduism). Gandhi's sense of Hindu *dharma* demanded, then, that this be made clear and that all Hindus should collaborate in setting things right. This fundamental re-establishment of justice was essential if India was to have the inner unity, strength, and freedom to profit by its own political liberation. (9)

Merton was probably not aware of the multiplicity of scriptural traditions from which Gandhi had to make sense. Strangely, Gandhi opposed the caste system as it had developed, but championed the original structure of four *varnas* (literally colour groups), which in Hindu tradition was the prototype of a caste system. If the original is evident in the ancient scriptures of the *Vedas* it is not at all difficult to read there that the *varna* system was divisive, hierarchical and discriminating, particularly in dealing with power, both ritual and socio-economic. Some Hindu law-givers strictly prohibited the lowest caste group even hearing the reading from the *Vedas*, let alone performing the Vedic rituals. Punishment ranges from stuffing ears with lead to cutting the head with twine. Gandhi rejected such law codes but, without touch-

ing the *Vedas*, he took refuge in the *Gita* as his ultimate source. In the *Gita*, Krishna says that he created four castes and applied different mind-sets and characteristics to them. However, he says, he would accept the low-born *Vashyas*, *Shudras* and women if they approach him in true devotion. There is no doubt that at different periods, many individuals who have been gripped by this devotional spirit have tried to practice the new code and resist caste distinctions. The reality is, though, that a system has remained intact in Indian life, one ramification being the more than four thousand castes officially recognised today, with even more expected.

So far we have mentioned the castes and the plight of the lowest of them. Still worse has been the plight of the Dalits, the outcaste and untouchable. They continue to struggle for their liberation in the course of which sometimes violence seems to be unavoidable: those who apply the theory of using lesser violence to challenge the greater violence condone such acts. It is true that Gandhi participated in the struggle for temple entry for Dalits in a few places. It is also true he declared that 'untouchability is a crime against God and humanity'; but how to punish the criminals so as to establish equality, is a question Gandhi never asked. He wanted to purify Hinduism of the blot of untouchability, and asked caste Hindus to make atonement for this sin by allowing the untouchables into temples and other public places. He warned them that if they did not come forward to destroy the heinous practice of untouchability, there was going to be a fierce fight between caste Hindus and *Harijans*. He also warned that they would destroy Hindu-

ism, and placed himself in the forefront to raze them to the ground as though with dynamite if all the *Harijans* were united behind him.

Gandhi's promotion of the title *Harijan* appeared to be a great gesture, but it raised doubts in thinking minds. To translate it as 'people of God' is far-fetched because the word *Hari* in the tradition normally means *Vishnu* and a few of his incarnations, including Krishna and Ram, the personal deity of Gandhi. Today, Dalits point out the treacherous act of Ram, the epic hero of *Ramayana*, who killed a low caste man for daring to perform a Vedic ritual, thus violating the rule. Moreover, the word *Harijan* has the connotation of children born of temple prostitutes. The temple prostitutes system (*Devadasi*), in spite of a legal ban, still exists in India and interestingly the majority of those who dedicate their girls for this divine vocation are *Harijans*. Perhaps Gandhi overlooked this cultural reality. In any case the awakened community rejected this term and chose the word Dalit, meaning 'broken' or 'split open,' as a term more truly describing their experience of suffering.

The ambiguous position of Gandhi on *varna*, caste and untouchability, which the Dalits see as a calculated and cunning betrayal of their cause, was vividly exposed when B.R. Ambedkar, the twentieth-century champion of Dalit liberation, opposed Gandhi head on. Ambedkar stood for the annihilation of the caste system, which alone promised abolition of untouchability. Following his representation of the Dalits in the first round table conference held in London in 1930, the British government announced the 'Communal Award'. Accordingly, the

Dalits were given dual voting rights, with which they would elect their own candidate through the first vote in the areas where they are heavily populated and through the second vote elect a common representative. Gandhi opposed this award which appeared to him as another divide-and-rule policy of the British, that would bring about the disintegration of the Hindu community. When his letters to the government were not taken seriously he declared a fast unto death. Ambedkar was in a great dilemma: whether to shame Gandhi or to protect the rights of the Dalits? Then there was the fear that if the 'old national saint' died there would be riots and killing, and the losers would be the Dalits. Hence his agreement to a compromise that resulted in the famous Poona Act.

