

Extracts from Savarkar's speech

(Veer Savarkar's views on absolute non-violence (Atyantik Ahimsa) as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi)

Extracts from Savarkar's speech in 1940 at Madura in his presidential address to his party – "Hindu Mahasabha"

An Armed Revolt on a National Scale :-

The first and the foremost effective course that would have presented itself to any subjected people as best calculated to assert its independence while its adversary was entangled into serious war with some of its powerful foes, would have naturally been to rise in arms to assert its own freedom. But firstly, disarmed, disorganized and disunited as we are, an armed revolt against England on a National scale is entirely ruled out under our present circumstances. And, secondly, the question of any armed resistance cannot even form a subject of discussion on an open platform of such institutions as the Hindu Mahasabha or the Congress or any other public and open bodies in India under their present constitutions and within the sphere of action they have chalked out for themselves under their present aims and objects. Consequently, not on any moral grounds but on the grounds of practical politics we are compelled not to concern ourselves on behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha organization with any programme involving any armed resistance, under the present circumstances.

The Gandhijist 'Satyagraha' Based on Absolute NonViolence :-

On the other hand, no programme based on the monomaniacal principle of absolute non-violence is worth a moment's consideration. If the first extreme remedy of an armed rising on a National scale is ruled out on grounds of practical politics, this other extreme of absolute non-violence condemning all armed resistance even to an incorrigible aggression must be ruled out not only on practical grounds alone but even on moral ground

Without going into deep waters for want of space and time to ascertain what constitutes the criterion of a moral action, whether morality derives its sanction from Intuition or Revelation or Exigency, the most practical factor and one which ought to be common to all of these schools of moral thought and which alone can practically serve to distinguish a moral act from an immoral one, a virtue from a vice, the good from the bad is the utilitarian principle that everything that contributes under a given set of circumstances to human good is moral, a virtue and the opposite is immoral, a vice under those given circumstances; that all mortality is essentially human. Judged from this most practical and yet fundamental test, the principle of absolute non-violence condemning all armed resistance even to incorrigible aggression cannot but be ruled out as absolutely impracticable, anti human and therefore positively immoral. If a serpent finds its way slyly into a pack of children sleeping soundly or a mad dog rushes all of a sudden foaming with insane exasperation into a crowded fair and you do not kill it there

and then even if you can, on principle of absolute non-violence, you abet the murderous violence which the serpent or the mad dog commits by biting innocent human beings to death, you are criminally doubly guilty in refusing to save the life of human beings to spare the life of a serpent or a dog and leave it free to take more human lives at leisure as occasion arises. On the contrary if you kill the serpent and the dog there and then you are still guilty of violence from the point of your own principle of absolute non-violence killing no living being. Even this one illustration is enough to prove that the principle of absolute non-violence is not only absolutely impracticable but anti-human and therefore absolutely immoral. What holds good in these individual cases does also hold good in matters affecting nation. It must be noted in this connection that even those religions which put the virtue of non-violence, Ahimsa above all virtues had to admit exceptions and did not or could not assert the absolute non-violence condemning all armed resistance whatsoever even to incorrigible aggression constituted a virtue.

Relative ahimsa अहिंसा is a virtue; but absolute ahimsa अहिंसा a crime !

Of course, relative non-violence on the whole is doubtless a virtue so pre-eminently contributing to human good as to form one of the fundamentals on which human life whether individual or social can take its stand and evolve all social amenities. But absolute non-violence that is non-violence under all circumstances and even when instead of helping human life whether individual or national it causes an incalculable harm to humanity as a whole ought to be condemned as a moral perversity and is on the whole condemned likewise by those very religious and moral schools which lauded relative non-violence as the first and foremost human virtue.

The ahimsa of the Jains and Buddhists is opposed to this Gandhist Doctrine of ahimsa

It should be noted in particular that the ahimsa preached by the Buddhist or the Jain religion is directly opposed to the absolute Ahimsa or the absolute non-violence as Gandhiji interprets it condemning all armed resistance under all circumstances. The very fact that the Jains reared up kingdoms, produced heroes and heroines who fought armed battles and Jain Commanders-in-chief leading Jain armies without being ostracized by the Jain Acharyas proves this point to the hilt that the Ahimsa of the Jains cannot be the rabid Ahimsa of the Gandhist school. Nay, the Jain scriptures openly assert that armed resistance to incorrigible aggression is not only justifiable but imperative. To save a saint from being murdered outright by a violent and armed sinner, Ahimsa itself requires that the sinner should be killed there and then if that act alone could save the life of the saint. Such a Himsa is in itself an act of Ahimsa and the Jain scriptures defend it, almost in the words used by Manu himself to defend it, that the sin of killing in such a case recoils on the murderer himself whose act was responsible for the reaction, 'मन्युस्तन्मन्युमर्हति!' Bhagwan Buddha also gave the same ruling when questioned by the leaders of a clan as to whether they should take to armed resistance as soldiers against the armed aggression, of another clan. 'Soldiers may fight against armed aggression,' said Bhagwan Buddha, 'without committing a sin if but they fight with arms in defence of a righteous cause.'

The defensive sword was the first saviour of man!

