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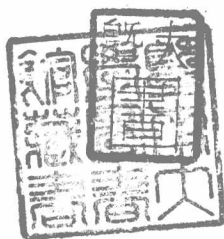
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Conquest of Violence

The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict

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BY JOAN V. BONDURANT



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CONQUEST OF VIOLENCE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*Point not the goal until you plot the course
For ends and means to man are tangled so
That different means quite different aims enforce
Conceive the means as end in embryo.**

IN times such as ours when conflict is the order of the day and the potential of technology offers more to fear than to hope, social and political theory face their gravest challenge. Theoretical political systems have grown increasingly suspect and intellectual formulations tend less to challenge than repel. But there is rapidly developing a demand hitherto neglected by social and political theory. This is the demand for solutions to the problem of conflict—not for theoretical systems of end-structure aimed at ultimately eliminating conflict, but for ways of conducting conflict when it arises: ways which are constructive and not destructive. Such a demand must be met by a theory of process and of means, and not of further concern for structure, for pattern, and for ends. Basic to such a theory is a philosophy of action.

In this book I have tried to formulate an approach to a philosophy of action suggested by the social and political experiments conducted in our time in India. I have not presumed to write on Gandhi the man, or his works. Nor have I

* This quatrain was suggested by Arthur Koestler's translation of a selection from Ferdinand Lassalle's *Franz von Sickingen* in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 241. The passage in the original reads:

*Das Ziel nicht zeige, zeige auch den Weg
Denn so verwachsen ist hienieden Weg und Ziel,
Dass eines sich stets ändert mit dem andern,
Und anderer Weg auch andres Ziel erzeugt.*

Ferdinand Lassalle, *Franz von Sickingen* (Berlin: Weltgeist-Bücher, n.d.), p. 89.

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written an essay strictly on Gandhian political philosophy. I have tried only to attack a problem inadequately explored in political theory by abstracting from the Gandhian experiments a theoretical key to the problem of social and political conflict. I have further suggested that social and political theory can rise to the challenge of our times only if it grapples with the means whereby end-structures may survive inevitable conflict.

It would not be proper to claim that what I present here is *Gandhi's* philosophy of action, for it is no more than one interpretation of what may be called a *Gandhian* system. My own formulation is suggestive and not definitive. At most, it points the way in which an adequate treatment of the ends-means problem might be undertaken.

Perhaps I should also make explicit what is implied in my interpretation: it is not necessary to subscribe either to the asceticism so characteristic of Gandhi nor to his religious notions in order to understand and to value the central contribution of his technique of non-violent action. The name Gandhi and the word "Gandhism" frequently touch off startling emotional responses. The reservoir of reverence for Gandhi in India is readily understandable. In the West, the response is often of a different order. For the non-Indian is likely either to afford Gandhi the respect due a saint, and thereby to dismiss his significance in the mundane realm of practical politics; or, worried by what appears to him to be a diffuse spirituality, to impute to Gandhi obscurantism and thereby to deny the pertinence of his contribution. Again, fearing that Gandhian notions of political economy necessarily issue in primitive agrarianism, the Westerner tends summarily to reject Gandhi's import as unmeaningful in the current circumstance. Such responses tend to obscure developments which continue to emerge from the Gandhian experience, and to obstruct an understanding of Gandhi's total impact. Even more important, these attitudes serve as a barrier to further

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exploration of the potentialities of the technique which Gandhi introduced.

In the summer of 1953, I had the rare good fortune to discuss with Jawaharlal Nehru some of the implications of Gandhian *satyagraha*. He spoke with me, not as the Prime Minister of a great State, but as one who had "grown up in this strange complex of ideas and action which Gandhi let loose in India." He went on to express to me the difficulties which Indians have in viewing objectively the Gandhian experiments—Indians have been too close to the greatness of the man to view his works dispassionately. The Westerner who has the temerity to undertake the task of interpreting Gandhian thought can perhaps best do so by searching for its meaning in terms familiar to the West. At least, so it has seemed to this Westerner whose basic predispositions are rationalist and humanist and who shares with some of Gandhi's severest critics an abiding suspicion of religious systems and of obscurantist approaches. It is the unsystematized and often inconsistent jungle of Gandhi's writings that makes it difficult but tempting to others to formulate a "Gandhian Philosophy." With the history of the movements in which Gandhi was involved as evidence from the field of action, it is possible to thread one's way through these extraordinary scraps of writing in search of theme and thesis. In the course of this search one necessarily interprets and abstracts. I hope that in abstracting and interpreting, and finally in formulating one aspect of a philosophy of action, I have not done violence to Gandhi's thought. Inasmuch as Gandhi himself did not formulate his philosophy, the temptation for others to do so lies ever at hand.

The problem of human conflict is perhaps the most fundamental problem of all time. In this age when the physical sciences have outstripped the more slowly advancing social sciences, it is one of undeniable urgency, and one which already attracts social scientists in many disciplines. This essay on *satyagraha* and political thought is an effort to focus at-

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tention on yet another direction in which solutions might be sought. It is hoped that the following pages will raise many questions and suggest certain challenges to students of psychology and sociology and to those working in the intensive areas where two or more such fields of inquiry impinge—such, for example, as communications and propaganda, and politics and anthropology. Indeed, as I have pursued the implications of the Gandhian experiments for political philosophy, suggestions for exploration in many other areas have pressed in upon the mind with great insistence. The further delineation of the Gandhian technique and its adaptation to different levels of conflict in differing cultural settings; the design of a procedure making full use of the latest findings in sociology and psychology; the implication of aspects of satyagraha for a sociology of law; the further sophistication of satyagraha techniques by bringing to bear upon them what can be learned from developing psychoanalytic method—these, and many other areas await exploration by those who would know more of the potential suggested by the Gandhian experience and its significance for formulating an adequate theory for the constructive conduct of conflict.

