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## **Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and its role in the Indian independence movement**

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#### **Abstract**

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, or Ahimsa, played a pivotal role in the Indian Independence Movement, offering a unique and transformative approach to political resistance. Rooted in moral and spiritual beliefs, Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence extended beyond mere abstention from physical harm; it encompassed a proactive force of love, truth, and self-discipline aimed at achieving social and political justice. This review examines the development of Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, its application during key movements such as the Champaran Satyagraha, Non-Cooperation Movement, Salt March, and Quit India Movement, and its impact on both the Indian freedom struggle and global resistance movements. While Gandhi's methods faced criticism from contemporaries like Subhas Chandra Bose, who advocated for more militant approaches, his strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience proved effective in uniting millions of Indians in their fight for independence. Gandhi's emphasis on nonviolence left an enduring legacy that inspired global figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, and it remains a powerful tool in contemporary struggles for justice and peace. This paper highlights Gandhi's nonviolence as both a political strategy and a moral philosophy, underscoring its significant contribution to India's independence and its lasting influence on the world.

**Keywords:** Gandhi, Indian Independence movement, justice, peace

#### **Introduction**

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, or Ahimsa, was central to the Indian independence movement and remains one of his most profound legacies (Mukherjee, 2010)<sup>[5]</sup>. Rooted in his personal beliefs and deeply influenced by his study of Hinduism, Jainism, and other world religions, nonviolence became the guiding principle of Gandhi's political and social activism (Kurtz, 2008)<sup>[6]</sup>. This review explores the development of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, its application during the Indian independence struggle, and the profound impact it had on both India and the global freedom movement.

#### **Gandhi's Early Formulation of Nonviolence**

Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence emerged and solidified during his time in South Africa, where he first employed nonviolent resistance (Satyagraha) to combat racial discrimination and injustice. His experiences fighting for the rights of Indian immigrants in South Africa (1893-1914) led to a deeper understanding of how passive resistance could challenge oppressive systems. Gandhi's vision of nonviolence was not limited to abstaining from physical harm but was a moral commitment to truth (Satya), self-discipline, and love. According to Gandhi, nonviolence was not merely the absence of violence but a proactive force for social change, requiring active compassion and the courage to endure suffering without retaliation (Chandra, 1999)<sup>[2]</sup>. This understanding of Ahimsa was grounded in his belief that each individual has a divine essence and that harming another was an offense to both the perpetrator and the victim's spirit.

#### **Nonviolence in the Indian Independence Movement**

Gandhi's arrival in India in 1915 marked the beginning of his active role in the Indian independence struggle. His first significant mass mobilization, the Champaran Satyagraha of 1917, where he led farmers in Bihar against oppressive indigo cultivation policies, was a turning point in Indian resistance. Gandhi's approach of nonviolent protest empowered the

masses, including those from the rural and working classes, to participate in the struggle for independence (Iyer, 1973)<sup>[3]</sup>. One of the most significant applications of nonviolence came through the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), which called for Indians to boycott British goods, services, and institutions. Gandhi's call for a nationwide, nonviolent protest resonated with millions, from farmers to intellectuals, uniting the country in opposition to British colonial rule. The movement, although curtailed after the Chauri Chaura incident, cemented Gandhi's role as the principal leader of the Indian independence movement. The Salt March of 1930, another landmark event, demonstrated how nonviolence could directly challenge British laws by defying the salt tax. Gandhi's 240-mile march to Dandi was a masterclass in civil disobedience, drawing widespread attention to the plight of Indians under British rule (Nanda, 2007)<sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Challenges and Criticism of Gandhi's Nonviolent Strategy**

While Gandhi's nonviolent methods garnered widespread support, they were not without their challenges and critics. Leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army (INA) argued that nonviolence was too passive and would not lead to effective results against British imperialism, which they saw as oppressive and violent (Bose, 1969)<sup>[1]</sup>. Gandhi's rejection of armed resistance was often viewed as impractical, particularly in the context of the brutality faced by Indians under British rule. Furthermore, Gandhi's emphasis on nonviolence sometimes created tension with other political groups, particularly the Muslim League, which felt that Gandhi's focus on Hindu religious ideals alienated Muslim aspirations for political power.

Despite these challenges, Gandhi's belief in nonviolence remained unwavering. He argued that the spiritual and ethical dimensions of nonviolence would ensure a just and lasting independence, and that violence would only perpetuate hatred and division.

### **Gandhi's Global Influence and Legacy**

Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence had far-reaching impacts, not only on India but also on global movements for social justice. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Cesar Chavez were deeply influenced by Gandhi's methods and applied nonviolent resistance to their own struggles for civil rights and social equality. Gandhi's methods also laid the groundwork for movements advocating for peace and disarmament around the world.

His legacy as the architect of nonviolent resistance continues to inspire contemporary movements for justice, such as those advocating for environmental protection, human rights, and political freedom. Gandhi's unwavering belief in the power of nonviolence remains an enduring testament to the possibility of achieving social and political change without resorting to violence.

### **Conclusion**

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence was the cornerstone of his leadership in the Indian independence movement. His strategy of Satyagraha, rooted in moral and spiritual beliefs, mobilized millions of Indians in a peaceful struggle for freedom. Despite facing challenges and criticisms, Gandhi's unwavering commitment to

nonviolence ultimately played a crucial role in India's independence and left a lasting impact on global movements for peace and justice. His philosophy continues to be relevant in contemporary discussions on conflict resolution, human rights, and social change.

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