



Science, Truth and Gandhi- Divergence and Convergence

**Dr G C Narasimhulu**

Post Doctoral Fellow- UGC

**Dr M Chandraiah**

Asst Professor, Dept of Philosophy, S V University, Tirupati

**KEYWORDS**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this paper an attempt has been made to compare Gandhi's notion of "truth" with the "scientists' notion of truth" and its realization through their respective methods. It is argued that scientific truth is not contradictory to the Gandhian notion of truth; rather it is complementary and, in fact, it is the need of the hour to integrate the Gandhian spirit of science with the modern practice of science and technology in order to realize their full potential for the material as well as moral progress of human beings.

Gandhi was a great experimental scientist and throughout his life he conducted "experiments" in various fields to arrive at truth. In fact, he lived an 'experimental life' and that was why he named his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*. Gandhi's experiments were oriented to explore various possibilities of the truth.

The aforesaid statements of Gandhi show the sensitivities of a truth-seeker and the acute awareness of his limitations. The quest for truth has been the long-cherished ideal of human beings in all societies. Since time immemorial scientists, philosophers, thinkers, reformers, sages, rishis and even lay men have made their efforts to arrive at truth. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was one of the most influential and yet most enigmatic personalities of the twentieth century. Various scholars have attempted to understand his views on different subjects. However, his conception of "truth" has been the most elusive concept not only for the scholars but sometimes even for Gandhi himself.<sup>1</sup>

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human beings.

**STUDY OF NATURE: QUEST FOR TRUTH**

In the pre-modern era there was no dichotomy between "God" and "Nature", as the God manifested through various forms of "nature". Although de-mythologization of the "nature" heralded the beginning of science in the 17th century Europe, most of natural scientists' quests for the exploration of nature were motivated by their desire to know the "glory of the God."

In the beginning scientists were mainly motivated to understand the mystery of nature and to explore the objective and universal principles governing the natural events. Their efforts were directed to discover the laws and principles that governed nature so that they could be used to predict and control natural phenomena so as to harness them for the benefit of human beings. For scientists, truth is nothing but "true and valid" knowledge about nature.

The claim of scientific truth has always been to distinguish "what I believe" from "what we believe." In the scientific discourse any notion of truth can only be accepted as such if it is based on a collective agreement or "solidarity principle".<sup>2</sup>

**TRUTH FOR ITS OWN SAKE?**

Gandhi's quest for truth was not for its own sake, but for some immediate or near future applications. For him an idea or theory which could not be put into practice had no value or worth. Gandhi always believed that "no matter what your convictions are, they are worthless if you do not implement them with deeds or rather they are worse than worthless. Not to practice what one believes is untruth; I would say dishonesty."<sup>3</sup>

However, Gandhi argued that real progress in our knowledge and techniques will come through our dispassionate dedication to our vocation. We find a strong symmetrical conviction in Gandhian thought to prove that *himsa* or violence could be conquered only through *ahimsa* or non-violence. Truth is self-evident in the sense that it does not require to be proclaimed forcefully. As stated by Gandhi, the champion of truth or the seeker of truth must have strong faith in the power of truth and he must show patience and calm in realizing the truth. Gandhi made continuous experiments to arrive at the truth and succeeded in proving that eternal peace could be achieved only through non-violent pursuit of truth (*Satyagraha*).

Thus, although Gandhi's notion of truth transcended the narrow conception of truth articulated by mainstream science, he saw great possibilities in science to realize 'the Ultimate Truth.'

**GANDHI'S VIEWS ON SCIENCE**

Gandhi has been often portrayed as 'anti-science' and 'anti-technology'<sup>4</sup> and there is abundant literature on Gandhi's critical views on technology but very little efforts to under-

stand his views on science. In recent years some scholars have taken his writings on machinery, khadi, health and modern civilization to construct his views on science and they have shown that there are numerous direct references to science in Gandhi's discussions with his co-workers and with fellow countrymen.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi wanted to promote and nurture science and research culture in the country. Gandhi understood the role of science and its need for all colonial countries, of course first to meet the requirements of day to day life of common people. He strongly urged the scientists to interact with people to understand their problems and requirements while conducting their research. He emphasized on direct intervention of scientific community in the village development programme and chided them for being ignorant and unresponsive towards the day to day life problems of ordinary people.

