

Organization as the test of non-violence

The Story of Gandhi Seva Sangh

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While experimenting with Truth, Gandhi created many institutions and organizations, took in hand many organizations and transformed them, and dissolved organizations whenever the need arose. What was important for him was the march towards Truth. During this march, Gandhi made efforts to make an organization, an organization of non-violent persons. Or, it may be said that he tried to organize non-violence; tried to demonstrate how could organization be the test of non-violence.

In 1909, Gandhi declared the mission of his life in 'Hind-Swaraj' and announced the dedication of his life to the attainment of Swaraj, which he defined as the 'self-rule'. Satyagraha and Swadeshi were to be the means for such attainment. Gandhi arrived in India with these three principles. Within no time, he was the supreme leader of Indian National Congress and of the freedom movement.

Congress was a small group of educated people, limited mainly to petitioning the Government. Gandhi transformed it into a big and great mass organization. He also changed its constitution. However, Congress basically was, and remained, a common front of all those desirous of Independence. Despite his firm commitment to non-violence and despite his all out efforts, Gandhi could succeed only in making the Congress accept non-violence as a strategy and not as a creed. Congress remained wedded only to 'peaceful and legitimate means' to attain Independence. Constructive work, the key to real swaraj for Gandhi, remained for Congress only a programme for mass contact.

So, even while striving to develop non-violence within the Congress, a separate organization of non-violence was the need of the hour. Gandhi took in his hands a small organization named 'Gandhi Seva Sangh', and attempted to organize non-violence through it.

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In 1920, Gandhi put before the country the programme of non-co-operation and civil disobedience. Non-co-operation Movement was the first mass movement against the British Government. Responding to its call, many lawyers forsook their practice, many government servants resigned from their jobs and many students withdrew from schools and colleges. Foreign cloth was burnt at many places. The spinning wheel, which Gandhi had recently 'found', began to hum in countless homes. Khadi became the 'livery of freedom'. The spinning wheel secured a place of pride on the Congress flag.

Gandhi wanted the Movement to remain perfectly non-violent. But training of the whole society in non-violence was bound to be a long-drawn and hard process. Stray outbreaks of violence could not be prevented. The incident at Chauri Chaura proved to be the 'last straw on the camel's back'. Finding that the country was not yet ready for a non-violent movement, Gandhi suspended the Movement. Congress Working Committee, in its meeting on the 11th February 1922, approved the same. What the non-co-operators were to do then? Gandhi's answer was: Constructive Programme—spinning wheel, removal of untouchability, establishment of national schools and prohibition. It was his way of permeating the society with

the spirit of non-violence, which alone could be the foundation for the success of the next non-violent movement.

Gandhi was arrested on the 10th March and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Non-co-operation Movement had ebbed and Congressmen, in general, were not much enthusiastic about the Constructive Programme. With Gandhi behind the bars, opposition to his programme was bound to become vocal. Those who could not resist him earlier began to press for change in strategy now. The educated class in Congress had all along been enamoured of parliamentary institutions. It began to press for council-entry. C.R. Das, President of the Congress, advocated council-entry at the Gaya session of the Congress in December 1922. Still, Rajagopalachari's resolution on council-boycott was passed by 1740 votes against 890. The session resolved to continue non-co-operation. Das and Motilal Nehru then revolted and formed Swaraj Party in January 1923.

But the fracturing of Congress would have meant weakening of freedom movement; and had to be avoided at any cost. Supporters of council-entry might have been in a minority; but they were a strong minority and had great patriots in their ranks. It was not right to alienate them. At the same time, the nature of the Congress as a broad front of freedom-seekers, and not a political party in the conventional sense, had to be guarded.

The break-up was avoided by permitting the Swaraj Party to take part in the elections to the councils. The Party wanted to enter the councils to obstruct their working and embarrass the British Government. Gandhi was neither in favour of electoral politics nor in favour of this strategy. Council-work was, for him, waste of time; and entering the council with an obstructionist attitude was clearly immoral. Still he permitted the Swarajists to work in their way despite having majority on his side. He also continued the dialogue with them to pursue them to fall in with his position.

