

Tolstoy's Ideology of Non-Violence: A Critical Appraisal

Sobia Tahir*

Abstract

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) started his career as a cadet in Russian Army and took active part in Crimean campaign. However, he emerged as the greatest champion of Non-violence after a prolonged and painful inner turmoil. According to Tolstoy, Christianity is fundamentally a creed of Non-violence based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which declares, 'resist not evil' as its chief dictum. However, the intrigues of the State and the Church, converted it into a violent dogma. Mankind may be redeemed only through the revival of real Non-violent teachings of Christ. This essay has evaluated the spirit and viability of Non-violence in an impartial and scientific manner. Non-violence, though a highly moral creed, lacks practicability due to some inherent flaws and weaknesses. Only a healthy and balanced mix of vision, morality and power may result into a workable and effective political set-up.

Keywords: Tolstoy, Non-Violence, Ideology

The Russian literary giant, Leo Tolstoy is, no doubt, the greatest apostle of Non-violence in 20th Century. This paper is an attempt to study his philosophy based on Non-violence, conceived as the 'The Law of Love'. It will also cover its ethical implications and socio-political viability along with its merits and demerits.

Tolstoy was born to an Orthodox Christian family of 19th century Russia with an aristocratic background; he started his career with military service which he soon left after Crimean campaign for seeking after literary pursuits. This was the turning point in his life when he witnessed a huge and meaningless loss of human life in the most ruthless manner. This was the time when a pacifist was taking shape within him. Ghastly experiences and observations of battle-field were recoded in 'Sevastopol Stories' and more masterly and fully in 'War and Peace'. His diaries while serving in the Caucasus are filled with horrors of war.

* Dr. Sobia Tahir, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy & Interdisciplinary Studies, Government College University, Lahore.
Email: dr.sobiatahir@gcu.edu.pk

The young cadet of Sevastopol had already decided that he would dedicate his life to a stupendous cause. That turned out to be eradication of 'Law of Violence' and enforcement of 'Law of Love' with the establishment of the 'Kingdom of God on Earth' which actually lies within us!

He started suffering from a strange agony and qualms of conscience by the end of 1870s, when he already had achieved international acclaim as a writer of '*War and Peace*' and '*Anna Karenina*'.

In 1879, he wrote '*A Confession*', a marvelous piece of literature of its sort wherein he has described the detail of the gradual shift in his ideas, his thorny journey from Orthodox Christianity to a new type of belief whose ultimate destination was Non-violence and Non-resistance to evil or Pacifism or Christian Anarchism. Let us have a brief account of this in his own words,

*"As I turned my attention to what is done in the name of religion I was horrified and very nearly repudiated Orthodoxy...I witnessed members of the Church, her teachers, monks, and ascetics condoning the killing of helpless, lost youths. As I turned my attention to all that is done by people who profess Christianity, I was horrified"*¹

This was the formal departure of a Prophet to-be from his ancestral faith and now he was on his long way to develop a religion of his own, that is, of Non-violence and peace. He wrote prolifically on his favourite subject and three of his essays are specifically significant in this regard, that is, '*What is religion and of what does its essence consist?*', '*What do I believe?*' and '*Religion and Morality*'. However, he developed his views in detail in his two landmark writings viz. '*The Law of Love and the Law of Violence*', and '*The Kingdom of God is Within You*'.

However, to achieve non-violence, first we have to break the vicious circle of violence. His self-proposed solution is more than simple and reasonable doubts may be raised about its feasibility and efficacy. The idea reads as follows:

"It would seem so simple and natural for working people, particularly the agricultural workers, who in Russia, as in the rest of the world, form a majority to finally understand that they have for centuries been suffering from something they have brought upon themselves to no advantage... It would seem such a simple thing for working people to realize this and finally

*say to those they regard their leaders: 'leave us in peace! If you emperors, presidents, generals, judges, bishops, professors and other learned men need armies, navies, universities, ballots, synods, conservatories, prisons, gallows and guillotines, do it all yourselves: collect your own taxes, judge, execute and imprison among yourselves, murder people in war, but do it all yourselves and leave us in peace because we need none of it, we no longer wish to participate in all these useless, and above all evil deeds!'*²

