
A STUDY OF THE MORAL-ETHICAL VIEWS OF MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND (MAHATMA) GANDHI UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF L.N. TOLSTOY'S NON-RESISTANCE-TO-EVIL PHILOSOPHY

**Narek Spartakovich Spartakian^{1*}, Irina Gennadievna Ryabova²,
Ekaterina Yuryevna Ivanova³, Natalia Mikhailovna Dugalich⁴ and
Yury Anatolievich Ermoshin⁴**

¹ *Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, Ural Federal University, Mira street 19, Ekaterinburg, 620002, Russia*

² *Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education 'South Ural State University (National Research University)', Nizhnevartovsk Branch, Mira St. 9, Tyumen Region, KHMAO-Ugra, 628600, Russia*

³ *Russian State Social University, Wilhelm Pieck street 4, Moscow, 129226, Russia*

⁴ *Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Miklukho-Maklaya str. 6, Moscow, 117198, Russia*

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Abstract

Nonviolent ethical theories and practices had significant impact on the humanization of society, since along with the main component – a peaceful struggle for national and civil rights – the ideas of introducing a humanistic paradigm into the socio-political process were an integral part of them. The article analyses the essence and origins of the moral-ethical views of M.K. Gandhi, the main provisions of his moral-ethical concept and principle of nonviolence, the influence of L.N. Tolstoy's creativity and non-resistance-to-evil philosophy on the formation of M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical views. The study emphasizes that religion was at the centre of M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical concept.

Keywords: Christian ethics, Jainism, principle, nonviolence, ahimsa

1. Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is an eminent person in the Indian liberation movement, who led the struggle of the peoples of Hindustan against the British colonialists for about three decades. Despite a huge number of works of a different nature and focus on M.K. Gandhi and Gandhism, M.K. Gandhi's world outlook and activities, as well as the characteristic features of his personality, continue to be of considerable interest and generate acute disputes.

*E-mail: n.yushenko@list.ru

M.K. Gandhi always put the spiritual search above all else, calling it the search for truth, which was identified by him as God [1].

M.K. Gandhi or Mahatma, which means the Great Soul (as he was called among the people contrary to his own will), was born on October 2, 1869 in a small principality of Porbandar or Sudampur (Western India), belonging to the trade caste Bania, representatives of which were grocers in the distant past [2].

Despite a huge number of works of a different nature and focus on M.K. Gandhi and Gandhism [1; 3-21; A.P. Sergeenko, *Correspondence of L.N. Tolstoy with M.K. Gandhi*, http://antimilitary.narod.ru/antology/gandi/gandi_tolstoj.htm], M.K. Gandhi's world view and activities continue to be of considerable interest and generate acute disputes. In the USSR, at different times, the Gandhian theory and practice were evaluated differently. In the 1920s-1930s, there was mainly rejection and condemnation of Gandhism as one of the harmful bourgeois ideologies, which seemed to distract the masses from the active struggle for independence [3]; in the second half of the 1950s-1970s, there was a gradual 'rehabilitation' of M.K. Gandhi as an outstanding fighter for India's freedom [4, 5]; in the 1980s, Soviet indologists sometimes came almost to its apotheosis [6, 7].

In the world, no less attention was paid to the study of various aspects of M.K. Gandhi's activities and views in Sociology (R. Ziegler, S. Schulz, L. Richter, M. Schreck), Political science (M. Swan, A. Nandy), Philosophy (K. Kumar, P. Bilimoria), jurisprudence (B.S. Chimni).

The objective of the research is to analyse the influence of L.N. Tolstoy's non-resistance-to-evil philosophy on the moral-ethical views of Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi.

2. The influence of L.N. Tolstoy's creativity and non-resistance-to-evil philosophy on the formation of M.K. Gandhi's views

The non-resistance-to-evil philosophy of M.K. Gandhi and L.N. Tolstoy is based on the fundamental principles of the philosophy of Jainism and Christian ethics. Both M.K. Gandhi and L.N. Tolstoy devoted their lives to the service of God and practical implementation of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ. Thus, the commandment of the Sermon on the Mount "not to resist evil" (Matthew 5.39) became a guiding light of the life service to the humanity of Mahatma Gandhi and L.N. Tolstoy. "It was said 'Eye for eye', but I tell you not to resist evil" – these words from the Sermon on the Mount were the basis of the philosophy of nonviolence, which L.N. Tolstoy and M.K. Gandhi preached the whole life.

