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## “Educational Philosophy of Gandhi ji and Terrorism”

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### Abstract

*Twentieth century has been a century of violence. Would the 21<sup>st</sup> century be a century of nonviolence? Pascal Alan Nazareth in this paper says, yes, if the issues of peace and security are pursued through justice and mutual agreements based on the legitimate aspirations of both sides of the conflict situations.*

*In this world today the most striking and dangerous phenomenon the entire world is facing terrorism. People very often have a deep feeling of fear of being blown away by a nonreligious, non-political and non-communitarian bomb. Terrorism has penetrated into the minds of people and it gets the nutrition for its survival from the fear it creates among people. It is the need of the hour to find a way through which mankind can see their future.*

*Non-violence has the answer to all these. Gandhi has the answer for this. The relevance of his philosophy including non-violence has been felt by the people in the wake of rising terrorism. This is an attempt to draw the attention towards him and his philosophy in front of the generation next..*

### Introduction

The 20th century has certainly been the most violent and destructive in human history. Over 90 million people have died in the two world Wars, in the Spanish and Greek Civil wars, Hitler’s gas chambers, Arab-Israeli and India-Pakistan wars, and innumerable local conflicts in different parts of the world. Yet, quite possible more people live in constant dread of sudden and violent death today than at any time in the past. The collapse of the blazing World Trade Towers on September 11, 2001 has seared themselves on the human mind universally. The suicide bomber has become the new symbol of terror of our times. Even the most sophisticated surveillance systems of a super power have

proved in capable of preventing terrorist attacks in broad daylight. This somewhat pessimistic reading of history is challenged by one major exception, Mahatma Gandhi's application of politics and techniques of nonviolence in India. Gandhi's success both redeems human nature from the inevitability of its historical experience and also suggests the viability of nonviolence in modern situations.

### **Gandhi's nonviolence movement**

When Gandhi arrived on the Indian political scene in 1915, the Russian revolution had just taken place. This and the widespread antipathy for British rule had generated strong revolutionary fervor among Indian nationalists. Their father figure was the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, whose popular novel, "Anandmath" was the inspiration for secret societies, and its hero Satyanand, the model for "revolutionaries". It contained the rousing hymn "Bande Mataram". Aurobindo Ghosh was the other influential figure. Educated in England, and selected for the coveted Indian civil service he had given it up to join the "revolution". Like many others who had studied abroad, including Jawaharlal Nehru, he was deeply impressed by the achievement of Mazzini and Garibaldi and Japan's defeat by Russia in 1905. Besides, like the rest of India, he was outraged by British division of Bengal on religious lines in 1904. Bartaman Rananiti, 'Modern Art of War' published anonymously in 1907 propagated Bankim's idea that the destruction was another form of creation and that funds for revolutionary activities must be raised by any means including terrorism. During the 1905-1915 periods, there was a spate of assassinations of British officials not only in India, but also in England. At the 1919 Amritsar congress session when Gandhi spoke about Truth and Nonviolence, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a senior nationalist leader who had connection with and sympathies for the revolutionaries, contemptuously retorted "My friend, Truth has no place in politics". Two decades later, another nationalist leader Subhash Chandra Bose, who assessed the nonviolent approach impractical and ineffectual, secretly left India for Germany and Japan. In collaboration with the latter he set up the "Indian National army" with Indian troops taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese in South East Asia. Gandhi's task in promoting Truth and Nonviolence within the Indian national movement was, therefore, not an easy one. He succeeded only because of his great moral strength, his total identification with the poverty-stricken Indian people, and the impressive results of his nonviolent campaigns, based on mass participation, produced vis-a vis the British, 1920 onwards. Besides Tilak died in 1920 and left a more open arena for him.

Gandhi ardently believed that truth was an objective moral reality as real and mighty as God himself. Truth was what constituted the "Right Path". For him, there was no greater strength than the strength of the Human Spirit when it was imbued with Truth and was unafraid to die, unarmed, upholding it. Since Humans have been created "In the image of God" and have the "Divine Spark" in them they have to be motivated and governed by Reason and Love rather than by fear and violence. When one

is steadfastly rooted in Truth, reason will always lead him along the path of Love and Righteousness. One has to live, and be ready to die, for Truth, Love and Righteousness but never to kill. “Given a just cause, capacity for endless suffering, and avoidance of violence, victory is a certainty”, “Peace will come when truth is pursued, and Truth implies Justice” and “the end of nonviolent struggle is always a mutually acceptable agreement, never the defeat, much less the humiliation of the enemy” are the three cardinal principles of Gandhi’s trust and Nonviolence strategy.

### **Definitions and Major Types of terrorism**

There are, among several others, three major types of terrorism such as ‘insurgency’, ‘militancy’ and ‘terrorism’.