Tolstoy had a firm belief that the most tyrant and despotic regime may be brought to terms by non-violent civil disobedience, that is ,non-payment of taxes, non-obeying laws and giving-up every sort of governmental service. All these tactics, taken together would paralyze the political structure based on oppression and injustice. Here his ideas bear great resemblance with those of Henry David Thoreau and John Ruskin. The same views were later on adopted by Martin Luther King Junior. However, the immediate practical successor of Tolstoy was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who in his autobiography, '*My Experiments with Truth*', declared himself a humble disciple of Tolstoy. He tried to execute the political ideals of his Guru on Indian soil with some real success. However, the disasters brought by this were not less in number and pernicious in effect.

Now the question is what Non-violence is in its very nature, how can it be theoretically defined? The answer has already been provided by Jesus in the Gospel as,

*"Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God...No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us...God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."*³

Law of violence may be replaced with the law of love both at individual and collective levels. Methodology of which has been briefly explained in above paragraph, however, individually we may employ the Non-violence if we give –up external aims and ideals, that is, instead of setting ourselves an external goal which needs the cooperation of others to be achieved, and we should set ourselves an inner goal, which requires cooperation from no one else.

“The general purpose of life may not be fully known,” says the Christian teachings, “and you only imagine that it is a continual approach towards universal well-being and the realization of the Kingdom of God. The purpose of your personal life is most certainly known to you and consists of the realization in yourself of the greatest perfection of love, which is necessary to the realization of the Kingdom of God. And this aim is always known to you and is always attainable. You may not know the best individual, external aims, there may be obstacles in the way of achieving them, but the approach to inner perfection and the increase of love within yourself and others cannot be stopped by anyone or anything. A person needs to set himself instead of false external, social aim, the true one, irrefutable, and attainable inner aim of life for all the chains, by which he seemed so indissolubly bound, to fall apart, and he will feel perfectly free...A Christian is not bound by civil law because he has no need of it, either for himself or for others, since he considers human life better provided for by the law of love which he professes, than by a law maintained by violence...For a Christian who has recognized the demands of the law of love, none of the demands of the law of violence can be obligatory, but present themselves as human errors which must be exposed and abolished.”⁴

The law of love, according to Tolstoy is inherently capable of bringing desirable changes into the lives of its followers without the need of any external training or orientation, because it is going to change the very set-up and make-up of human personality once conditioned by the law of violence.

“And when this law penetrates consciousness as the Supreme law of life it will, of its own accord, bring an end to that attitude, so harmful to morality, whereby the most extraordinary injustices and cruelties people perform on one another are regarded as natural, inherently human behaviour. And that which is dreamed of, desired and promised by the Socialist and Communist regimes of future societies will come to pass, and more besides. And this will be achieved by quite different means; it will be achieved precisely because it will not be

sought through the contradictory means of violence, which both the government and its opponents employ in order to achieve it. Freedom from the evil which torments and corrupts men will be attained, not by strengthening and preserving the existing regimes, monarchies, republics or whatever, nor by suppressing the existing order and instituting better Socialist and Communist ones; indeed not in any instance by a few people inventing a particular social system they consider an improvement and imposing on others by violence. It will be attained only when each one of us (the majority of people), without thinking and worrying about the consequences to ourselves or others, conduct our lives in a particular way, not for the sake of some social organization, but simply for the sake of fulfilling, for one's own life, the supreme law of life: the law of love that does not permit violence under any circumstances,'⁵

