



RESEARCH PAPER



H.D. THOREAU'S THEORY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE—GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY OF A NATION'S EMANCIPATION THROUGH STRUGGLE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

S Kiran Chaithanya

(Lecturer in English, Dr. B.R.R Degree College, Jadcherla. Mahabubnagar. T.S.)

ABSTRACT



Henry David Thoreau was an American poet, philosopher and a naturalist. He lived in Concord, Massachusetts during 1817-1862. He is famous for his book "Walden" which was published in 1854 and is an example for simple austere living. He along with Ralph Waldo Emerson spearheaded 'transcendentalism' in America which underscored boundless potential of human life and individual soul in transcending the limits of physicality. In 1848, Thoreau delivered a lecture on "The Rights and Duties of the individual in relation to government" which later came out as "Resistance to Civil Government" in 1849.

By reading Resistance to civil Government and comparing the theoretical part of it with those of Non-cooperation (1920-1922) and Civil Disobedience (1930) movements of Indian freedom struggle, the reader will come across the verisimilitude of theory and practice.

Keywords: *Non-Violence, Disobedience, Civil Rights, Tax Resistance.*

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There are two mass movements in India which united all the Indians irrespective of caste, creed and religion against the exploitative rule of British Imperialism.

Non- Cooperation movement (1920-1922) led by Mahatma Gandhi against the "Jallianwala Bhagh Massacre" which threatened to root out the very roots of British raj with its refusal to buy British goods and liquor shop picketing.

The massacre executed by Dyer showcased the satanic face of the alien rule on our soil. All the

offices and factories were hit with peaceful non-violent demonstrations. Impetus was provided to the production of Swadeshi goods. Many Indians deserted their official positions of colonial rule and teachers left their teaching positions. Lawyers boycotted their law courts. English manufactured goods were put to fire. A wave of dignity of self-rule and pride in indigenously manufactured goods swept across the sub- continent. It is declared that cooperating the "Bloody- Rule" of the British Empire



is a 'Sin' and Non-Violent resistance is the only catharsis of the guilt of supporting 'Sin'.

The movement resulted in the Unification of the people and it became a clarion call to them to come out of their petty reasons which made them isolated from other fellow citizens. Hindu Muslim unity had shaken the foundations of foreign rule. If it had not been for the "chauri - chaura" Incident that brought propeller of freedom struggle of 1920-1922 to a screeching halt, India would have gained its freedom from bondage as early as 1920s. The spirit of Non- Violent protest which formed the very core of the non-cooperation movement was burnt alive with the incident of "chauri-chaura" on 5th February, 1922. The cessation of the movement abruptly attracted criticism from various quarters, yet Mahatma Gandhi was unmoved from his decision because if the very psyche of the populace was not filled with the sacredness of Non- Violence it would be meaningless to bestow freedom upon them.

Gandhiji was arrested along with many national leaders and the movement was suppressed, yet according to the contemporary historians the Non Cooperation movement set a direction and provided an ideological framework to the future of Indian struggle.

Non-Violent protest and tax resistance had become the two prominent tools of resistance for Civil Dis-Obedience which was also called "Dandi March" or "Dandi Satyagraha". From an outer aspect it seems to be a simple act of making salt but it had set an example of undeniable courage and invested faith in one's conviction of fighting the draconian law with peaceful non-violent means. It reiterated the citizen's right to protest against imposition of ruthless law, for 26 days from 12th March 1930 to 6th April 1930 slowly but steadily like a brewing tornado which could reach to its peak energy with the passing movements of time, the Dandi – March. It had shaken the British rule sending shivers through the spinal cord of its establishments. Millions of Indians got united together and came onto the streets to show their allegiance to the march. Satyagraha (Truth-Force) achieved its deserved respect and attention from the masses of India.

Un-related Purna Swaraj became the sole goal of Indian National Congress. It brought the

Viceroy Lord Irwin to the negotiating table and India succeeded in attracting worldwide attention to its Freedom Struggle.

In "On the Civil Disobedience" which was published in 1849, Henry David Thoreau declares that " That government is best which governs least" highlighting the spirit of self-rule upholding the dignity of right to live free. He further says that government is expedient. It fortifies the fact that when a government imposes lacerating measures of exploitative rule on its subjects or colonizes a free human being by subjecting him to inhuman suppression ... the government becomes inexpedient. He vehemently disapproves an undue respect for law as it results in the creation of army of which soldiers would be marching into the war against their wills, against their common sense and consciences. Thoreau says that a man should not take the role of supporting the heinous government in any form and the tax resistance is the key far doing it. Thoreau compares the government with a machine, if the machine is producing the seeds of injustice, author says, what one has to do is to see, at any rate, that one's life should see as a counter friction to stop.

Thoreau observes that of a thousand men did not pay tax bills that year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure as it would be to pay them, and enable the state to commit violence and shed innocent blood; he furthers the idea of peaceful revolution by refusing to pay taxes. Thoreau's answer to the tax gatherer is "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office" is significant how it is put to practice during the non-cooperation and Civil Dis-Obedience movements of Indian freedom struggle when thousands of Indian intellectuals, factory men vacated their positions as protest against the colonial rule.

A state of, according to Thoreau shall succeed to bear the fruit of perfection and glory in terms of peace, progress, amity and universal justice. If it is not so, it is in the very right of its subject to protest against it. The protest shall be with peaceful non-violent efforts so that the ruler too can gain conscience of justice and era can be heralded into a glorious future.

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