Love that was preached by M.K. Gandhi and L.N. Tolstoy, in the highest, divine understanding, is primary and paramount. In the opinion of M.K. Gandhi and L.N. Tolstoy, all religions uphold their primacy and the absolute right to a single truth, which is the greatest mistake of mankind. After all, in all religions there are universal spiritual laws of human existence, which, for example, in Christianity, were given by Christ. They also exist in other religions. All

disagreements between peoples and nations are not because of God, but in the minds of religious and secular authorities, who hide behind religious teachings and ideas for the sake of power, who waged and are waging wars with weapons in hand, proving their truth and implanting their god.

As noted by E.A. Bitinayte [8], the idea of non-resistance to evil brought together two great philosophers and thinkers who had never seen each other, but corresponded for a short time until L.N. Tolstoy's death in 1910.

In the autobiography, M.K. Gandhi told about the influence that L.N. Tolstoy had on him in his youth, and that the first work by L.N. Tolstoy he read impressed him much so that all other books seemed to him 'insignificant'. M.K. Gandhi lay a special emphasis on L.N. Tolstoy's book 'The Kingdom of God is within You' [9].

In 1909, while studying in London, Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy for the first time: "I had the privilege of studying your writings, which left a deep impression on my worldview..." and continued: "I, a person you don't know, dare to write this letter for the sake of truth and in order to get your advice on those issues, the solution of which became the task of your life" [10].

Having received a benevolent response from Tolstoy, almost six months later Gandhi wrote to him the second letter, in which he sent his own book to the Russian writer. Gandhi's second letter and his work read by Tolstoy showed a similarity of their ideas. Tolstoy told about this in a letter to his friend Vladimir Chertkov.

The letters concerned the practical and theological applications of non-violence, as well as Gandhi's wishes of health to Tolstoy. The last letter from Tolstoy to Gandhi "was one of the last, if not the last, writings from his pen" [9, p. 177]. Gandhi received the last letter from Tolstoy a few days before the death of the Russian writer and did not have time to answer it. Nevertheless, this Tolstoy's letter was the most emotional, where Tolstoy discussed the idea of nonviolence through the prism of Christianity – in this he remained a purely Russian philosopher who believed that, certainly, the process of fighting against evil through non-resistance would begin in Russia.

"The longer I live – especially now when I clearly feel the approach of death – the more I feel moved to express what I feel more strongly and what, in my opinion, is of immense importance, namely, what we call non-resistance, but what actually simply means the doctrine of love unperverted by false interpretations. Love, or in other words, the striving of men's souls towards unity, represents the highest and indeed the only law of life, as every man knows and feels in the depths of his heart..., and knows until he becomes involved in the lying net of worldly thoughts. (...) Most clearly, I think, was it announced by Christ, who said explicitly that on it hang all the law and the prophets. More than that, foreseeing the distortion that has hindered its recognition or may hinder it, he specially indicated the danger of its misrepresentation that presents itself to men living by worldly interests, namely that they may claim a right to defend their interests by force or, as he expressed it, to repay blow by blow and recover stolen property by force, etc. He knew, as all reasonable men must do, that any

employment of force is incompatible with love as the highest law of life, and that as soon as the use of force appears permissible even in a single case, the law of love is recognized insufficient and, therefore, the law itself is denied.” [10]

Later, in his numerous works written after the death of L.N. Tolstoy, M.K. Gandhi used to refer to the writer as “the highest moral authority” [11].

3. Specificity of M.K. Gandhi’s personality and moral-ethical views

A biographer of the most famous Indian of the 20th century, P. Bilimoria, noticed nothing special about Gandhi’s appearance and behaviour in his youth [12]. Such traits and qualities of Gandhi as modesty, decency, sincerity, sensitivity to injustice and a passionate desire to achieve justice, showed up already in childhood and developed in adulthood.