Caste and untouchability continue to be a menace in India today. Belying the expectation that globalisation will abolish it, caste is itself being globalised. Hindus have reason to be grateful to Gandhi for his confused stand in not seeing the inextricable connection between the Gita, the law codes and the Vedas, and between *varna*, caste and untouchability. Dalits have reason to suspect the real intentions of Gandhi. Gandhi's ideal of non-violence has a limited appeal to both groups as the Dalit struggle for liberation has taken the international stage.

At this juncture, it should be noted that Gandhi did not appreciate religious conversion as a form of protest and non-cooperation with an unjust caste system. Conversion was the last option for Ambedkar and his followers to embarrass Gandhi and other Hindus, and after serious consideration they chose Buddhism. V.S. Azariah, the first Indian bishop was

involved in 'humanising' and converting poor Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. Gandhi fiercely criticised him, but he refused to accept his invitation to go and see the kind of people who were converting to Christianity in the dust and heat of the villages. Such conversion from Hinduism to other religious traditions - including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam - has continued in India. Gandhi's aversion to conversion to Christianity was fuelled by stories of stupid acts, such as the converts being expected to eat beef and drink wine. Meanwhile Gandhi also spoke of conversion, but of a different kind. For example, he says: '*Satyagraha* is never vindictive. It believes not in destruction but in conversion' (33). He asked people to follow their inner voice and act on it - which is always ambiguous: if that is the only or the main criterion it is hard to deny the act of suicide bombers who claim to hear the inner voice in the context of inhuman secularisation and structural forms of terrorism. Of course we would question such a connection.

The Effect of Gandhi's Fast

As a Hindu, Gandhi practiced public fasting as part of his *dharma*. He used it to draw the attention of and to mobilise the masses, though he never used it for his selfish interest. At the same time, Gandhi says: 'As an author of fasting as a weapon in *satyagraha* I must state that I cannot give up an opinion honestly held even if the whole world fasts against me. I might as well give up my belief in God because a body of atheists fasted against such belief' (58). It is a last resort when all other efforts have failed. 'There is no room for imitation in fasts. He who has no inner strength should not dream of it, and never

with attachment to success. But if a *satyagrahi* once undertakes a fast from conviction, he must stick to his resolve whether there is a chance of his action bearing fruit or not.' (69)

In some Indian religious traditions, fast unto death is suicidal - and Buddhists criticised Jains for this. In the wake of their criticism of elaborate Vedic rituals, fast was prescribed as a substitute, which would be equally meritorious. Fast unto death and self-immolation are not uncommon in public in India, particularly with a view to opposing a decision or to gaining one's way. Towards the end of his life, Gandhi wrote: 'I failed to recognise, until it was too late, that what I had mistaken for *ahimsa* was not *ahimsa*, but passive resistance of the weak, which can never be called *ahimsa* even in the remotest sense' (76). However, before his death in January 1948, he wrote: 'My fast should not be considered a political move in any sense of the term. It is obedience to the peremptory call of conscience and duty. It comes out of felt agony' (76). Again, in the context of millions of poor Indians being forced to starve or semi-starve, when inflicting pain on oneself too was regarded as violence, it is very difficult to understand Gandhi's fast and its appeal to the poor masses of India.

Tensions and Dilemmas in Achieving the Ideal of Non-Violence

Merton comments that:

In Gandhi's mind non-violence was not simply a political tactic which was supremely useful and efficacious in liberating his people from foreign rule, in order that India might then concentrate on realizing its own na-

tional identity. On the contrary, the spirit of non-violence sprang from *an inner realization of spiritual unity in himself*. The whole Gandhian concept of non-violent action and *satyagraha* is incomprehensible if it is thought to be a means of achieving unity rather than as *the fruit of inner unity already achieved*. (6)

Perhaps Gandhi in his humility might not have approved this acclamation. We have already noted he was aware of the option of violence in the struggle of Dalits for regaining their humanity. Further, for Gandhi *ahimsa* was an ideal which, starting from himself (he thought) would spread throughout India and reach every part of the world. He was clear in his mind when he said, 'When the practice of *ahimsa* becomes universal, God will reign on earth as He does in heaven' (7).