In the light of the views quoted above, serious questions arise about their practicability. For instance, what is actually meant by an internal goal or aim which is independent of anything external? Is not it a vague and equivocal phrase which may not be clearly and precisely defined? Moreover, may we achieve anything at all either material or spiritual without bare minimum support provided externally? Does love not demand physical comfort, absence of pain and privacy for its execution? Can love of any sort is possible when one is hungry, debilitated and subject to severities of weather? For the achievement of internal ideals we have to pay some attention at all to our exterior and for that purpose inter-dependence may never be ruled out. Even in most primitive and anarchist living situations we will have to have some sort of organization. Secondly the advice of Tolstoy suggests that, "we should without thinking and worrying about the consequences to ourselves or others conduct our lives in a particular way". Is it possible? Can such a major decision with huge and serious consequences be taken without thorough or even basic considerations? The value of any system is judged through its results and consequences, whereby Tolstoy is suggesting us that we ought to overlook the question of outcomes, consequences and final results altogether! Is this attitude justified? Any socio-political system or practical philosophy is bound to ensure its followers as to what it is going to deliver, how and when. Unfortunately Tolstoy does not furnish us with satisfactory answers, rather declares our worries, anxieties and questions as 'superstitions'.

However, before going critical, let us see how Tolstoy himself defends his ideals. He has tried to explain how will Non-violence work and what will be the nature and condition of his Stateless and subsequently Classless Society. Once again we will be interested to listen to the same in the words of his own.

“But how can we live without a government, and without authority? People have never lived this way, ’ is the retort to this. People are so accustomed to the political structure in which they live that to them it seems an unavoidable, permanent form of human existence. But it only seems so: people have lived and do live, outside the political structure. All the primitive peoples who have not yet reached what we call civilization have lived and still live in this way. So also do people who have reached an understanding of life that is higher than civilization...The State is only a temporary thing and in no way a permanent feature of human life.”⁶

He further states in the same mood and spirit,

“People who stand in an exclusively privileged position as a result of the existing political structure imagine that to deprive people of governmental authority would lead to tremendous strife and that everyone would be at war with everyone else...Therefore, to the question of what life would be like without governments and authorities, the answer can only be that there would certainly not be all the evil which government creates. There would be no private landownership, no taxes spent on things unnecessary to nation, no division of nations, no enslavement of some by others, no more wastage of the nation’s best resources on war preparation, no more fear on the one hand of the bombs, on the other hand of the gallows; and there would be none of the senseless luxury of some, and still more senseless poverty of others.”⁷

Regarding the viability of this set-up based on the principle of Non-violence, Tolstoy offers following arguments:

“Yes, but what form would existence takes without a government? Ask people, who evidently think that we always know what form life will take, and in what form it will continue, and that those who have decided to live without a government must, therefore, know beforehand

the form life will take. But really, we have never known and can never know what shape the future will take. The conviction that man can know and can even arrange the form of future is really a very primitive, albeit old and widespread, superstition. Regardless of whether or not people should submit to the government, the fact is they have never known and do not and cannot know the form their lives will take...The superstition that some people can not only know in advance the form that the lives of others, the majority, will take, but can also arrange future existence, has arisen and is maintained by the wish of those exerting violence to justify their activity, and by wish of those suffering from the violence to clarify and ease the burden of violence they experience. Those who commit violence convince themselves, and others, that they know what must be done in order for people's lives to assume the form they consider best. And the people who suffer the violence will, until they have the strength to overthrow it, believe this, because it is only such a belief that gives some kind of meaning to their predicament."⁸

*"So the question of what I should do to counteract acts of violence committed before my eyes is always based on the same primitive superstition that is possible for a man not only to know, but to organize, the future in the way he likes. For a man free of this superstition the question cannot and does not exist."*⁹

It is amazing, rather shocking how quickly and easily, Tolstoy has just dismissed a very relevant rather most important question regarding workability of his own theory, which is according to him the highest achievement of his life. He continues the same line of argument in the following paragraphs:

"A rogue has raised his knife over his victim. I have a pistol in my hand and kill him. But I do not know, and cannot possibly know, whether the purpose of raised knife would have been implemented. The rogue may not have carried out his evil intention, whereas I certainly commit my evil deed. Therefore, the only thing a person can and must do in this and a similar instance is what he must always do in all possible instances: he must do

what he believes he ought to do before God and before his own conscience. A man's conscience may demand that he sacrifices his own life but not that of another person. The same principle can be applied to the method of counteracting social evil".¹⁰

The author of this theory still has some unique arguments in store to defend and support his ideas, for instance, he says,

