

GANDHIAN MODEL OF PROTEST : FOUR CASE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

The modern, capitalist path of development essentially entailed certain fall-outs, which were inevitable to this dispensation. The policy of *laissez faire* did not help much as was evident from the growth and strengthening of the socialist forces all over the world. A plethora of social movements sprang up throughout the world, catering to the forces that were being marginalized as a result of the onward treading on the path of development. After the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the 'defeat' of the Marxist ideology, and the subsequent emergence of unipolar world, the liberal democratic path of development has been 'embraced' by the entire world. Since then, these movements have become apparently more visible and articulate. Our knowledge of historical sociology tells us that in Europe, the land that has witnessed and mothered major epochal upheavals and changes, every successive social, economic, cultural and political mobilization (protestant reformation, liberal and the socialist) has cleared the way for the next. This involves wresting the (consecutive) historical initiative by the new social forces. The new social movements are a case in point here. These are anti-nuclear and anti-war movements, environment movements, women's liberation movements, movements of indigenous peoples, and movements for alternative lifestyles. These movements, at first, remained single-issue movements but towards the end of the 1970s, they developed more and more a common understanding based on a holistic view of life. The Green parties in the developed countries of Europe and elsewhere, in fact, represent an interconnected bunch of these movements, which eventually seek to realize an ecologically sustainable and decentralist society with emphasis on community building, peoples' participation and development of social capital. This was not considered as a momentary happening but a durable trait of advanced industrial societies in the post-modern era. All these movements are apparently disparate and distinct but on going deeper into them, we can discern an underlying harmony and unanimity embracing this wide-ranging continuum. Clause Offe views that all the major concerns of the new social movements "converge on the idea that life itself and the minimal standards of "good life" as defined and sanctioned by modern values is threatened by the bland dynamics of military, economic technological and political rationalizations and that there are no sufficient and sufficiently reliable barriers within dominant political and economic institutions that could prevent them

from passing the threshold to disaster.¹ We agree here with R. Manivannan when he asserts, "The most significant aspect of these movements is that each one of them carries in it a component of the meaning of peace and together a collective notion of life in peace."²

Although there is a visible gap in the settings and approaches of these movements, there is a strong linkage between them and one attribute of peace or the other gets reflected as part of this linkage. Taken as a collective whole, they offer to rectify the ills of today's society by proposing alternative worldview. More importantly, their activities have or are in the process of developing a far-reaching critique of the existing political, economic, and social order. They also strive to change social values as well as public policy.³ More crucially it is this framework, which locates these movements as part of the process of social transformation, which is new. Ramchandra Guha writes that these movements work simultaneously at two levels. He states : "At one [level], they are defensive, seeking to protect civil society from the tentacles of the centralizing state; at another, they are assertive, seeking to change civil society from within and in the process putting forward a conception of the good life somewhat different from that articulated by any of the established political parties. Considered individually, these movements are small and scattered, taken collectively, and keeping in mind the convergence of interests and ideologies and the growing networks of coordination and cooperation, they are an increasingly visible part of the Indian social scene. These are then the new social movements."⁴

The humble attempt that has been made in this paper is to establish that these new social movements under Gandhian influence project a perception of peace through their diverse issues. The classification of new social movements is based on the fact that in recent years, many people's movements in India have started emphasizing the socio-political and economic aspects of militarization. More importantly, this study attempts to examine both the military and the non-military threats as concern for the human security.

Indian Context of the Conception of Peace in Human Rights

The classical Hindu concepts of ahimsa, truth, non-stealing, purity and control of senses are five great virtues, which every human being should achieve irrespective of his/her caste or station in life. The emphasis on these concepts by religious books and the ancient rulers of India created a mentality that gave "Ahimsa" and "Shanti" an all important position in people's life.⁵ This became a seedbed for the peace movements in India, which started at Buddha's time. Buddha's movement (not in the sense of agitation or protest processions) helped the then society work for peace through such acts which declared men to be worthy of respects, not through birth, but through spiritual or moral merit. The peace movement that is usually called Jainism originated at the same time and in the same region of India as Buddha movement. This movement

helped growth of moral and spiritual disciplined, encouraged honesty and kindness in personal relations and underlined importance of non-violence.⁶

In India's peace history, the upsurge and spread of devotional movements during the medieval period the medieval period known by the umbrella term-

Bhakti Movement is a watershed. The masses played a pivotal role and the vernacular languages of the regions became the vehicles of this Bhakti movement stressing love, peace, harmony and an intimate personal awakening. The impact of Bhakti movement is visible in the lifestyle of people in many parts of Tamil Nadu, Kannada in the south and in Bengal in the North today.⁷

An aspect of Asia that must always be seen as a historical backdrop while discussing its social movements are a variety of national liberation movements against colonial occupation in many countries of the region.

