

Chapter 46

Holistic, Evolving Aspects of Nonviolence for Bringing About Needed Social–Political Change and Important Practitioners of Nonviolence

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ABSTRACT

This article examines holistic, evolving aspects of nonviolence—as a goal and as the desired means for bringing about needed social-political change, whether in schools or society, along with important practitioners of nonviolence. It covers Gandhi’s principled and spiritually-based nonviolence for collective social-political change (Part 1); a number of other nonviolence practitioners in the Gandhian tradition—from different countries and spiritual-religious traditions working for different goals in their respective countries (Part 2); strategic nonviolence of Gene Sharp and others (Part 3); and additional forms of working nonviolently within existing systems that have emerged since Gandhi’s time (Part 4).

INTRODUCTION

In addition to seven plus evolving aspects of peace—as visions and goals for society and the world from the Peace Studies Field, covered in other writing by this author (see, for example, Groff, January 2001; Groff, 2007; Groff, 2008; and Groff, 2009a and 2009b), one can also identify at least ten or more evolving aspects of nonviolence—defined as a desired goal and also as the desired means used to bring about needed social-political change, whether in schools or society, from the Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution fields. One can also study the lives and nonviolent struggles of various practitioners of nonviolence who have led their peoples in movements to achieve various goals needed in their respective societies. These nonviolent efforts can be either principled or spiritually-based, as part of a whole philosophy of

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life, including Gandhi's pioneering use of nonviolence for *collective* social-political change (Part I), with a number of other purposive and spiritually-based practitioners of nonviolence in the Gandhian tradition (Part II), or they can be in the Gene Sharp tradition of strategic nonviolence, where nonviolence is used as a temporary strategy for bringing about needed social-political change that need not be spiritually-based (Part III). In addition to all the above uses of nonviolence to bring about needed change—initially *within* existing political systems, but eventually *outside* those systems, when particular laws must be challenged as unjust—a number of additional nonviolent methods for working *within* existing systems have also been developed since Gandhi's time, which will also be briefly summarized below (Part IV).

PART I: MAHATMA GANDHI'S SATYAGRAHA OR TRUTH FORCE – THE FIRST TO USE SPIRITUALLY-BASED NONVIOLENCE FOR COLLECTIVE SOCIAL-POLITICAL CHANGE

Introduction to the Great Significance of Gandhi's Nonviolence

While there have always been religious leaders historically who lived lives of nonviolence, as well as important *individual* practitioners of nonviolence in more recent periods before Gandhi—such as Leo Tolstoy in Russia (Green, 1986; Murthy, 1987; and Tolstoy and Garnett, 2006) and Henry David Thoreau in the United States (Thoreau, 2012; and other editions of his work)--modern nonviolent movements began with Mahatma Gandhi, who was the first person who led a *collective* movement using nonviolence for social-political change, in Gandhi's case first against discrimination that he experienced for being Indian in South Africa, and later when he returned to India to lead India's movement for independence from the British Empire. (See, for example, from the many writings on Gandhi's life: Carter, 1995; Easwaran and Flinders, 3rd Ed., 1997; Gandhi and Fischer, 2002; Gandhi and Brown, Eds., 2008; Gandhi and Mahadev, 1993; and Johnson, 2005.) All later practitioners of collective movements of principled and spiritually-based nonviolence, as part of a whole philosophy of how one lives one's life, go back to Gandhi as their inspiration. Gandhi was nominated five times for a Nobel Peace Prize before he was murdered in 1948—an irony for someone so committed to nonviolence. (The same happened to Martin Luther King.)

Stages in Gandhi's Nonviolent Movement

Gandhi believed that there were a series of stages that a nonviolent movement for social-political change needed to go through. He also believed that one must exhaust all of the possibilities of each stage before proceeding on to the next stage. In short, one cannot skip stages, and one hopes that each stage will be successful in achieving the goals of one's movement so that one need not go on to the next stage. Nonetheless, if necessary, a nonviolent movement will end up going through all the stages he outlined. (Ibid.; Dalton, 2012; Gandhi, 2001; and summarized from Gandhi's lifetime of nonviolent struggle.)

Gandhi's stages included:

Stage I- Utilization of All Regular Constitutional Machinery: Work through the existing system for change.

Stage II- Agitation Stage: Educate the people about the issues involved.

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