“Insurgency” involves revolutionary and guerrilla activities against the military force of a State.

“Militancy” is the more aggressive and even violent wing of a political party. Prime target of militancy is also military, para-military, armed soldiers and police forces of the State machinery. However, they do not hesitate to go for other destructive and absolutely violent acts when it is required to attain their ends.

“Terrorism” is the violent act involving massacre and indiscriminate killing of innocent people for the purpose of drawing political attention by generating mass fear psychosis to attain certain political and motivated ends or goals.

All three types of above mentioned activities involve absolute and utterly destructive violence. These definitions have emerged after prolonged years of interviews and discussions with senior air force, army and police officers of India and several other academics from various universities in India and abroad.

### **Gandhian views on terrorism**

No one loathed terrorism more than Gandhi. He stood to lose everything he had worked for with a single bomb, for he knew full well how rulers seize on the chance to condemn non-violent movements for the slightest infraction (as today’s media will ignore a highly disciplined non-violent demonstration for hours, to seize on the odd outbreak of sabotage). But Gandhi’s aversion to terrorism went much deeper. Terrorism is in many ways the worst form of violence. Indeed, it is often tinged with a kind of cowardice, which is even worse than violence, if anything can be. As one who dedicated his whole life to show weary humanity the way out of violence, he could not possibly condone one of its worst forms.

In the Mahatma’s eyes, violence is violence whether handed down by a legally constituted court or hurled by a lone assassin. All life is sacred; all violence to life is desecration. It was by the same reasoning that while he hated “from the bottom of my heart the system of government that the British have set up in India” and the way they kept it set up, he “refuse[d] to hate the domineering Englishman,” just as he refused to hate the domineering Hindu.

This refusal to dehumanize made it possible for Gandhi to, as we say, not condone but understand. He pleaded with the colonial government to listen to the voice, however hoarse and inarticulate, that was issuing from the deeds of their attackers: “Will you not see the writing that these terrorists are writing with their blood? Will you not see that we do not want bread made of wheat, but we want bread of liberty; and without that liberty there are thousands today who are sworn not to give themselves peace or to give the country peace.”

Condemn terrorism, by all means, he urges, but condemn it even-handedly. Terror is terror, he would say today, whether it comes strapped to the body of a suicide bomber or launched from thousands of miles out of range onto targets that may just turn out to be civilians.

If we are not to use violence to protect ourselves against such attacks, though, what on earth are we to use?

The answer is on one level very easy: nonviolence is the only possible alternative. Otherwise we only add violence to violence, thus making the cycle of destruction endless, as many have begun to suspect. But most of us still have only a vague idea what exactly nonviolence is; in the hundred years since Gandhi launched it in South Africa we have barely begun to exploit the vast power for positive change that it holds.

The situation is oddly similar to the great breakthroughs in physics that occurred at very much the same time: a handful of theoretical and applied physicists work with the reality of quantum science while the general public remains unshaken in its literally superstitious belief that all reality is material and outside the observer. Similarly, a handful of specialists and a small (but fortunately growing) number of activists operate in a paradigm of principled nonviolence while the majority of us still try, with increasing hopelessness, to counter violence with more violence wherever we meet it. We need, urgently, to think about what exactly nonviolence is and how to apply it in such desperate conditions as our own.

Gandhi holds nothing back in his unstinting praise for this force which he has experimented with for fifty years, and, as a result of those tireless experiments, about which he makes two great claims: that nonviolence is “the greatest power humankind has been endowed with,” and that there is no situation in which it cannot be successfully applied. Terrorism It was cardinal for him that when an application of nonviolence seemed to fail, the error was to be sought in the actor (for example, himself) not in the principle. Just as violence fails when we make a mistake in how we use it, so nonviolence can seem to fail when we don’t understand the timing, the target or the exact form in which it should be applied — with the tragic difference that we never condemn violence itself when it doesn’t work.

Centrality of human dignity – for which, if necessary, life itself can be sacrificed, becomes not only a “creed” but an extremely practical tool. Many a conflict can be resolved when once opponents come to respect each other — and the practice of courageous nonviolent resistance gains that respect. This



and many other features of ‘nonviolence of my conception,’ as he often called it, are intuitively reasonable to most of us. One statement, however, requires comment. Gandhi does not hesitate to say that “in the last resort it does not avail those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love.” This can be a stumbling block for many today, after seven more decades of immersion in the mass media and the relentless march of materialism. Here is one way to think about it: Gandhi’s God was very personal, the “God of Love.” When shot without warning at point-blank range he would die with the name of his God (Rama) on his lips. Yet Gandhi would not have dreamed of saying that this was the only right way to conceive of God. Once, in fact, when he teased his devoted secretary, Nirmal Kumar Bose, a distinguished Bengali scientist, “Don’t you believe in anything, Nirmal” and the latter answered “I believe in Truth.” Gandhi was quick to reply “That will do.” For “Truth is God” was precisely the conception that Gandhi himself reached as the definitive statement of his faith. In other words, we who may be averse to the notion of an “old man with a stick” (as a Buddhist writer said recently) ruling us and the rest of the universe from the sky somewhere are at liberty to interpret Gandhi’s “God” impersonally, as the Supreme Reality. What Gandhi does mean to imply by this rule is that life has a discoverable meaning, that there is a Power which controls the Universe, including the human universe, according to a purpose which we flout only at our peril. That is a faith position from which he never wavered. What does it mean for those of us who wish to be non-violent today but may not share that position?