Contemporary social movements cannot really be well understood without identifying the elements of continuity and change from such liberation movements. And nowhere else is that as important as in India. India's nonviolent movement for freedom was in itself a part of the tradition of the Indian peace movement. Its major endeavor was to release India from the British rule. There were a number of social movements, which had joined the nationalist movement for the cause of political freedom. They were conscious of the need for enduring their struggle in free India (the dalits, peasantry, labour, women, and tribal, environmental and other survival related movements). The Indian national independence movement⁸, as is well known, was greatly influenced by the leadership provided by Mahatma Gandhi.

The sheer number of people who participated in his movement, particularly from about 1920 to the time of independence in 1947 is staggering. Apart from gaining political independence for India, the movement influenced a nation of 300 million people in 1947 and over a billion today in nearly all aspects of politics and life. Apart from its main characteristics of non-violence and struggle based on truth and Satyagraha⁹, Gandhian thought penetrated areas like governance, decentralization, ethics and morality of politics, education, rural and national development, self-reliance, volunteerism, caste and untouchability and much more.¹⁰

Gandhi staunchly believed that it was possible to avoid war and fights through amicable relations among peoples and groups as well as individuals. "This is not a mere utopian vision based on nonviolence or non-resistance as an ethics principle but as an ultimately practical basis of order".¹¹ Further, "Gandhi had long believed that India had a special responsibility and duty in the development of a nonviolent alternative means of struggle which would make possible the abolition of war".¹²

After gaining freedom, and even after Gandhi's assassination by a Hindu religious extremist in 1948, his thought prompted a wide variety of Gandhian movements and civil society formations that persist till today. The resolution and resilience of his thoughts can also be discerned today in movements that may not be direct descendants of Gandhian movements, like the environmental, adivasi and local governance movements. The more direct Gandhian movements would include the Sarvodaya movement that concentrated on the redistribution of land in the fifties and sixties but is fairly dormant now, the movement for bringing in Panchayat Raj [xiii] and a plethora of Gandhian institutions all over the country, of which the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi, Sewagram Ashram in Wardha, Gandhigram in Tamil Nadu, Gandhi University and Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat would be prominent. His notion of self reliance, symbolized by the hand-spun local cloth, khadi, and a variety of other locally produced products is promoted by the state through a vast organization called the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, with an extensive network of still popular retail outlets. Gandhian thought finds popularity amongst groups and movements that seek to establish a more ethical, moral and harmonious relationship between human activities and nature, and who are seeking another world that draws away from centralization of political power and economic production. It would therefore seem to confront and resist both forms of capital, private or state-owned, putting much more emphasis on community ownership.

The impact of Gandhian philosophy can be clearly seen in the movements which have come up during freedom struggle and since independence.

The following movements would help demonstrate through their methods, goals, appeal, reach, success, the efficacy of Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha:

1. Chipko Movement
2. SEWA Movement
3. Khadi Movement
4. Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement

1. Chipko Movement

The forests of India are a critical resources for the subsistence of rural peoples throughout the country, but especially in hill and mountain areas, both because of their direct provision of food, fuel and fodder and because of their role in stabilizing soil and water resources. As these forests have been increasingly felled for commerce and industry, Indian villagers have sought to protect their livelihoods through the Gandhian method of Satyagraha non-violent resistance. In the 1970s and 1980s this resistance to the destruction of forests spread throughout India and became organized and known as the Chipko Movement.

The success achieved by this protest led to similar protests in other parts of the country. From their origins as a spontaneous protest against logging abuses in Uttar Pradesh in the Himalayas, the movement spread to Himachal Pradesh in the North, Karnataka in the South, and Rajasthan in the West, Bihar in the East and to the Vindhya in Central India. This movement stopped clear felling in the Western Ghats and the Vindhya and generated pressure for a natural resource policy, which is more sensitive people's needs and ecological requirements.

Philosophical Foundation

The Chipko movement is historically, philosophically and organizationally an extension of the traditional Gandhian Satyagraha. Its special significance lies in the fact that it took place in post independent India. Equipped with the Gandhian worldview of development based on justice and ecological stability, its followers contributed silently to the growth of women power and ecological consciousness in the hills areas of Uttar Pradesh. The influence of two European disciples of Gandhiji (Mira Ben and Sarla Ben) on the heritage of struggle for social justice and ecological stability in the hills of Uttar Pradesh has been immense and they generated a new brand of Gandhian activists who provided the foundation for the Chipko Movement.