In the elections held in November, the Swaraj Party secured majority in some provinces; but other parties too won sizable number of seats. In the Central Assembly, Swarajists won 45 out of 105 seats. So now the British could say that the whole country was not behind the Congress!

Some institutional arrangement was necessary on this background for the advancement of constructive work. Some arrangement was also needed to provide for the basic necessities of those who had forsaken everything for the nation.

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It was mainly for the latter purpose that Jammalal Bajaj founded Gandhi Seva Sangh. Its avowed objective was service in consonance with Gandhiji's programme of non-co-operation. Jammalal gave Rs. 2.5 lakhs to this organization. There were four founder members besides him: C. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Gangadharrao Deshpande. Every member was expected to establish an ashram in his region, as a centre for the advancement of constructive work, where the workers and their families would stay. The experiment was initially for two years only and the continuation of the organization was to be decided thereafter in the light of experience. Ashrams were accordingly established in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Gandhi was released in 1924, before the expiry of his term of imprisonment. He presided over the Congress session at Belgaum. The session decided to suspend all programmes of non-

co-operation save the Constructive Programme. Country-wide organization of constructive work started with the establishment of All-India Spinners Association in September 1925.

Now, as the programme of non-co-operation was no more there, change in the objective of Gandhi Seva Sangh became imperative. Moreover, A.I.S.A. had come into being for khadi work, which was the main constructive work. Jinnalal himself suggested merger of Gandhi Seva Sangh into A.I.S.A.. However, the governing body decided to continue its existence with due changes in the objective and rules. The Sangh was registered as a charitable society under the Societies Registration Act in September 1927.

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Gandhi was aware of the increasing gulf between him and the educated class in the Congress. Neither could he persuade them to accept his viewpoint nor did he want to come in its way. Non-violence, by its very nature, abhors competition and rivalry. With Gandhi's stepping out, Congress practically assumed the form of a political party.

Split in the Congress was averted; however, Swaraj Party could not escape its nemesis. Electoral politics and attraction of power did have their inevitable result. A group within the party advocated the policy of responsive co-operation. Some partymen accepted positions of power. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "My father (Motilal Nehru) shouted and thundered and talked about cutting 'the diseased limb'. But this threat has no great effect when the limb is eager to walk away by itself."¹ Congress, and the freedom movement, thus stood weakened by this programme.

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Gandhi Seva Sangh gradually grew in membership. But membership was increased neither through any campaign nor with an 'open door' policy. Members were admitted only when recommended by the governing body.

1930 witnessed the second Satyagraha movement. The period 1930-1934 was a period of great turmoil in the nation's life. Satyagraha was gradually petering out. Gandhi, after coming out of the gaol in May 1933, assessed the situation and came to the conclusion that the political workers, in general, lacked adequate faith in non-violence; they only itched for fight with the British Government by any available means.

On the 7th April 1934, Gandhi formally announced suspension of civil disobedience. Henceforth, he was to concentrate on the constructive work. It was his strategy to safeguard the gains from the agitations, provide purposeful work to the workers and build non-violent strength for the next campaign.

However, with the waning of agitation, attraction for political work resurfaced and Swaraj Party was revived for participating in the forthcoming elections. Gandhi 'welcomed' the revival, though his views on the utility of legislatures remained "as they were in 1920"². There was no alternative to Gandhi for leading agitations; however, there was little understanding of his quest for non-violence.

There was also a new development on the political horizon. Many young men and women lodged in jails had been influenced by the Socialist and Communist doctrines. Communism was in ascendance on the world stage. Even those, who were not happy with the Communist strategy of keeping away from the freedom struggle, were enamoured by Scientific Socialism. Socialist Party had been formed within the Congress in March 1934. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose were inclined towards Socialism, although they had not joined the

Socialist party. Intense ideological struggle was going on in the Congress. Gandhi did not want to take any side in this struggle.