Those who would explore further may have an interest in the words penned by Jawaharlal Nehru at a time when, truly, he was pressed by the searching, weighty problems which beset the statesman. As he wrote to me a few days after our brief discussion, he had stolen the moments to set down these thoughts because he wished that people might be brought to understand Gandhi's ideas about satyagraha. The following paragraphs were addressed to my original manuscript, "Gandhian Satyagraha and Political Theory: an Interpretation." "To many of us," he wrote, "it is not a new field . . ."

We were hardly in a position to exercise a dispassionate judgment about them, for we ourselves became integral parts of these processes which changed us as individuals and changed the history of India. And yet, in some ways

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we are entitled to a hearing and our views may have some value, though they might not be expressed in the language of the scholar. We were not only intellectually in touch with these dynamic ideas but were emotionally aware of many things, which cannot easily be analysed or put down on paper. It is nearly three and a half decades now that I first came in contact with his strange personality and his stranger ideas. The effect was almost instantaneous, as if an electric shock went through the system. And yet, the shock was a soothing and, at the same time, an enlivening one. The mind struggled with these new ideas often put out without much method or logic. But the whole system reacted to them and grew under their impress.

Was it the personality of Gandhi that did this or the force of the ideas that he represented and that he translated into action? Was it the rare spectacle of a man whose thought and word and act were so closely co-related as to form one integrated whole?

The man has gone, though he lives vividly in the memory of those who knew him, and innumerable legends have grown up about him. The story of his deeds has become a part of the history of India. Many people swear by his name and exploit it for base purposes. The noble doctrine of Satyagraha is debased and used for wrong ends.

I suppose all this is inevitable. The truth or reality in the idea that he represented will no doubt survive and, I am sure, influence men's minds more and more.

In this age of uttermost violence, it is strange to think of the man who talked always of non-violence. In this age of consuming fear, this absolutely fearless individual stands out. He demonstrated to us that there can be a strength far greater than that of armaments and that a struggle can be fought, and indeed should be fought, without bitterness and hatred.

The questions which Jawaharlal Nehru has raised demand

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answers from statesman and scholar alike. As the Prime Minister reflected upon Gandhian experiments in which he himself had played so great a part, he saw in them a "new dynamic that Gandhi brought into the political and social field."

That dynamic largely justified itself in India, in spite of the weaknesses and failings of many who call themselves his followers. I do not pretend to understand fully the significance of that technique of action, in which I myself took part. But I feel more and more convinced that it offers us some key to understanding and to the proper resolution of conflict. We see conflict all round us in the world. That is perhaps not surprising. But what is surprising is that the methods adopted to end that conflict have almost always failed miserably and produced greater conflict and more difficult problems. In spite of this patent fact, we pursue the old methods blindly and do not even learn from our own experiences.

Gandhi was never tired of talking about means and ends and of laying stress on the importance of the means. That is the essential difference, I think, between his approach and the normal approach which thinks in terms of ends only, and because means are forgotten, the ends aimed at escape one. It is not realised that the ends must inevitably come out of the means and are governed by those means.

Conflicts are, therefore, seldom resolved. The wrong methods pursued in dealing with them lead to further conflict. The mistaken belief still persists that violence can end a conflict or that war can bring salvation to the world.

Gandhi pointed another way and, what is more, lived it and showed achievement. That surely should at least make us try to understand what this new way was and how far it is possible for us to shape our thoughts and actions in accordance with it.

It is my endeavor in the pages which follow to shed some light upon "this new way."

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My interest in the Gandhian impact was first aroused during my residence in India in 1944-1946. Observations made concerning developments in the post-independence period are based both upon my study in India during 1947-1948 and 1952-1953, and upon continuing research in the course of my work as Research Political Scientist with the Indian Press Digests Project (Institute of International Studies), University of California. A fellowship from the Southwestern Region of Soroptimist Clubs supported the writing of the original manuscript. The research conducted in India during 1952-1953 was made possible through a fellowship from the Social Science Research Council.

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Many friends and colleagues played a part in forwarding the progress of this study and my debt to them is great. I would first mention the many Indian friends who supplied both data and evaluation of the Gandhian movements in India, among them, Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, The Honorable R. R. Diwakar, Sri R. R. Keithahn, Sri Pyarelal. To Dr. Chandra Uttam Singh belongs the credit for my initial interest in satyagraha. The information, critical comment, and consistent support lent to the work in its early stages by Dr. Satya Prakash Agarwal and Miss Mary L. Allison proved indispensable. Dr. Frances W. Herring read the manuscript at a later stage and made valuable suggestions.

I owe a very special debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague, Dr. Margaret W. Fisher, from whose methods and high standards of scholarship I have learned so much, and upon whose knowledge I have so often drawn. Dr. Fisher's critical reading of the manuscript has allowed me to strengthen and improve the study in many of its aspects. My association with the Indian Press Digests Project together with the research facilities and staff of the Project have enabled me to revise my initial work and to substantiate some of the factual data. I am also indebted to Mrs. Corinne Bennett whose help in preparing the manuscript for the publishers has been invaluable. To these and to many other friends and colleagues I express my keen appreciation—for without them the work would never have been completed if, indeed, it could have been conceived. Sole responsibility for soundness of fact and interpretation rests, of course, with me.

Joan V. Bondurant
Berkeley, California

July 1957

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