Call it a law of nature or the will of God as you like, the iron fact remains that there is no room for absolute non-violence in nature. Man could not have saved himself from utter extinction nor could he have led the precarious and wretched life of a coward and a worm had he not succeeded in adding the strength of artificial Arms to his natural arm. In those Geological periods when he evolved to manhood he was surrounded by such ferocious brute and serpentine order that he found himself, individual to individual, the weakest being; physically the most unfit to survive in contest during the struggle for existence that was raging round in the formidable primitive jungles which was his first home. He had neither poisonous fangs nor tusks nor horns nor blood-thirsty claws. We call the cow as physically and by nature the most harmless and the most incapable of self-defence. But even a cow could have cowed down a man in a naked physical combat and even killed him by piercing her pointed horns in his stomach as none of his natural organs were a match for them. It was only his capacity to invent artificial weapons to add to the strength of his natural limbs, which the beasts and the brutes failed to develop that man could cope with tigers and lions and wolves and serpents and crocodiles and could snatch the mastery of the earth and water from his wild enemies. Throughout the paleolithic periods, the bronze age and the iron age man could maintain himself, multiply and master this earth chiefly through his armed strength. Verily the Defensive Sword was the first Saviour of man !

*The belief in absolute non-violence condemning all
armed resistance even to aggression evinces no
mahatmaic saintliness but a monomaniacal
senselessness !*

What held good in man's struggle with the brute world continued to be true throughout his social, the struggle of clan against clan, race against race, nation against nation. The lesson is branded on every page of human history down to the latest page that nations which, other things equal, are superior in military strength are bound to survive, flourish and dominate while those which are militarily weak shall be politically subjected or cease to exist at all. It is idle to say, we shall and a new chapter to history but you cannot add to or take away a syllable from the iron law of Nature itself. Even today if man hand over a blank cheque to the wolf and the tiger to be filled in, with a human pledge of absolute non-violence, no killing of a living being, no armed force to be used, then the wolves and the tigers will lay waste all your mandirs and mosques, culture and cultivation, Aramas and Ashrams-finish man Saint and sinner alike before a dozen years pass by ! In face of such an iron law of nature can anything be more immoral and sinful than to preach a principle so anti-human as that of absolute non-violence condemning all armed resistance even to aggression?

And yet it is curious to find that even those who condemn this doctrine of absolute non-violence as impracticable seem still to believe that though impracticable for us worldly men, this doctrine is nevertheless highly moral and evince some Mahatmaic excellence, some superhuman sanctity. This apologetic tone must be forthwith changed, It raises these prophets of this eccentric doctrine in their own estimation and makes them feel they had really invented some moral law raising human politics to some divine level. Seeing that even their opponents on practical grounds attribute to them a superhuman saintliness owing to the very eccentricity of their doctrine, they grow, perhaps unconsciously all the more eccentric and have the insane temerity to preach in all seriousness to the

Indian public that 'even the taking up of lathi is sinful. The best means of freeing India from the foreign yoke is the spinning-wheel. Not only that but even after India becomes independent there would not be any necessity of maintaining a single armed soldier or a single warship to protect her frontiers. If but India believes and acts in the spirit of such absolute non-violence maintaining no army, no navy or no air force, no nation in the world shall invade her and even if some armed nations did invade her they could be easily persuaded to fall back as soon as they are confronted by the unarmed army of our Desha Sevikas singing to the tune of the spinning-wheel musical appeals to the conscience of the invading forces.' When things have come to such a pass that such quixotic souls are sent as accredited spokesmen by the credulous crowd to the round table conference and even in foreign lands such senseless proposals are seriously advanced by them in the name of the Indian Nation itself in so many words to the great merriment of the foreign statesmen and the general public in Europe and America- the time has surely come to take this doctrinal plague quite seriously and to counteract it as quickly as possible. We must tell them in no apologetic language but in firm accents that your doctrine of absolute non-violence is not only absolutely impracticable but absolutely immoral. It is not an outcome of any saintliness but of insanity. It requires no ingenuity on your part to tell us that if but all men observe absolute non-violence, there will be no war in the world and no necessity of any armed forces. Just as it requires no extraordinary insight to maintain that if but men learn to live forever mankind will be free from death. We denounce you doctrine of absolute non-violence not because we are less saintly but because we are more sensible than you are. Relative non-violence is our creed and therefore, we worship the defensive sword as the first saviour of man. It was in this faith that Hindus worship the arms as the Symbols of the Shakti, the Kali, and Guru Govindsingh sang his hymn to the Sword.

सुखसंताकरणम् दुर्मतिहरणम् खलदलदलनम् जयतेगम्॥

And we also join with the great Guru in the refrain and sing with him, 'Hail Thee, Sword.'

It is in this spirit that I want all Hindus to get themselves re-animated and re-born into a martial race. Manu and Shri Krishna are our law givers and Shri Rama the Commander of our forces. Let us re-learn the manly lessons they taught us and our Hindu Nation shall prove again as unconquerable and conquering a race as we proved once when they led us : conquering those who dared to be aggressive against us and refraining ourselves, not out of weakness but out of magnanimity, from any unjustifiable designs of aggression against the unoffending.