On this background, he decided to sever his formal relations with the Congress. On the 17th September 1934, he announced his intentions:

“It has appeared to me that there is a growing and vital difference of outlook between many Congressmen and myself. I seem to be going in a direction just opposite of what many of the most intellectual Congressmen would gladly and enthusiastically take, if they were not hampered by their unexampled loyalty to me. For me any more to draw upon this loyalty and devotion is to put undue strain upon them. Their loyalty cannot blind my eyes to what appears to me to be fundamental differences between the Congress intelligentsia and me.

“I put the spinning-wheel and khadi in the forefront. Hand-spinning by the Congress intelligentsia has all but disappeared. Nevertheless my conviction is growing that if India is to win complete independence in terms of the toiling millions and through unadulterated non-violence, the spinning-wheel and khadi have to be as natural to the educated few as to the partially unemployed and semi-starved millions - - -

“I am convinced that in the present circumstances of the country and in the absence of any general scheme of civil resistance, a Parliamentary Party within the Congress is the necessary part of any programme that may be framed by the Congress but there are sharp differences of opinion among us on that point. - - -

“I have welcomed the formation of the Socialist Group. Many of them are respected and self-sacrificing co-workers. With all this, I have fundamental differences with them - - - But I would not, by reason of the moral pressure I may be able to exert, suppress the spread of ideas propounded in their literature - - - however distasteful some of them may be to me. If they gain ascendancy in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress.

“Then there is the policy advocated by some in regard to the (native) States which is wholly different from what I have advised. - - - Even on untouchability my method or approach is perhaps different from that of many if not most Congressmen. For me, it is a deeply religious and moral issue.

“Last of all, take non-violence. After 14 years of trial it still remains a policy with the majority of Congressmen whereas it is a fundamental creed with me. - - - It has been increasingly difficult for me to carry the reason of fellow Congressmen with me in all resolutions recently passed on the subject, while they have generously voted for them. They and I must be free from this oppression if we are all to grow in pursuit of what we believe to be the common goal.

“ - - ours has not been unadulterated non-violence in thought, word and deed. It is now my paramount duty to devise ways and means of showing demonstrably to the Government and the terrorists the efficacy of non-violence as a means of achieving the right thing including freedom in every sense of the term. For this experiment, to which my life is dedicated, I need complete detachment and absolute freedom of action.

“I have referred to the common goal, but I have begun to doubt if all Congressmen understand the same thing by the expression complete independence. I have always said

that means and end are convertible terms - - - (but) many Congressmen do not admit this, to me the obvious truth. They believe that end justifies means.

“It is the sum total of these differences which has sterilized the existing Congress programme because members who gave their lip-assent to it, without believing in it, have naturally failed to reduce it to practice and yet I have no other programme save the Congress programme - - - (of removal of) untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, total prohibition, hand-spinning with khadi and cent per cent swadeshi in the sense of the revival of village industries and general reorganization of seven lakhs of villages.”³

For building non-violent strength, Gandhi severed his formal relations with the Congress. He was, of course, available whenever need for his leadership would arise.

Congress, if it so desired, could have stopped Gandhi from taking this step, had it agreed to his proposals for changes in the Congress constitution, notable among which was the substitution of the words ‘legitimate and peaceful’ by the words ‘truthful and non-violent’. But Congress did not agree to his amendments.

Gandhi’s decision must have been prompted by one more consideration. Sooner or later, the country was bound to become Independent; and Congress was inevitably going to wield State power. And what Gandhi wanted was not just the transfer of power to Indian hands, he wanted swaraj in the real sense – creation of a non-violent society, which implied freedom from the coercive State apparatus. And Gandhi could not identify himself with those who wanted to wield the State power.