"But he steals, robs and murders, and I do not steal, rob and murder. Let him fulfill the law of reciprocity and then ask me to fulfill it, is what the people of our world usually say, and with greater conviction the higher their social standing. 'I do not steal, rob and kill,' say the governor, the minister, the general, the judge, the landowner, the merchant, the soldier, the policeman. The superstition of a social structure that justifies all kinds of violence has clouded the consciousness of today's people to such an extent that they do not see the continual, never-ending acts of theft and murder that are committed in the name of the future order of the world; 'He is a thief, a liar, a robber; he is a murderer and does not observe the rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Who says this? It is said by those very people who do not cease murdering in war and forcing people to prepare for carnage, and who steal and rob from both their own and other nations."¹¹

These arguments, he finds enough in the favour of his great system going to be operated on the basis of Non-violence. In the end of his work, he addresses mankind in a prophetic manner and announces,

"Understand, all of you that you were born neither to be slaves, nor to be masters; that you are free men, but that you only become free and rational when you fulfill the supreme law of life. This law has been revealed to you, and you need only discard those lies which conceal it from you to be able to see clearly of what this law consists and in what your happiness consists. This law consists in love, and well-being is only found in the fulfillment of this law... Understand that the assumption that a man may organize the lives of others is a crude superstition that people have only accepted because of its antiquity. And understand that those who are

preoccupied with organizing the lives of others, be they monarchs, presidents and ministers, or spies and executioners, or members and leaders of a party, or dictators, understand that these people manifest nothing worthy – as people seem to think – but, to the contrary, are pitiable, deeply misled people, preoccupied with a task that is not only vain and stupid, but one of the most horrible things man can choose to do. People are already recognizing the pitiful degradation of a spy, or executioner, and are starting to feel the same about the police force, police agents, and even to some extent about the army; but they have not yet begun to feel this about judges, senators, ministers, political leaders and revolutionaries. And yet the work of the senator, the minister, the monarch, and the leaders of political parties is just as base, vile and alien to human nature and, perhaps, even worse than the task of executioner or spy, since it is just the same, but covered in hypocrisy.”¹²

Besides, *'The Law of Love and the Law of Violence'*, Tolstoy wrote another immense compendium on the same topic under the title, *'The Kingdom of God is Within You'*, wherein he has not only elaborated his ideas in the same manner but also has thrown light on some contemporary like-minded personalities and their views, besides answering criticism raised by various circles on the Philosophy of Non-violence.

He has specially quoted American Quakers, which is, Fox, Penn, Dymond and Daniel Mussers. Amongst them Dymond wrote a book *'On War'* which was published from London in 1824. Mussers had two great published works on his credit, that is, *'Non-resistance Asserted'* and *'Kingdom of Christ and Kingdom of this World Separated.'* Two more icons were William Lloyd Garrison and Adin Ballou. Garrison was a champion of the emancipation of Negroes. He founded a Society on Non-resistance and a journal, *'NON-RESISTANT'*.¹³

Garrison was the man, who presented, *'Declaration of Sentiments adopted by Peace Convention, Boston- 1838'* in USA. The declaration came about under following circumstances: William Lloyd Garrison took part in a discussion on the means of suppressing war in Society for the Establishment of Peace among Men, which existed in 1838 in America. He came to the conclusion that the establishment of universal peace can only be found on the open profession of the doctrine

of Non-resistance to evil by violence (Matthew, V, 39) in its full significance, as understood by the Quakers, with whom Garrison happened to be on friendly relations. Having come to the conclusion, Garrison thereupon composed and lay before the Society a Declaration, which was signed at the time- in 1838-by many members.¹⁴

After citing the examples of like- minded ones, Tolstoy has countered all the criticism raised against his ideology in a very cool and calculated manner, the Chapter II of *'The Kingdom of God is Within You'* deals with comments which were offered by Russian and foreign critics on his book, *'What I Believe'*. Tolstoy stands steadfast in the face of criticism made against his ideology, and, concludes just like someone divinely inspired:

"I do not say that if you are a landowner, you are bound to give up your land immediately to the poor, if a capitalist or manufacturer, your money to workplace; or that if you are a Tsar, minister, official, judge, or general, you are bound to renounce immediately the advantages of your position; or if a soldier on whom the system of violence is based, to refuse immediately to obey in spite of all dangers of insubordination. If you do so, you will be doing the best thing possible. But it may happen, and it is most likely, that you will not have the strength to do so. If you have relations, a family, subordinates, and superiors, you are under an influence so powerful that you cannot shake it off, but you can always recognize a truth and refuse to tell a lie about it. You need not declare that you are remaining a landowner, manufacturer, merchant, artists, or writer because it is useful to mankind; that you are governor, prosecutor, or Tsar, not because it is agreeable to you; because you are used to it, but for the public good, that you continue to be a soldier; not from the fear of punishment, but because you consider the army necessary for the society. You can always avoid lying in this way to yourself and to the others; and you ought to do so; because the aim of your life ought to be to purify yourself from the falsehood and to confess the truth. And you only do that, and, your situation will change directly of itself."¹⁵

"But ask ye first Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."¹⁶

“The kingdom of God cometh not without outward show; neither shall they say; Lo here! or Lo there! for behold that the Kingdom of God is within you.”¹⁷

Tolstoy had a vast number of followers even in his life both inside and outside Russia; his ideas influenced his countrymen to such an extent that Lenin himself was compelled to declare him responsible for the failure of first revolutionary campaign 1905. However, the commanding influence Tolstoy held over a substantial segment of the Russian population fell somewhat into decline after the bloody events of 1905. The upsurge of violence clouded his image as helpless people could not defend themselves against the bayonets and bullets of Tsar's forces with the 'weapons' of passive Non-resistance, and a number of 'Tolstoyans' joined ranks of the revolutionaries. His glorious ideals could not save women and children from being slaughtered in the streets of Moscow! This enraged both liberals and radicals alike who considered Tolstoy's archaic stand quite irrational and futile.

However, the believers of his ideology imported it to their native lands too and made experiments with it in alien soils. They were not moved by its failure in the hometown, rather considered it a global agenda. The first such name that strikes one's mind is, nonetheless, of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; the prominent leader of India's struggle for freedom and a great exponent of Non-violence. A brief study of the application of Tolstoy's methods in Indian freedom movement will be both interesting and helpful to evaluate practical implications of Non-violence. Gandhi declared himself a humble disciple of Tolstoy. He tried both Non-violence and Civil Disobedience in India including non-cooperation with British Government, non-payment of taxes, boycott of civil service and of all governmental employment and institutions. These techniques, however, remained confined to Indian National Congress only. At a stage the methodology, significance and results of Non-violence caused serious doubts among his loyal followers too. Both Tolstoy and Gandhi invited criticism from a number of eminent thinkers, intellectuals and political theorists/activists. In the next pages to follow some representative opinions will be presented about practical repercussions and underlying hypothesis of Non-violence.

Bertrand Russell in his autobiography has shown deep distress on the views of Tolstoy and disapproved them. At one place he writes, "What is valuable in Tolstoi, to my mind, is his power of right judgments, and his perception of concrete facts; his theorizing is of course worthless. It is the greatest misfortune to the human race that he

has so little power of reasoning.”¹⁸ Russell also highlighted that ‘moral victory’ claimed by Gandhi over the British through his non-violent campaign was actually the humane approach of the latter, he asserts,

*“I have always recognized the necessity of the Police and criminal law, and even during the First World War I had maintained publicly that some wars are justified. But I had allowed a larger sphere to the method of non-resistance – or, rather, non-violent resistance – than later experience seemed to warrant. It certainly has an important sphere; as against the British India, Gandhi led it to triumph. But it depends upon the existence of certain virtues in those against whom it is employed. When the Indians lay down on railways, and challenged the authorities to crush them under trains, the British found such cruelty intolerable. But the Nazis had no scruples in analogous situations. The doctrine which Tolstoy preached with great persuasive force, that the holders of power could be morally degenerated if met by non-resistance, was obviously untrue in Germany after 1933. Clearly Tolstoy was right only when the holders of power were not ruthless beyond a point.”*¹⁹