The Movement

The Chipko Movement is the result of hundreds of decentralised and locally autonomous initiatives. Its leaders and activists are primarily village women, acting to save their means of subsistence and their communities. Men are involved too, however, and some of these have given wider leadership to the movement. Prominent Chipko figures include : Sunderlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian activist and philosopher, whose 5,000 kilometre trans-Himalaya footmarch in 1981-83 was crucial in spreading the Chipko message. Bahuguna coined the Chipko slogan: 'ecology is permanent economy', Chandi Prasad Bhatt, one of the earliest Chipko activists, who fostered locally based industries based on the conservation and sustainable use of forest wealth for local benefit, Dhoom Singh Negi, who, with Bachni Devi and many village women, first saved trees by hugging them in the 'Chipko embrace'. They coined the slogan : 'What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air'.

2. SEWA (Self-Employed Women Association) Movement

Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) is a trade union registered in 1972. It is a Gujarat based organisation of poor, self-employed women workers. SEWA has a membership of more than 700,000 members all of whom are women in the informal economy in all rural and urban sectors of work. These are women who earn a living through their own labour or small businesses. They do not obtain regular salaried employment with welfare benefits like workers in the organized sector. The Self-Employed Women's Association SEWA was born in 1972 as a trade union of self

employed women. It grew out of the Textile Labour Association, TLA, India's oldest and largest union of textile workers founded in 1920 by a woman, Anasuya Sarabhai. SEWA is both an organisation and a movement. The SEWA movement is enhanced by its being a confluence of three movements: the labour movements, the cooperative movement and the women's movement. But it is also a movement of self-employed workers: their own, homegrown movement with women as the leaders. Through their own movement women become strong and visible. Their tremendous economic and social contributions become recognized.

Philosophical Foundation

Gandhian thinking is the guiding force for SEWA's poor, selfemployed members in organising for social change.¹⁴ His principles of satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), sarvadharmā (intergrating all faiths, all people) and khadi (propagation of local employment and self reliance) are followed. Mahatma Gandhi led a successful strike of textile workers in 1917. He believed in creating positive organised strength by awakening the consciousness in workers. By developing unity as well as personally, a worker should be able to hold his or her own against tyranny from employers or the state. To develop this strength he believed that a union should cover all aspects of worker's lives both in the factory and at home.

Goals

SEWA's main goals are to organise women workers for full employment. Full employment means employment whereby workers obtain work security, income security, food security and social security (at least health care, child care and shelter)

Achievements

SEWA has successfully adopted Gandhian techniques of mass mobilization through its campaigns and many movements in the shape of co-operatives, federations and supportive services have sprung up as its offshoots:

1. Campaigns for Mass Mobilization

This mass mobilization strengthens the SEWA movement and at the same time highlights their own pressing issues. All mobilization is done as part of a campaign around a clearly identified issue. The women and local leaders identify the issue, which affects large numbers of people, which affects them deeply or is felt as unjust or intolerable and is continually called to their attention. Mobilization involves continuous meetings at the village or mohalla level. The meetings must include as large a representation as possible, for example an all-village meeting - 'gram sabha'. Campaigns are organized around pressing issues affecting SEWA members. These spread geographically and across occupations, depending on the issues involved. In

recent years, some campaigns made considerable headway and others faced obstacles or long struggles. But in all, workers in large numbers joined the campaigns, contributed their insights and ideas. Several strong leaders developed as a result of these campaigns. Some of the campaigns are namely:-

Home-based Workers' Campaign, Vendors Campaign, Forest Workers' Campaign, Construction Workers' Campaign, The Water Campaign, Food Security Campaign, Campaign for our Right to Child Care, Campaign for Recognition of Midwives, Campaign, Minimum, Campaign

2. SEWA Movements

These can be seen in the forms of Cooperatives, federations etc. at state, and national and international levels:-

- State
- Cooperatives Groups: Social, Savings and Credit Groups
- Federations: Gujarat State Mahila SEWA Co-op. Federation, Banaskantha DWCRA Mahila SEWA Association, Kutchcraft Association, Kheda Dist. Women's Saving & Credit Association, Gandhinagar District Women's Saving & Credit Association, Ahmedabad District Vegetable Growers & Sellers Association, Sukhi Mahila Mandal Sabarkantha Kheda Mandal, Surendranagar District Women & Child Development Mandal, Shri Mahila SEWA Anasooya Trust, Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust, SEWA Gram Mahila Haat, Gujarat Shishu Sangh, SEWA Insurance etc.
- National: National Centre for Labour, National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and
- International: Homenet, Streetnet, SEWA Movement in South Africa, SEWA in Yemen, SEWA in Turkey.