In an interview with N.K. Bose in November 1934, Gandhi articulated his stand in unequivocal terms:

“The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.”⁴

Distancing himself from politics, Gandhi was to concentrate on development of non-violence.

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All-India Village Industries Association was formed in October 1936. It was followed by the formation of Harijan Sevak Sangh. In 1936, Gandhi settled in the village Segaon, which later became well-known as Sevagram. Congress met in a village – Faizpur – for the first time, in December 1936. ‘Harijan’ weekly was launched.

Different structures for organizing and developing different constructive programmes were taking shape. They were meant to look after the particular programme exclusively. They were supposed to look after the development of different techniques pertaining to that programme. But *tantra* – techniques – needs to be complemented by *mantra* – the spirit. The structures would have been lifeless unless infused with the spirit. Some arrangement was needed to take care of this aspect.

Gandhi Seva Sangh was already there. Gandhi decided to take it in his hands and mould it to make it an instrument for the organization of non-violence.

Annual session of the Sangh was held for the first time in November 1934. Gandhi participated in it fully. He advised the members that they should continue to work through different constructive work organizations; the Sangh need not do such work independently.

The Sangh was envisioned basically as a fraternity of believers in constructive work and non-violence, who would seek to develop non-violence in their personal lives as well as in the societal life. They would meet every year, exchange notes, deepen their understanding and augment their strength; and then engage in their work with better perception and stronger commitment.

Constitution of the Sangh was also changed. The main objective now was to serve the people in accordance with the principles of Satyagraha enunciated by Gandhi; and for its fulfilment, constructive programmes like khadi, village service, national education, propagation of national language, prohibition, service to Harijans, communal unity, service to the cow, propagation of Gandhian literature etc. were listed. A list of potential members was prepared. Membership at the end of 1935 had risen to 105, which showed that great care was being taken in identifying potential members and in admitting them. The number of ashrams and village service centres running under the aegis of the Sangh stood at 12.

Initiation of new constructive programmes and looking after them until the creation of separate organizational structures for them was also understood to be the Sangh's responsibility. Thus the Sangh undertook the work of the tannery at Wardha. It also started the monthly journal '*Sarvodaya*'.

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Government of India Act was passed in 1935. Congress found it unsatisfactory, as it had hardly anything to satisfy the aspirations of freedom-loving Indian masses. Still it was inclined to contest the elections to be held under the Act.

On the world stage, forces of violence were gaining in strength. Nazis had come to power in Germany and Italy was being ruled by the Fascists. Both had expansionist designs. Ominous signs of the impending war were visible on the horizon.

On this background, Gandhi Seva Sangh was seeking organization of non-violence.

Commitment to non-violence was the foundation of the Sangh. Jamnalal Bajaj, the founder of the Sangh, found himself wanting on this touchstone, as he was running a business, albeit with the outlook of a trustee. How could one with the riches be a member of a non-violent organization, as non-violence necessarily implies non-possession? On the other hand, Vinoba wondered how could a follower of the principle of non-possession be a member of an organization having assets. Both tendered their resignations. Many prominent Gandhians did not become members, although they continued to have a prominent role in the conduct of Sangh. It was certainly in keeping with the ethos of non-violence.

The second conference of Gandhi Seva Sangh was held at Sawali (a village in Chanda district in C.P. and Berar) in February-March 1936. It was natural for the Sangh to discuss its approach towards the councils. Gandhi had unambiguously stated in the last conference that members of the Sangh should not enter the councils; their mission was to serve and not to occupy positions of power. But at Sawali, he had something different to say: Sangh should not take part in politics; but there is no intrinsic antagonism between constructive work and politics. May be, Gandhi had the politics of the freedom movement in mind.

Congress session at Lucknow in April 1936 condemned the Government of India Act, but resolved to contest the elections. Gandhi was present, but did not participate in the session. In June, he went to Segaon with the intention to settle there. He had nothing to do with the electoral politics. He wanted to make the Congress village-oriented, rural-minded. His proposal

for having Congress session in a village was for this very purpose. It was in the year 1936 that this could materialize.