The substitute for violence, for Gandhi, is non-cooperation. 'Non-cooperation', he declared, 'is a protest against an unwitting and unwilling participation in evil' (19). But non-cooperation can harden the perpetrator of violence and increase repression. For example, Dalit non-cooperation with the maintenance of the system of bonded labour is a reason for further riots and repression. Should they and other vulnerable people suffer such oppressive system which itself is violent? In Gandhi, does the voice of the poor and hungry of Asia still speak, as Merton claims? (10)

For Gandhi, 'Crime is a disease like any other malady and is a product of the prevalent social system. Therefore (in a non-violent India) all crime including murder will be treated as a disease' (49). This perception lends itself to see the place of some form of violence - as in the

case of surgery. Indeed, when non-violence with reference to the Gita was debated, theologians like Ramanuja compared the pain of victims in these acts to the pain of a patient in the course of a surgical operation. In fulfilling a sacrificial duty - performance of Vedic ritual for a priest, and fighting in war for a warrior - Gandhi advocates that 'The *satyagrahi* should have no hatred towards his opponent, facing death cheerfully in the performance of one's duty' (30). Can such an individual gesture be applicable to the experience of a victim community? Gandhi admitted that:

there will never be an army of perfectly non-violent people. It will be formed of those who will honestly endeavour to observe non-violence (27). It is not possible for a modern state based on force non-violently to resist forces of disorder, whether external or internal. A man cannot serve God and Mammon, not be temperate and furious at the same time (31). In life it is impossible to eschew violence completely. The question arises, where is one to draw the line? The line cannot be the same for everyone... Meat-eating is a sin for me. Yet for another person who has always lived on meat and never seen anything wrong in it, to give it up simply to copy me will be a sin. (41)

But somehow this message has not reached the extremists who not only ridicule meat-eating but also target Muslims for slaughtering cows. Gandhi supported the cow-protection act and went on fast when thousands of rioters were slaugh-

tered for this issue. Further, according to Hindu belief, plants and shrubs also have soul. Yet for Gandhi, 'to allow crops to be eaten up by animals in the name of *ahimsa* while there is a famine in the land is certainly a sin' (41). The Muslim community will be pleased to see this grading extended to cover animal life in comparison with human life. Gandhi admits: 'I am not able to accept in its entirety the doctrine of non-killing of animals. I have no feeling in me to save the life of animals who devour and cause hurt to man. I consider it wrong to help in the increase of their progeny... To do away with monkeys where they have become a menace to the well-being of man is pardonable' (70). A strict Jain would think that Gandhi leaves room for justification of violence. For Gandhi, 'Non-cooperation in military service, and service in non-military matters are not compatible' (52). 'If non-violence does not appeal to your heart, you should discard it' (41). 'If the people are not ready for the exercise of the non-violence of the brave, they must be ready for the use of force in self-defence. There should be no camouflage... It must never be secret' (41). One can understand in this light that Gandhi condoned the Indian government's action of sending an army when, soon after independence, part of Kashmir was occupied by some Pakistani tribes.

The first condition of non-violence is justice all around in every department of life. Perhaps it is too much to expect of human nature. I do not, however, think so. No one should dogmatize about the capacity of human nature for degradation or exaltation. (66)

Behind Gandhi's statement lies a Christian notion of sinful human nature and the need for salvation through Christ. Thinkers like Swami Vivekananda declared that it was a sin to call a human being a sinner because, according to the Hindu view, every human being has a divine spark or soul which goes through a chain of births and deaths until it becomes liberated and gains a stage of equanimity and equipoise. Gandhi has been criticised by some Indian Christian theologians that he did not regard self-righteousness also as a sin and that the body at no stage need be a thing to be despised. Gandhi's adoption of renunciation at a late stage of his life could not have an appeal to the youth who would want to enjoy life in its full measure until the passions and instincts fade away in old age. However, it does have an appeal to those who are overwhelmed by consumer 'pleasure'. Further, if the true condition for non-violence is justice all around in every department of life, it is hard to ask the victims of injustice not to use any form of violence in self-defence and in pursuit of gaining a share of even an average life.