3. Khadi Movement in India

Khadi or khaddarm, as it is popularly known, perhaps is not more than an outdated cloth of yesteryears for today's generations and does not catch their imagination as much as it did of the generations who fought with the British rule during the freedom struggle. It was a sign of economic freedom, self-reliance, a symbol of Indian unity before Indian independence. The Khadi movement was a part of the independence struggle in order to boucott the foreign cloths. In the hands of Gandhi, it turned out to be a powerful weapon to drive out the colonial powers from the Indian soil. Of the major (peace) movements inspired by the Gandhian thought. Khadi movement is one of the earliest, to which Gandhi himself contributed a lot.

Background

The Industrial Revolution, with its steam engine, spinning jenny and power loom, created a powerhouse of cloth mills that literally desiccated India's textiles. British colonial policy dictated by law that all the cotton grown in India be exported to the Home Country at very low prices while British mill cloth flooded Indian markets, forcing the locals to buy it. Millions of Indian spinners and weavers went out of work, prompting Bengal Governor Lord William Bentinck to admit "the bones of cotton weavers are littering the plains of India". Hand spun, hand woven cloth, the pride of India, was all but killed and along with it, vast reservoirs of precious traditional textile knowledge too disappeared.

OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAMME OF THE MOVEMENT

It was left to Mahatma Gandhi in early 20th Century to reinvent, revive and resuscitate Khadi under a new brand name, a new philosophy and programme.¹⁵

Khadi simply means cotton, usually handspun. Khadi is Indian handspun and hand-woven cloth. The raw materials may be cotton, silk or wool, which are spun into threads on a spinning wheel called a charkha. By asking millions of his countrymen to spin yarn at the charkha, wear Swadeshi Khadi cloth and eschew all foreign goods, Gandhiji was not merely restoring pride in heritage and the value of handwork or making a strike against colonial exploitation. Khadi was a socio-economic statement as well. Apart from giving jobs to millions of rural artisans, his programme looked to an equal distribution of wealth, decentralisation, non-exploitation or minimal exploitation. Heeding his clarion call, countless Indians: the intelligentsia, middle classes, the common man and the poverty-ridden rural masses took to spinning yarn. A Khadi wave swept over the country. The first Khadi production center was opened in 1921, it found a place in the National Flag and as millions of charkas hummed across India Khadi was truly reborn.

Significance and Achievements

The movement not only carried on the Swadeshi agenda, but more importantly, generated employment. Gandhiji wanted production by masses instead of mass production. He wanted people to be aware of their own productive potential and have control over the economic structure. This would also give them a sense of self-worth. He wrote: "Swaraj without Swadeshi is a lifeless corpse and if Swadeshi is the soul of Swaraj, Khadi is the essence of Swadeshi." The fabric, for him, was more than hand-spun cloth. He once said: "Khadi is more of a thought than a cloth... it is a symbol of Swaraj, a symbol of national emancipation." The Khadi Movement worked with the twin objectives of shaking the British economy on the one hand and boosting the Indian economy on the other. The movement, on the characteristic Gandhian mode, was completely non-violent in approach. Writer Goldston wrote about the movement: "No

laws were being overtly broken, but the Raj was grinding to a halt as its activities were simply ignored by the Indian people.”

Challenges

Khadi evolved itself to become a fashion designer's choice, but it cannot be sold on an emotional level. In order to flourish in today's world, it has to remain competitive and viable in all regards. Its Indianness and being rooted in tradition can only then be an added qualification to it. The young and trendy generations need to be taught about its original implications. The governmental efforts through revitalizing Khadi & Village Industries (K.V.I.C.) becomes a *sin qua non* in this regard.

Khadi movement is yet another beautiful example of the genius in Gandhi. He could prove in one more way that the 'Small is beautiful'. His Khadi movement was no less a peace movement as it was movement against unjust British rule and strived to attain freedom from it by propagating a sense of equality and self-reliance. For today's generations, fighting the onslaught of liberalization, privatization and globalization (L.P.G.), through Gandhian techniques can be a handsome tribute to his legacy, apart from being an effective way of subduing these agents of neo-imperial forces.