With elections round the corner, some of the Sangh members were being persuaded to be the Congress candidates. Sangh Working Committee discussed this matter in its meeting in August. Gandhi too was present. With his consent, it was decided that members should not stand for election. Some members, however, defied this decision.

Result of the elections was out in February 1937. Congress emerged as the largest single party in the Central Assembly and secured majorities in six out of eleven provinces. However, it decided not to accept office unless the Governors undertook not to use their special powers. The Governors therefore appointed *ad interim* ministries which, as expected, could not face the legislatures. But the legislatures had to be summoned within six months. This created a deadlock. The Sangh conference at Hudli (April 1937), a village in Karnataka, was held on this background.

At Hudli, the question whether those who had gone to legislatures should continue as members of the Sangh became a lively issue. Gandhi, strangely, said that “the boycott of the legislatures is not an eternal principle; the question is purely one of strategy.”⁵ His arguments were indeed perplexing. Though he conceded that ‘legislatures are a great temptation’, he advocated going there ‘not to sacrifice truth and non-violence, but to vindicate them.’ He also wanted to use the legislatures to further the constructive programme, and claimed that “in making room for the parliamentary programme, we are advancing a step further in the direction of non-violence.”⁶ This was clearly impatience which was, according to his own definition, a facet of violence. Predictably, even his loyal lieutenants revolted. Jannalal opined that this stand was not in keeping with unadulterated truth and non-violence. Kishorlal Mashruwala, President of the Sangh declared his dissent and tendered resignation. Gandhi had to persuade, and even to compel him not to insist on the same. The Conference finally resolved to permit the Working Committee to allow any member to go to the legislature.

The Hudli decision was not only theoretically flawed, it did have disquieting results. Power politics entered the Sangh and a wrong impression was created that the Sangh was a political block with its own agenda, which naturally entailed opposition.

History testifies that Gandhi later conceded that it was a mistake. In the Malikanda Conference (1940) he said, “As an experiment, I suggested entering the political stage, and test the strength of truth and non-violence. I may have erred, but I do not repent it. We did have valuable experience. Without such experience, I would have been in a quandary. I would always have thought that we lacked this experience. Now, after this experience, I can tell you unequivocally that the Sangh should eschew politics altogether.”⁷ This experience might have been necessary, but it did become one of the reasons for the eventual winding up of Sangh.

Constructive workers should shun politics – that had always been Gandhi’s refrain, and it remained so after the Hudli episode. For example, he advised constructive workers even in December 1947, after the gaining of Independence, to keep out of politics.⁸

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With Congress in saddle, Muslim League intensified communal propaganda leading to communal flare-ups in many parts of the country. Vitiating communal atmosphere cast its shadow over Delang Conference (1938) of the Sangh. The Conference gave green signal to increased participation of Sangh members in the affairs of Congress Party and Congress

ministries for advancing constructive work therein. This reinforced the wrong notion that the Sangh had political ambitions and was therefore a competitor to other political blocks. So much so that even Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose fell prey to this misconception! Not only was this far from the intention of the Sangh, its presence in the Congress was also not so much as to warrant perturbation for the detractors. When the Sangh President sought information in this regard from the members, it was found that out of 103 members (total number was 189) who provided information, 32 were not Congress members and 29 were nominally so; only 42 were active members of the Congress. Only six members of the Sangh were in legislatures or ministries. Out of 86 members who did not respond, only 20 were believed to be active members of the Congress. Had the Sangh wanted to work as a political block, it certainly would have striven for a stronger presence within the Congress.