Gandhi's politics and the application of Tolstoy's ideology on Indian situation were seen with great dismay and doubt by many contemporary political thinkers, activists and intellectuals. However, by the start of third decade of 20th century, Gandhi had attracted considerable influence in Indian politics. Calcutta Congress (1915) gave him his first major victory though his non-cooperation program was strongly opposed by Bengal's leading politicians C.R. Das and B.C. Pal who joined hand with M.A. Jinnah and Mrs. Annie Besant; even though Gandhi emerged with a clear majority with the help of Ali Brothers and Nehrus, especially Motilal. Gandhi launched his first countrywide *Satyagraha* (Non-violent resistance) on 1st August 1920. Lokamanya Tilak never accepted his leadership, Annie Besant never trusted him whereas V.S. Srinivas Sastri declared him fanciful. Dinshaw E. Wacha called him ‘a madman...mad and arrogant’. Amongst the British contemporaries, Montagu has always suspected his ‘saintly politics’ but now he openly termed his *satyagraha* combined with *Khilafat* Movement as a ‘Bolshevik conspiracy’.²⁰

In Nagpur Congress, the non-cooperation programme of Gandhi was approved with overwhelming majority, under the influence of which a large number of civil servants resigned from their jobs; students gave up their studies, all the courts and other Governmental institutions were

boycotted including legislative councils. It was a negative, destructive and damaging agenda in accordance with the teachings of Tolstoy, which was acted upon with great zeal and fervour throughout the India.

One of the prominent lawyer of Mumbai (the then Bombay) High Court and educationist M.R. Jayakar accepted Gandhi's scheme with great enthusiasm in the beginning but later on turned into one of his bitterest critics after observing the destructive results of his non-cooperation and civil-disobedience movement. He has written in his autobiography: The basic purpose of non-cooperation movement was to paralyze the Government. The important sectors of civil activities were schools, colleges and courts which were fully boycotted as per command of Gandhi. He was of the view that schools and colleges being run by British Government were inculcating wrong ideas in the minds of the students; hence their abolition was an utmost necessity. Moreover, the process of destruction and demolition should have been completed first, so that reconstruction might be started later on with full vigour. He said that schools and colleges should be vacated immediately as it was better for students to sit idle than to have such a venomous education.²¹

This was indeed worst of such acts in Indian history as hundreds of thousands of students gave up their education and started wandering in the streets. These misled young people had no idea of their future. Gandhi was vehemently opposed by Rabindra Nath Tagore and Jinnah. He was so committed to his mentor that he even did not send his own children to schools, whereas he himself was educated at prestigious British Institutions! Renowned member of Indian National Congress, Mr. Sri Prakash evaluated the non-violence movement brilliantly in his article published in the *'Illustrated Weekly of India'* on 12th August 1962. Mr. Sri Prakash also served as a Governor of Maharashtra and Madras (presently Tamil Nadu) after independence. He wrote: This question was raised first of all by my son whom I could not answer till date...Was it justified for the leaders of that era to use students for their political ends and destroy their academic careers? Was it right to devastate the peaceful environment of academic institutions? And when *Sawraj* (Independence) came, those who played havoc with themselves for its sake, were rejected and children of the turn-coats and opportunists were bestowed with high offices...Most paradoxically the leaders had been sending their own children abroad specially England for their education...We even did not know for sure either Gandhi was doing the same for a national cause or only to amuse himself! The questions of my son pierce my heart like thorns...I know a number of sons have suffered like my son and a number of fathers have faced anguish like me.

However, the grand scheme could not achieve the desired results. Wolpert writes,

*“The satyagraha boycott proved less effective than Gandhi envisioned. British courts remained as busy as ever, though some Indian lawyers abandoned their practices. Schools and colleges continued to function. Most trains ran on time. Jails were filled, Police did not stop working, and the army remained entirely loyal to the British Raj that paid it.”*²²

Gandhi's roadmap, which was actually the imported ideology of Tolstoy, not only failed in the earlier phases but one of its integral parts, that is, boycott of civil institutions including legislatures was also abandoned by his close associates. By September 1923, Congress split into two factions, that is, pro council-entry *Swarajist* Party faction led by Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, and, 'no-changer' non-cooperators loyal to Gandhi.²³ Though Non-violence always remained the official policy of Congress, however, serious doubts were raised time to time, about its theoretical validity and practical usefulness. It is also a bitter fact that Gandhi's preaching of Non-violence could not overcome communal hatred in India, its subsequent partition and the worst ever riots of human history ending in murder (of around a million people), rape, arson, loot, plunder and what not. It is an irony of fate that he himself became a victim of violence and was assassinated on 30th January 1948 at the hands of an extremist Hindu.