4. Bhoodan-Gramdan Movement

After having achieved freedom, the Indian leaders took little time in abandoning the Gandhian principles. Nonviolence gave way to the use of India's armed forces. Heavy industries were called as 'the temples of modern India'. The new leaders discarded Gandhi's vision of a decentralized society - a society based on autonomous, self-reliant villages. These leaders spurred a rush toward a strong central government and an industrial economy as found in the West. Yet all did not abandon Gandhi's vision. Many of Gandhi's, "constructive workers" - development experts and community organizers working in a host of agencies set up by Gandhi himself - resolved to continue his mission of transforming Indian society. Like Gandhi, Vinoba believed that the divisiveness of Indian society was a root cause of its degradation and stagnation.¹⁶ After India got independence, Vinoba advised that, now that India had reached its goal of Swaraj - independence, or self-rule - the Gandhian's new goal should be a society dedicated to Sarvodaya, the "welfare of all". Bhoodan (Land-gift) and Gramdan (Village-gift) are actually practical applications of the philosophy of Sarvodaya [xvii]. They collectively were 'trusteeship in action'. Connected with Bhoodan and Gramdan, there were other programs. Important of these were Sampatti Dan (Gift of the Wealth), Shramdan (Gift of the Labour), Shanti Sena (Army of Peace), Sarvodaya-Patra (the pot where every household gives daily handful of grain) and Jeevandan (Gift of Life).

The Movement

He started on his extraordinary and unprecedented in the history, the Bhoodan Movement, and further on to Gramdan movement. Over a period of twenty years, he walked through the length and breadth of India persuading landowners and landlords to give a total of four million acres of land to the poor and downtrodden. His Bhoodan (Gift of the Land) movement started on April 18, 1951, he attracted the attention of the world. Untouched by publicity and attention, Vinoba had continued his efforts for a just and equitable society.

After 1954, Vinoba began asking for “donations” not so much of land but of whole villages. He named this new program Gramdan – “village-gift”. While Bhoodan had been meant to prepare people for a nonviolent revolution, Vinoba saw Gramdan as the revolution itself. Gramdan was a far more radical program than Bhoodan. In a Gramdan village, all land was to be legally owned by the village as a whole, but parceled out for the use of individual families, according to their need. Because the families could not themselves sell, rent, or mortgage the land, they could not be pressured off it during hard times – as normally happens when land reform programs bestow land title on poor individuals. Village affairs were to be managed by a village council made up of all adult members of the village, making decisions by consensus – meaning the council could not adopt any decision until everyone accepted it. This was meant to ensure cooperation and make it much harder for one person or group to benefit at the expense of others.

While Bhoodan had been meant to prepare people for a nonviolent revolution, Vinoba saw Gramdan as the revolution itself. Gramdan, he felt, with its common ownership and cooperative decision-making, could bring about the needed unity. And once this was achieved, the “people’s power” it would release would make anything possible. Vinoba’s Gramdan efforts progressed slowly until 1965, when an easing of Gramdan’s requirements was joined to the launching of a “storm campaign”. By 1970, the official figure for Gramdan villages was 160,000 – almost one-third of all India’s villages!

Achievements and Limitations

But it turned out that it was far easier to get a declaration of Gramdan (Bhoodan later on merged into Gramdan in a way) than to set it up in practice. By early 1970, only a few thousand villages had transferred land title to a village council. In most of these, progress was at a standstill. What’s more, most of these few thousand villages were small, single-caste, or tribe – not even typical Indian villages. By 1971, Gramdan as a movement had collapsed under its own weight. Still, the Gramdan movement left behind no mean achievement what could be procured under the force of Land Reforms Act was very less when compared to what was obtained from Bhoodan-

Gramdan movement through non-violent and peaceful means. There were more than a hundred Gramdan “pockets” – some made up of hundreds of villages-where Gandhian workers settled in for long-term development efforts,. These pockets today form the base of India’s Gandhian peace movement. In these locales, the Gandhians are helping some of India’s poorest by organizing Gandhian-style community development and nonviolent action campaigns against injustice. The propagation of ideas combined with material achievements affected the thinking of the people. By adopting Gandhi’s ideas to the solution of the basic economic problem of land collection and equitable distribution among the landless, the movement kept Gandhi’s ideas of socio-economic reconstruction alive. The movement kindled interest in the individuals to study Gandhi’s ideas and assess their relevance.

Hence, we see here the diverse variety of fields in which Gandhian philosophy pervades and gives birth to many human rights and peace movements thereby. Apart from those illustrated above, we also know about other Gandhian peace movements, tribale movements such as PR movement, Anti-liquor movement, tribale movements during freedom struggle, Panchayat Raj Movement etc. All of these separately and collectively create conditions, for peace to originate and sustain in the true sense of the term, and hence are known as peace movements, or human rights movements in other way!

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