#### METHODS OF ACQUIRING OR REALIZING TRUTH

The method used by Gandhi in his quest for truth was based on the spirit of science. In his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* he underlined the fact that the method he used to realize the truth was characterized by its "accuracy, fore-thought, and minuteness." He had no finality about his conclusions which were always open-ended. At every step, he subjected the next step to a process of acceptance or rejection and on that basis he acted.

Thus, his method for the search of the reality was very much scientific. He never believed that truth could be revealed or attained through mere meditation or some other mystic practices. He suggested that: "Scientific knowledge requires constant probing into the way and wherefore of every little process that you perform. A scientific mind will not be satisfied with having things scientific just on faith. He will insist on finding a basis in reason. Faith becomes lame when it ventures into matters pertaining to reasons. Its field begins where reason's ends. Conclusions based on faith are unshakable whereas those based on reason are liable to be unstable and vulnerable to superior logic".<sup>6</sup>

#### RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN APPROACH TO TRUTH

Gandhi's notion of truth and his method of realizing it have shown the unique quality of combining "reason" with "faith". He would never accept anything unless brought to the touchstone of reason and subjected to scientific inquiry. "My life is largely governed by reason," said Gandhi, and "when it fails, it is governed by a superpower force that is faith."<sup>7</sup>

He was against the "instrumental rationality" as the sole principle governing our life. Rather he emphasized more on the "purity of means and ends." It is easier to evolve consensus on the goal but very difficult to arrive at consensus on the means to realize it. If there is no consensus on the method of inquiry there would be no unanimity on the findings of inquiry and then people would keep questioning each other's findings (truth). Then, truth will keep on changing sides as per its convenience which would be dangerous. It is because this variant of truth would require to be backed by force to assert it. In this situation it is not the truth but the force would be asserted in the name of truth.

#### CONCLUSION

In this sense Gandhi's notion of non-violent truth becomes relevant. Truth cannot be violent and it does not need force for its manifestation; it is omnipresent and Omni felt. Gandhi equated these features or attributes of truth with God not in any religious sense which is generally understood in the common parlance. Truth is embodiment of morality. Truth backed by force can win only the body of the human beings while non-violent truth ensures winning of people's hearts. Gandhi wanted to realize this truth and he believed that once the status of truth is self-realized it would be whole heartedly adopted and practiced by the people without any external force. Gandhi always endeavored to achieve or realize the higher order of truth and not get stuck in the "relative truths" or "subjective truths" and he strongly believed that any kind of rela-

tivizing and subject vising of truth may undermine the scope for justice.

**"The world will live in peace, only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so".**

**--- Mahatma Gandhi**

#### REFERENCES:

1. M.K. Gandhi while on his way back to India after attending the Round Table Conference in 1931 attended a meeting in Switzerland. At this meeting he was asked a question: What is Truth? In reply to this question Gandhi admitted that it was "a difficult question." See, M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1958).
2. Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity", in J. Rachman and C. West (eds), *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1984).
3. M. K. Gandhi, Quoted in Sarton, George " Experiments with Truth by Faraday, Darwin and Gandhi". *Osiris*. Vol. 11(1954), p. 94.
4. The Science and Culture group formed in 1934 by Professor M.N. Saha and J.N. Mukerjee, J.C. Ghosh, S.K. Mitra etc strongly opposed the Gandhian thinking on science, Technology and industrialization. This Group also published a journal called by the same name, *Science and Culture* and in its editorial columns regularly criticized Gandhian approach.. However, the group appreciated the genuine concerns of Gandhians, but stressed that, "we do not for a moment believe that better and happier conditions of life can be created by discarding modern scientific techniques and reverting back to the spinning wheel, the loin-cloth and the bullock cart." See, M. N. Saha, "Science and Culture", *Science and Culture*, 1(1), (1934), p. 2.
5. Shambhu Prasad, "Towards an Understanding of Gandhi's Views on Science", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(36), (2001), pp. 3721A-3731
6. CWMG, Vol. 82, p. 368.
7. CWMG, Vol. 52, p. 114.