Jawaharlal Nehru started his political career under the direct supervision of Gandhi and remained a loyal disciple throughout his life. Actually it was Gandhi who promoted him as the President of Indian National Congress in 1929, out of turn, which he himself has acknowledged with regret in his autobiography.²⁴ He was one of the ardent followers of Non-violence, but propounded somber questions about this ideology as well as about his mentor in the same book though with overall sympathy for the both. His comments are valuable and worth quoting. He has written about the non-cooperation movement, "...what were our principles and objectives in 1921 and 1922? A vague *Sawraj* with no clear ideology behind it and a particular technique of non-violent struggle...there was not enough backbone or organization. Even the people who went to prison did so, on the spur of the moment, expecting the whole thing to be over very soon."²⁵

Jawaharlal has further commented on the theoretical aspects of Non-violence,

“To suffer for an idea has always commanded admiration; to submit to suffering for a cause without giving in or hitting back has a nobility and grandeur in it which force recognition. And yet there is a thin line which divides this suffering for suffering’s sake, and this latter kind of suffering is apt to become morbid and even a little degrading. If violence is often sadistic, non-violence in its negative aspects at least is likely to err on other side. There is always a possibility for non-violence to be made a cloak for cowardice and inaction, as well as maintenance of status quo.”²⁶

He opines in the same tone,

“The recent tendency in India to condemn objectives and policies simply because they are supposed to conflict with non-violence seems to me an inversion of right method of looking at such problems...But now our goal in itself is judged in terms of non-violence and rejected if it does not seem to fit in with it. The idea of non-violence is thus becoming an inflexible dogma which may not be challenged. As such it is losing its spiritual appeal to intellect, and taking its place in the pigeon-holes of faith and religion. It is even becoming a sheet-anchor for vested interests, who exploit it to maintain status quo.”²⁷

“The stress, however, on pure non-violence has made it something remote and apart from life, and there is tendency for people either to accept it blindly and religiously or not at all. The intellectual element has receded into background...Gandhiji, of course, continues to be a vital force whose non-violence is of a dynamic and aggressive character...But many of those who claim to follow him tend to become ineffectual pacifists or non-resisters of the Tolstoyan variety or just members of a narrow sect, not in touch with life and reality. And they gather around themselves quite a number of people who are interested in maintaining the present order, and who take shelter under non-violence for this purpose. Opportunism thus creeps in and the process of converting the adversary leads, in the interests of non-violence, to one’s own conversion and lining up with the adversary.”²⁸

Much more could have been said about the topic, but paucity of space does not allow. One thing however, is clear that morality alone without power may lead to spiritual elevation but may not deliver politically. Non-violence, as a moral theory does have a great intrinsic worth but as a means towards a political end, it has serious limitations.

Notes & References

- ¹ Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, tr. Jane Kentish (London: Penguin Group Limited, 1987), 75-76.
- ² *Ibid.*, 178-179
- ³ I John, IV, 7, 8, 12, 16
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 199-200
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 205-206
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-208
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 209-210
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 211-212
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 214
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214-15
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 215
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 217-218
- ¹³ Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is within You*, accessed on January 12, 2012, available at: <http://www.kingdomnow.org/w-inyou01.html>.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, loc.cit.
- ¹⁶ Matthew, vi, 33
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Luke, xvii, 20-21.
- ¹⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1991), 195.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 431
- ²⁰ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69.
- ²¹ M. R. Jayakar, *The Story of my Life* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1958), 369
- ²² Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 74
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 78
- ²⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, distributed by Oxford University Press, 1996), 194-95
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 546
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 547
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 548-49