Strength of Heart and Faint of Spirit

Merton gives a fine interpretation of Gandhi's inner strength and the nature of true freedom:

True freedom is then inseparable from the inner strength which can assume the common burden of evil which weighs both on oneself and one's adversary. False freedom is only a manifestation of the weakness that cannot bear even one's own evil until it is projected on to the other and seen as

exclusively his. The highest form of spiritual freedom is, as Gandhi believed, to be sought in the strength of heart, which is capable of liberating the oppressed and the oppressor together. But in any event, the oppressed must be able to be free within himself, so that he may begin to gain strength to pity his oppressor. Without that capacity for pity, neither of them will be able to recognise the truth of their situation: a common relationship in a common complex of sins. (14f)

The implication of this interpretation is that all the oppressed can have the inner strength of heart and proximity to their oppressors. Of course they can have deep sighs and visions of hope but to expect them to have inner strength in all circumstances may not be realistic. For Gandhi, in non-violence 'bravery consists in dying, not in killing' (26). 'A non-violent state must be broad-based on the will of an intelligent people well able to know its mind and act up to it' (31). 'A non-violent man or woman will and should die without retaliation, anger or malice, in self-defence or in defending the honour of his women folk. This is the highest form of bravery. If an individual or group of people are unable or unwilling to follow this great law of life, retaliation or resistance unto death is the second best, though a long way off from the first. Cowardice is impotence worse than violence. The coward desires revenge but being afraid to die, he looks to others, maybe to the government of the day, to do the work of defence for him. A coward is less than a man. He does not deserve to be a member of a society of men and women' (33). 'Non-violence is not a

cover for cowardice, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave... Cowardice is wholly inconsistent with non-violence... Non-violence presupposes ability to strike' (36) 'There is nothing more demoralising than fake non-violence of the weak and impotent' (41). 'A weak man is just by accident. A strong but non-violent man is unjust by accident' (47). 'A weak-minded man can never be a *satyagrahi*' (54). '*Ahimsa* calls for the strength and courage to suffer without retaliation, to receive blows without returning any. But it does not exhaust its meaning. Silence becomes cowardice when occasion demands speaking out the whole truth and acting accordingly' (58).

This ideal raises many questions in the Indian context. Are all the poor and illiterate, the majority of the Indian population, weak and impotent? When they are crushed by the oppressive structures of

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religions and social structures, should we ask them to endure blow after blow and insult after insult? Perhaps Gandhi was not expecting them to do so – once they had recognised the power of *satyagraha*. In fact most of them do and, arguably, with their subsequent frustration and anguish added, they have to endure the double weight that is forced upon them.

What is often happening in the context of people's movements in India, and elsewhere too, is that while the oppressor is unwilling to move an inch, the oppressed are exhorted to adopt non-violence. Any uprising is regarded not only as against the principle of non-violence but also against the State's law and order, which unfortunately has to be maintained by authorities who side with the oppressors either for gain or from fear of threats.

It is the Hebrew scripture that projects the poor and oppressed as weak, faint of heart, with broken spirit and so on, a people with whom God identifies and on whose behalf God challenges the strong and the oppressors. God asks the prophets and other servants to expose the secret plans of the oppressor and be the voice for the voiceless. The oppressor's repentance and reparation are called for. It was in this vein that Jesus started his Sermon on the Mount declaring 'Blessed are the poor in spirit (or wounded psyche), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. This sermon was a favourite of Gandhi, seeing in it not only the quintessence of the Gita and true Hinduism, but of true religion itself. Today, following the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and procedures of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what is emphasised is not retributive justice but restorative justice in which reparation is essential. As the Chairman of the Commission, Desmond Tutu, later declared, 'there is no future without forgiveness', but it is to be preceded by the repentance and confession of the perpetrator of violence. And there is no truth and freedom without remembering the past. What healing is possible, though, is to remove the poisonous toxin from that memory. Then the question is

whether Gandhi's point of reference – such as non-violence as the law of life, truth and God – can appeal simultaneously to the oppressors and the oppressed.