Presidential election in January 1939 widened fissures within the Congress. Subhas Bose threw his hat in the ring for the second time. Subhas' commitment to non-violence was questionable, and his reading of the world situation too was at variance with that of Gandhi and other major leaders. Although his patriotism and commitment to the cause of freedom were never in doubt, his re-election as President, particularly when the World War was round the corner, was bound to have disquieting repercussions. (By joining hands with the Fascists and raising an army unit, Subhas did prove his detractors right.) Seven senior Congress Working Committee members, six of whom were members of Gandhi Seva Sangh, openly supported Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the other candidate, and appealed Subhas to reconsider his decision to fight the election. As Gandhi's stand was not explicitly known, the Presidential election saw some Sangh members voting for Subhas as well. As is well-known, Pattabhi lost; and Gandhi termed it as his own defeat. Faced with non-co-operation from senior leaders, Subhas ultimately resigned on the 29th April and announced formation of Forward Block, a political outfit within the Congress. The whole episode created bitterness, particularly in Bengal, which resulted in slogans like 'Down with Gandhism' at Malikanda (1940).

The World War expectedly put strain on the commitment to non-violence of not only other Congressmen but of Sangh members as well. The distance between Gandhi and Congress was again unmistakably clear. Gandhi Seva Sangh Working Committee resolved in its meeting in October 1939:

"What could be the attitude of an organization believing in non-violence towards the War? The Working Committee declares that for Sangh members, Gandhiji's principles of Truth and non-violence are the only ones worth acceptance and adoption. The non-violent strength that he wants to organize and develop should be able to solve all sorts of conflicts both within and outside the country, and succeed in creating harmony between man and man. The individual and societal life of members should be in accordance with this ideal. All the programmes by the Sangh members should be infused with the ideal of gaining such strength for themselves and imparting the same to the people."⁹

But, some members of the Sangh distanced themselves from this position. They were found wanting in the testing times.

The decision of virtual winding up of the Sangh—at least for the time being—in the Malikanda Conference (1940) was, in a way, inevitable on the whole background. The Sangh was not dissolved; but its activities were wound up and only a skeleton structure was kept in place. Writing on 'the right step', Gandhi recapitulated the function and mission of the Sangh: "It was not without a pang that I advised the important step taken by the Gandhi Seva Sangh.

The hara-kiri was performed when the Sangh was in full bloom of life. For the last two years, we, its builders, were groping. - - - But we were not satisfied with the result. - - - The Sangh has to explore the possibilities of ahimsa in all walks of life. It has to find out whether, in reality, the activities, known as constructive, have vital connection with, or are inevitable consequences of, the application of ahimsa to national life. It is the function of the Sangh to apply their mind as scientists to this laborious task. The constructive activities of the different organizations furnish the Sangh with ample data for its investigations. When the mission was discovered, we found that we were poor in missionaries for shouldering the tremendous responsibility. - - - The Sangh has been kept alive in the hope that the right men, may be women, would be forthcoming - - "10

The hara-kiri coming at the time of full bloom also underlines the strength of the Sangh. It needs rare courage to take such a decision. The men whom Gandhi had hoped to be torch-bearers of non-violence had failed to rise above narrow considerations, and new men could not be found and groomed in a hurry. Nor were the times propitious for this venture. There should be no question of blaming the Sangh members. They did what they thought best in the circumstances. History does present people with hard choices. However, the result was that active organization of non-violence had to be on the back burner. But the idea had to be kept alive, and it was kept alive. An executive committee of nine members was kept in place; all others ceased to be members.

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Gandhi Seva Sangh was not formed by the Congress unlike A.I.S.A. or A.I. Village Industries Association. It was formed for a different purpose, but Gandhi took it in his hands to make it an instrument for the organization of non-violence. In a way, it was Gandhi's 'inner circle' which could be compared with Christ's apostles. Shrikrishnadas Jajoo, in his introductory speech at the Sawali Conference did express such sentiments: "When I think of the work and objects of Gandhi Seva Sangh, I am reminded of the olden times. Disciples of epoch-makers like Jesus and Buddha must have had such congregations. They too must have assembled from time to time and thought about their own purification as well as the betterment of the people. Some people will find this comparison exaggerated. But I do look upon many of the Sangh members as saints and sages like those of the yore."¹¹ The Sangh members might not be like them, but they did serve, albeit for a brief period, as Gandhi's instruments in a courageous experiment.