Possibly very little. There are, for example, twenty or so organizations worldwide, including one that is part of a national government (the German Civil Peace Service), that are now trying to put into practice various pieces of the old Gandhian dream of a “Peace Army” (usually called now Third Party Nonviolent Resistance, or TPNI). Some of these organizations are faith-based: Christian Peacemaker Teams or Michigan Faith and Resistance, Quaker Peace & Service, Witness for Peace. Others, like Peace Brigades International, are “secular.” But they are doing exactly the same work. Actions always speak louder than words; and one could argue that in this age, when words about religion are so confusing, only actions speak. Volunteers who are willing to risk their lives to protect strangers are, to paraphrase Ben Franklin, “always and everywhere of the same religion” whether they profess adherence to a particular sect or none at all.

A dozen years after Gandhi’s passing, in May of 1960, a remarkable scene unfolded in one of the most lawless communities of India, the hereditary dacoits (bandits) of Madhya Pradesh. Vinoba Bhave, a saintly man widely regarded as the Mahatma’s spiritual successor, was passing through the region and was warned that the ravines were “infested” with dacoits. “No,” he quickly replied, they were “inhabited by human beings” — and he wanted to visit them. He wanted to visit them “to show affection. I assured them that they would be treated justly, without brutality, and that their families would not suffer.” Large numbers of dacoits came to him, surrendered their costly weapons and

turned themselves into face the punishment duly prescribed under the law. In many cases they received mild, humane treatment with an emphasis on rehabilitation and did in fact return to society to lead normal lives. Such is the power of stripping off labels and seeing the persons beneath them. Implicit in Gandhi's response to terrorism in India and, more broadly, in his whole theory of nonviolence, are the outlines of an approach that would work with, rather than against this unbreakable law. A nonviolent response to terrorism begins in an attitude of mind, namely a non-dehumanizing, non-labelling of those who use that method to attack us. Then a state victimized by terrorism would take its grievance to an international court (as the majority of world opinion, according to a recent poll, would have preferred that the United States had done). This would be the most realistic and most effective response, absent someone or some group with the trust and prestige of a Vinoba Bhave. And given that the 'peace army' concept is still in an early stage of development.

### **Gandhian Strategy**

A Gandhian strategy for confronting terrorism, therefore, would consist of the following:

*Stop an act of violence in its tracks.* The effort to do so should be nonviolent but forceful. Gandhi made a distinction between detentive force—the use of physical control in order to halt violence in progress—and coercive force. The latter is meant to intimidate and destroy, and hinders a Gandhian fight aimed at a resolution of principles at stake.

*Address the issues behind the terrorism.* To focus solely on acts of terrorism, Gandhi argued, would be like being concerned with weapons in an effort to stop the spread of racial hatred. Gandhi thought the sensible approach would be to confront the ideas and alleviate the conditions that motivated people to undertake desperate operations in the first place.

*Maintain the moral high ground.* A bellicose stance, Gandhi thought, debased those who adopted it. A violent posture adopted by public authorities could lead to a civil order based on coercion. For this reason Gandhi insisted on means consistent with the moral goals of those engaged in the conflict.

These are worthy principles, but do they work? This question is often raised about nonviolent methods as a response to terrorism—as if the violent ones have been so effective. In Israel, a harsh response to Palestinian violence has often led to a surge of support for Hamas and an increase in terrorist violence. The U.S. responses to jihadi movements after the September 11 attacks have not diminished support for the movements nor reduced the number of terrorist incidents worldwide. *Militant responses to terrorism do not possess a particularly good record of success.*

Violence begets violence and absolute violence leads to complete extinction. Nonviolence, on the other hand, cuts at the roots of violence. Nonviolence paves the pathway to peace and ultimate victory in which even the loser is not hurt. Gandhi, therefore, even while dealing with state "terrorism" of the British, always succeeded in his nonviolent attempts to resolve numerous conflicts.

Sometimes violence has to be used under certain inevitable circumstances as already shown in this chapter earlier. Yet violence is the way to self-destruction. Nonviolence is an ever alive process – it never ends and it is timeless. Violence kills and nonviolence never kills. That is why vast international resources are being spent on establishing the processes of nonviolence for resolving conflicts and tensions through multi-track diplomacy and instruments of institutions like the United Nations etc.