Sarvodaya – a society of universal well-being, based on the principles of high morality and social egalitarianism – was his ideal of social order [13]. All these qualities, as well as the ascetic lifestyle (actually on the verge of poverty), the extraordinary poverty of home and clothing, the vegetarian diet and the simplicity of communication enormously distinguished M.K. Gandhi from all politicians known to mankind, although he can be called like that only with very strong reservations. Some modern researchers of Gandhism, for example Ashis Nandy, consider M.K. Gandhi a prophet or a saint in politics who tried to rigidly regulate it with the rules of high morality, to combine politics with morality [14, p. 170].

Speaking about the moral and ethical views of Gandhi, one needs to note a few significant points, namely:

- 1) as the entire Gandhi’s world view, they were formed under the influence of the Indian and world religious-philosophical heritage, including, as was shown earlier, L.N. Tolstoy’s views, especially his doctrine of nonviolence. They are eclectic in nature;
- 2) it is very difficult to determine when exactly the formation of M.K. Gandhi’s moral-ethical views was finally completed (some authors believe that during his return from England in 1891 [15]). It is more likely that his views were in the process of formation throughout his life, although already in the 1920s they acquired an almost finished form;
- 3) the main task set out by M.K. Gandhi was to form new relationships in society and a new moral-spiritual makeup of a person, whose standards and rules of behaviour would be fundamentally different from those of predecessors to be fully consistent with the high human destiny;
- 4) M.K. Gandhi considered moral-ethical categories and values as eternal and unchanging, independent of material conditions of people’s lives and specific historical circumstances. He did not recognize the presence of his morals in different segments of the population, differing moral standards of different peoples in different epochs, as well as denied the possibility of determining the criteria of morality in each specific case and depending on the circumstances;

- 5) M.K. Gandhi has always stressed that morality and politics are both compatible and inextricably linked, politics should always be moral and politicians must take care primarily of the moral rationale of their actions. He also defended the unity of politics with religion, believing that politics should be based on religious principles [16].

4. Religion and the principle of nonviolence in M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical concept

M.K. Gandhi assigns a central role in his moral-ethical concept to religion, putting it before his own life and even the life in general [17, p. 34]. He could not imagine the existence of each person and human society as a special community without religion, without God. The entire Gandhist doctrine of morality is based on religious principles; therefore, it can also be called religious-ethical. Religiosity, as the most important moral-ethical category of Mahatma, determined the moral character of a person, being a kind of evidence of high morality, while the remaining categories were almost directly dependent on it. This indirectly allowed M.K. Gandhi to determine nonbelievers from among all moral people, and he even denied their right to become moral until they change their attitude to religion. Belonging to one or another confession did not play an essential role, because M.K. Gandhi treated all religions with equal respect and honour, paying tribute to the merits of each of them without exception.

The principle of nonviolence was the second most important moral-ethical category, to which M.K. Gandhi also attached exceptional importance and considered inherent in human nature [18]. Following religiosity, this principle was regarded as the determining factor of behaviour not only of every individual, but also of the relationships in human society in general. Although M.K. Gandhi borrowed this principle from the ancient Indian religion and the philosophy of Jainism, where it was the most important ethical category and called 'ahimsa', its connection with the teachings of Buddha and Jesus Christ should be noted. Jainism defined ahimsa as the abstinence from inflicting a physical injury to all living creatures, whether to man or another creature, and M.K. Gandhi significantly extended the definition of this principle, considering it as the abstinence not only from physical actions, but also from spiritual actions that could cause suffering, pain, do harm, inflict damage and abuse any divine creature, primarily referring to people, for whom spiritual suffering and traumas were sometimes more terrible than physical ones. He strictly regulated all people's actions and behaviour by the principle of ahimsa. Firstly, people had no right to resort to any violence under no circumstances. Secondly, nothing in the world could justify the use of violence, even for some particularly important reasons, including those when there was a real threat to the life of a person and he/she needed to resort to self-defence to be saved.

As noted earlier, the book 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' by Tolstoy had a particular influence on the formation of the Gandhian principle of

non-violence. This philosophical treatise was first published in Germany in 1894 after it was banned in Russia. This is the culmination of Tolstoy's thirty-year-old reflections, which set forth a new organization of society based on a literal Christian interpretation. 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' is the key text for Tolstoy's supporters of non-violence, non-violent resistance and the Christian anarchist movement.

The name of the book is taken from Luke 17.21. In the book, Tolstoy talks about the principle of non-violent resistance when faced with violence, as Jesus Christ taught. When Christ speaks about turning the other cheek, Tolstoy argues that Christ calls for the abolition of violence, even defensive, and the rejection of revenge.