The Sangh initiated new constructive initiatives like the one in the realm of education, which later bloomed as 'Nai Talim'. It helped constructive work and workers. But its real mission was development of non-violence and its organization. And that was Gandhi's mission as well. The Sangh was, therefore, a sort of Gandhi's extension. Perhaps that was the reason why Gandhi did not insist on changing its name, although an organization with his name would normally have been distasteful to him. And certainly it was because of this that Gandhi remained present in all the conferences of the Sangh. He spent weeks there in spite of the demands on his time. He patiently replied to the members' questions and explained the subtle meaning and implications of non-violence. The task was so important for him.

Organization of non-violence, by its very nature, is bound to be ever-evolving. So also would be the yardsticks for judging it. It will certainly not be correct to look upon Gandhi Seva Sangh as the ideal. Looking at it today, we shall find it lacking in many respects. The Sangh was an organization registered under a State Act. A non-violent organization must not be so bound. The Sangh had a constitution, under which disciplinary action could be taken. Such thing

should be unthinkable in a non-violent organization. But it has to be borne in mind that no initiative can transcend the limitations of the times. Thinking may transcend the limitations of the place, times and the situation; but any effort to put it in practice has necessarily to be imperfect. What is creditable for the Sangh was that it did put in an effort. And it was equally creditable that it resolved to limit its existence when the situation demanded it. Such efforts are valuable in themselves, as much could be learnt from them. They deepen our understanding and prepare us for the next leap.

Organization, for Gandhi, was the test of non-violence. Such organization is bound to be a long-drawn process marked with advance in the light of experience. That was why Gandhi did not dissolve Gandhi Seva Sangh. The seed was kept intact. It is noteworthy that this seed later germinated into Sarvodaya Samaj and Sarva Seva Sangh in the Sevagram Conference in 1948; that conference was convened by the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Efforts to organize non-violence in the new context followed in the form of Sarvodaya Samaj and Shanti-Sena. Sarva Seva Sangh shouldered the responsibility of Bhoodan and Gramdan, the most spectacular non-violent movement the world has ever witnessed. We can learn much about the working of non-violence from their lessons. This effort too has now stagnated. However, no experiment is wasted if we learn from it.

Discussions in the Sangh Conferences make a fascinating reading. They give a glimpse of the working of minds wedded to non-violence. And what Gandhi said in analyzing the situations and in replying to the queries is not only historically important but relevant as well. It may be noted that the Sangh members mostly appear to be happy in getting answers to their questions from Gandhi or Vinoba or other great leaders. Answers from others, however great they may be, may satisfy the questioner intellectually or silence him; but they become truly convincing only when they come from within. And for this purpose, what is needed is a dialogue on equal footing, and not a question-answer session. But again, lack of it was because of the limitations of the times.

Non-violence, Gandhi believed, is the law of the human race. Unfortunately, we have moved little on the path of non-violence. Although violence is growing, and taking more and more sinister forms, we are almost being dragged on its path, which will lead to nothing but destruction, and even the extinction of human race on the planet Earth. If humanity is to survive, and evolve further, the vicious circle of violence has to be broken. There is no alternative.

And for this purpose, we must deepen our understanding of non-violence. The story of Gandhi Seva Sangh has much to offer in this regard.

[A history of Gandhi Seva Sangh has been written by Abhay Pratap in Hindi under the title Gandhi Seva Sangh ka Itihas: Ahimsa ke Prayog (Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 2011). The speeches by Gandhi, Kishorlal Mashruwala, President of the Sangh etc. and the deliberations at the five conferences of the Sangh are given in an abridged form in the 240-pages annexure to this book.]

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