Image of God for India

Merton observes that non-violence, for Gandhi, bears witness to the chief truth of Hinduism: 'the belief that *all* life (not only human but all sentient beings) is one, i.e., all life coming from the One universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara' (8). But students of the dynamics of the Hindu religious traditions know that this is the view of one particular school of thought and it is unfair to cover the whole of Hindu religious traditions with this blanket. We have already noted that Gandhi himself has made a distinction between the life of humans, animals and crops. As a Vaishnavite, Gandhi did believe in the unfailing assistance of God for a non-violent resister, sustaining through insurmountable problems.

The votary of non-violence has to cultivate his capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear... He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice *ahimsa* to perfection. The votary of *ahimsa* has only one fear, that is God. He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the *Atman* (the transcendent self) that transcends the body; and the moment one has glimpsed the imperishable *Atman* one sheds the love of the perishable body... Violence is needed for the protection of the *Atman*, for the protection of one's honour (38). A

satyagrahi is dead to his body even before his enemy attempts to kill him, i.e., he is free from attachment to his body and only lives in the victory of his soul. Therefore when he is already thus dead, why should he yearn to kill anyone? To die in the act of killing is in essence to die defeated. (46f)

Without realising this background, Merton comments on the ultimate surrender to the will of God: 'Surrender to the demands of that *dharma*, to the sacred needs of the *Harijan* (outcastes, untouchables) and of all India was purely and simply surrender to God and to His will, manifested in the midst of the people' (8). At a mature stage, Gandhi claimed that to hear the inner voice of God and surrender to his will was his greatest joy.

Gandhi believed in prayer which was for him the root of *satyagraha* and a '*satyagrahi* relies upon God for protection against the tyranny of brute force' (30). At the same time, in his understanding of God's involvement we seem to see the Gita's view of the invulnerable soul, the chain of births and deaths, and the pre-determination of death. In order to persuade the despondent Arjuna in the battle field Krishna tells him that all those to be killed by him have already been killed and his responsibility as a warrior is to fight and kill. Gandhi said, 'No man can stop violence. God alone can do so. Men are but instruments in His hands. The deciding factor is God's grace. He works according to His law and therefore violence will also be stopped in accordance with that law. Man does not and can never know God's law fully. Therefore we have to try as far as lies in our power' (31f).

This view is of course completely different from the Judeo-Christian view. The Hebrew scripture introduces the God with a mysterious, enigmatic and unpronounceable name, YHWH, who is zealous for changing the structures of violence by challenging them and even by using lesser forms of violence. There God struggles within him/herself between justice and compassion.

Jesus, for Gandhi, was a true *satyagrahi*, 'a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act' (34). 'Jesus was the most active resister known perhaps to history. This was non-violence par excellence' (40). But he did not grasp him as Son of Man as the true representative of the victim community having authority to forgive on their behalf and giving them freedom to forgive or not forgive. He stopped with the ideal of turning the other cheek and did not notice his dramatic action in cleansing the temple, condemning the oppressive religious and political authorities with strong words such as 'woe unto you' and asking the police who struck him at trial, 'if I was wrong to speak what I did, produce the evidence to prove it; if I was right, why strike me?' In his earlier work in South Africa, Gandhi would have acted in such ways. His ideal of non-violence was something he realised in due course. Would the teaching of Jesus have developed similarly if he was given a chance to live longer? What the early Christians perceived was that even after his resurrection Jesus continued to suffer in solidarity with the victims of society and was made the rallying centre as a vulnerable lamb

yet having true authority in the context of the tyranny of imperial Rome.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Gandhi's ideal of non-violence will be extolled as long as history continues. Some of his observations are true and right. For instance, 'Unless big nations shed their desire of exploitation and the spirit of violence, of which war is the natural expression and the atom bomb the inevitable consequence, there is no hope for peace in the world' (34). Probably writing in the context of World War II, he said that 'the people of Europe are sure to perish if they continue to be violent' (34). Today many thinking people will join Gandhi asserting with him:

If they can shed the fear of destruction, if they disarm themselves, they will automatically help the rest to regain their sanity. But then these great powers will have to give up their imperialistic ambitions and their exploitation of the so-called uncivilized or semi-civilized nations of the earth and revise their mode of life. It means a complete revolution. (52)

But in the process of such a revolution, the place of violence or the application of the ideal of non-violence needs to be considered earnestly. We have shown in this essay, not only problems and contradictions in connecting different views and their application to any response to structural violence in India and around the world today, but also the dilemmas and tensions found in realising the 'ideal' of non-violence. Perhaps the nuances of its realisation can be better understood only

in particular situations. For instance, a mother using force to redeem her baby from a baby-snatcher is different from a state accumulating power to dominate and destroy, as Gandhi would have well understood.

As has been shown, Gandhi's obsession with Hindu dharma without discrimination between a myriad of traditions, beliefs and practices, and his interpretation of the Gita without applying any reasoning, have rendered his ideal of non-violence ineffective. Gandhi took the four passing references to non-violence as an ideal virtue and as the essence of the Gita and Hinduism, whereas for any average reader the central message of the text is 'fight and kill for the sake of safeguarding the everlasting dharma'. Radical social critics like Kosambi have demonstrated from the Gita that it advocates murder with impunity. B.G. Tilak and his followers on the other hand followed this central message by fighting any interference with or confusion within the given dharma, that is essentially the brahmanic and caste-oriented dharma. Godse, the assassin of Gandhi came from this fold.

The Christianity Gandhi encountered in South Africa and India could not have appealed to him as it was propagated and practiced in the colonial atmosphere and colonial mindset of the time. The golden thread running through the Bible is that God in the name of YHWH showed solidarity with a community of people groaning in slavery, liberated them, made a covenant with them and chose to use them to be instruments of his mission of humanising the whole world. God journeyed with this community protecting them from enemies within and without, teaching them the twin commandments

of loving God with the whole person and loving the others as themselves, chiding them when they went astray and taking new initiatives with a vision of hope for a better future. Those who engagingly read the Hebrew Bible cannot miss the tales of terror and bloody massacres. At the same time there were people with the 'right mind'. For example, while summarising all the battles encountered in the exodus, the writer of the Judges expresses this 'right mind' as s/he says that in every case first they sought permission for a peaceful passage through the lands on the way but when that was denied violence became inevitable. This is not to condone all forms of violence mentioned in the Bible but to illustrate the fact of 'right minds' throughout the history and the moral dilemmas they faced. There was no deviation from the perception that God was on the side of the poor and victims even at times when he had a change of location depending on the new situation of the victims, i.e. when the victims turned into victimisers. And there is no dearth of visions to the effect that 'love and faithfulness will embrace each other and justice and peace will kiss one another'. Perhaps some imagined a future in which if one turns the other cheek it will receive kisses, not further blows. In the line of this hope Jesus came teaching the strange power of God who can come down in identification with the slaves, who can die on a cross yet would defend herself by not allowing annihilation. The weakest who have only the power of love would gain the right kind of power and authority to rule in the new world.

If Merton's selection of Gandhi's writings on non-violence, and his additional comments, were made with full awareness

of the Indian situation, it would appear much more authentic. Praising Gandhi's impact as an enlightened awakening of a whole nation or spiritual consciousness needs to be related to events like the death of more than a million people at the time of partition and exchange between Pakistan and India. Without such recognition, Western projections of Gandhi have only limited appeal for the continued struggle of millions of Indians for their liberation. Of course, Thomas Merton is not the only westerner who has written similarly about Gandhi.

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