What is really required is also benevolent intent of political will, determination, patience, perseverance and a general belief in the force of nonviolence. Violence does not succeed. However, State and inter-state use of force maybe necessary now in view of the latest establishment of the United Jihad Council (UJC) in Pakistan recently.

Modern terrorism is indeed not a random response of an individual or a group of individuals. Terrorism has become an army of disciplined and well trained soldiers beyond national frontiers. They have their own philosophies, morals and ethics. In addition to their networking and armaments, their real strength comes from their philosophies – ethically sound and morally soothing to them though esoterically. Hence, the terrorists will have to be dealt with nonviolently – with nonviolence providing the strong base for confronting the terrorists ethically as well. Otherwise, terrorism will flourish ever more. Terrorists go for massive violence with ethical base beneath their act.

### **Conclusion**

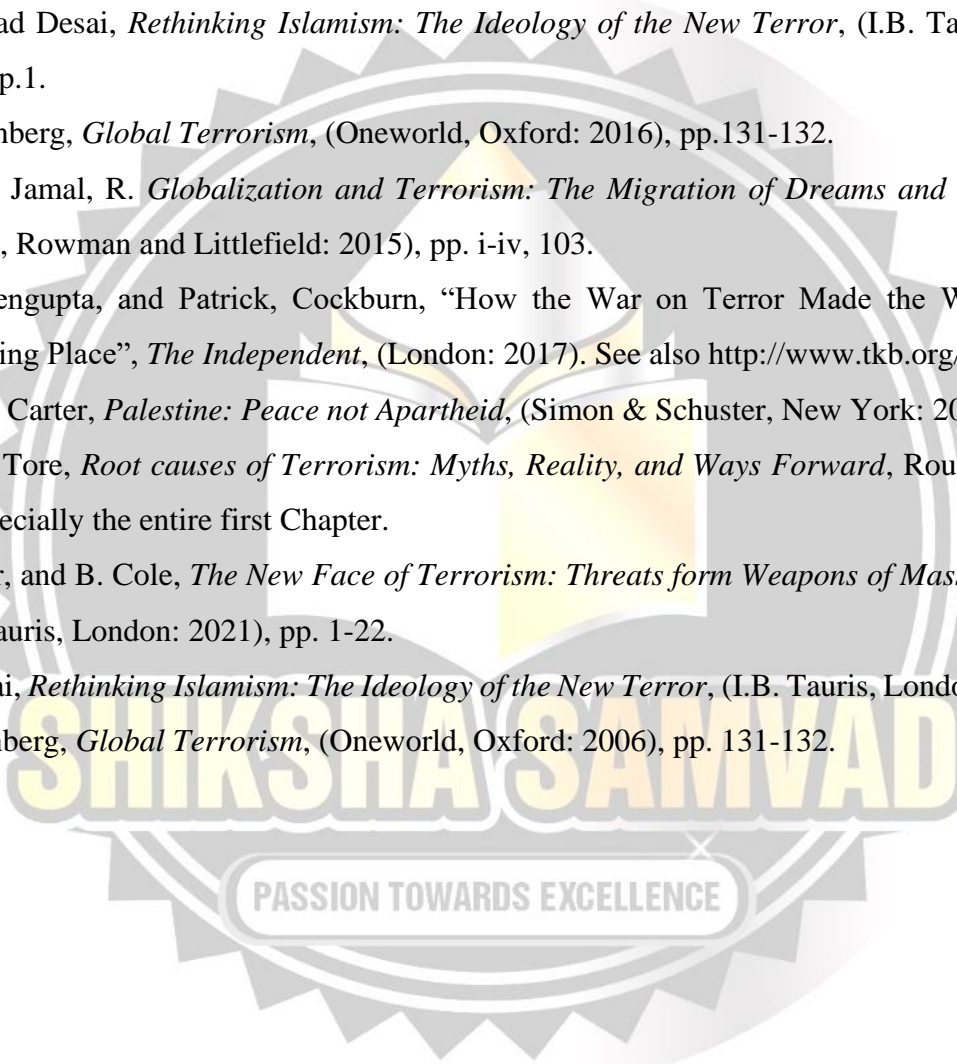
The terrorists are now sharing their networked information bank the world over. They have acquired a hidden international identity nearly as powerful as the institution of the State. It is the State and its sponsored terrorism and counterterrorism that appear to have become direct and indirect source of the strength of terrorist groups the world over.

Terrorism will not end until there develops a strong faith in the power of nonviolence on a larger general plane at the behest of every individual and organization. At times, legal violence, against the perpetrators of widespread massive satanic violence, is also to be regarded as nonviolence only.

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