Tolstoy believed that all governments that waged wars were an insult to Christian principles. Since the Russian Orthodox Church was an organization that completely merged with the Russian state and fully supported its policy, Tolstoy sought to separate its teaching from what he considered the true Gospel of Christ, in particular, the Sermon on the Mount.

Tolstoy advocated non-violence as a solution to interethnic problems and pointed to the hypocrisy of the Church. Reading the words of Jesus in the Gospels, Tolstoy notes that the modern Church is a heretical organization: "Nowhere and in nothing except in the statement of the Church can we find that God or Christ founded something like what the clergy understand as the Church" [10, p. 17].

Mohandas Gandhi considered the book by Tolstoy, as well as the book by John Ruskin 'Unto This Last' and the poetry by Shrimad Rajchandra (Raychandbhai), as the three most important contemporary influences in his life. Reading this book opened the ideas of the world famous Tolstoy to young Gandhi, who at that time lived in South Africa.

According to M.K. Gandhi, called 'the apostle of nonviolence', only that person could reach the so-called complete moral perfection, who fully learned the principle of nonviolence, was constantly guided by it in everyday life and never violated it, resorting to violence or actions against people, who were close to him. Gandhi's obligatory condition was also moral attitude towards the opponent, which meant not only a complete lack of hatred for the person who caused physical pain and suffering, but, on the contrary, the love for him. Moreover, ahimsa was considered real and perfect only when a person showed a feeling of love not only towards the one who loved him, but also to the one who hated him [19].

Ahimsa gave rise to other M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical categories, which were so organically connected with it that they could even be considered an integral part of nonviolence. First of all, these are such categories as courage, bravery and fortitude, the interpretation of which is also rather peculiar and paradoxical. M.K. Gandhi believed that a person could not adhere to nonviolence without these qualities, because he had to completely overcome any fear and develop them in himself.

The idea of suffering and martyrdom is very important in the Gandhian concept [21]. Mahatma attached exceptional importance to this idea, considering voluntary suffering and martyrdom as the highest valour, and the spiritual state achieved by a suffering martyr was considered especially significant, because in this state a person felt and learned something that was unachievable for other people, these were primarily supreme spiritual values and specific perception of reality.

The category of love, one of the main categories in M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical concept, was also inseparably linked with ahimsa. Mahatma preached abstract, boundless, all-consuming love in general, the same to everything existing on Earth without exception, including enemies, independent of what was an object of love and whether he/she deserved it. This 'love in general' was not conceived as a real and specific exalted feeling of someone for something, but as abstract, impersonal, faceless feelings of general mercy, kindness and forgiveness. Cultivating such feelings, a person had to completely get rid of hatred, since ahimsa, which was based on vast and boundless general love, was absolutely incompatible with the hatred that was considered by M.K. Gandhi as a wild animal instinct, which completely contradicted human nature and his high destiny.

But even the closest followers of M.K. Gandhi in India did not always fully comply with his strict requirements. As for the general public, participants in satyagraha – mass nonviolent campaigns in India in the 1920s-1930s [20], they perceived ahimsa in the vast majority not as a deep conviction or belief, but as a kind of a temporary ritual imposed by the leader on participants in anti-British actions, that was partially or completely alien to them, compulsory to perform, but not mandatory for the soul and heart. That's probably why in India there were many cases of deviation from the principle of nonviolence, although, due to M.K. Gandhi, who was killed on January 30, 1948, the liberation movement managed to remain nonviolent.

5. Conclusions

In accordance with the objective of the study, the author conducted an analysis of the influence of L.N. Tolstoy's non-resistance-to-evil philosophy on M.K. Gandhi's moral-ethical views, which consisted in the transformation of a rather abstract principle of nonviolence declared by L.N. Tolstoy through the prism of Christianity, into the principle of practical life and political activity of M.K. Gandhi.

Two great spiritual teachers of humanity, Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi, never met in person. Still, in the last year of Tolstoy's life there was a correspondence between them, which covered philosophical, religious and political issues. Two great thinkers tried to find their own ways of non-resistance to evil by force. They brought their philosophy to all wars, revolutions, national liberation movements, against any manifestations of cruelty, racism and intolerance.

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