

Tolstoy and Gandhi and their Legacy Today

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Tolstoy and Gandhi followed the principle of Non-violence in interpersonal and international relations between individuals and organisations. There are many aspects of Non-violence in today's life which could give us benefit in case we are prepared and willing to learn from Tolstoy and Gandhi. Four aspects of Non-violence according to Tolstoy and Gandhi are of utmost importance and meaning for us today:

1. Good Labour / Bread Labour;
2. Vegetarian / Vegan Ethics;
3. Pacifism / Antimilitarism; and
4. Trusteeship

If we summarize the ***"Gospel of Renunciation"*** according to Tolstoy and Gandhi, we find the following basic ideas for our future action:

- Creating empathy and compassion for the weakest whose lives are endangered;
- Identifying with the poorest to contribute to their/our social and moral uplift; and
- Emancipating society from all forces of violent fear and destruction.

Global emancipation will be only possible through the suppressed outcast [es] of society who follows Truth on the pathway of Non-violence. We should give an example!

During the preparation of my lecture on Tolstoy's and Gandhi's legacy for an international conference on "**Nuclear weapons and Non-violence**" in Copenhagen [Denmark], I recollected by heart the basic ideas of both of them with reference to Labour, Nature, Peace and Property.

1. Good Labour / Bread Labour: Tolstoy as well as Gandhi was influenced by the Christian writer Timofej Bondarev and his plea for Bread Labour and by John Ruskin and his plea for Good Labour. Both writers inspired Tolstoy and Gandhi tremendously. The Russian peasant writer Bondarev described the life as a peasant and gardener [agriculture and horticulture] as the ideal life. He recommended students and academics to spend one month per year as peasant or gardener, not in the city but in a village. The English writer John Ruskin emphasized the value of Good Labour which gives benefit to all mankind, most of all to the weakest and poorest of society. Both writers drew inspiration from the Gospels on Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ. Both writers were Christians whose message convinced Tolstoy and Gandhi.
2. Vegetarian / Vegan Ethics: Tolstoy became Vegetarian when he visited the slaughter-house in Tula [Russia] and observed the slaughtering of animals for meat production. He wrote an impressing essay on Vegetarian Ethics when he described "**The First Step**" on the fragile path to realize good principles and to reform the individual life: first to fast and to contemplate the essence and meaning of life, then to become Vegetarian and afterwards continue with new steps towards the "**Gospel of Renunciation**". Gandhi had been an ardent believer in the ideas of Vegetarian Ethics since his student days when

he became member of the London Vegetarian Society and when he met Henry Salt, the most important writer on the history and philosophy of Vegetarianism. During all his life, Gandhi made experiments with Vegetarian diets of various kinds: saltless diet, fruitarian diet, abstention from cow's milk etc. In addition, he made experiments with Nature Cure, inspired by Central European writers. Gandhi combined Vegetarian Ethics and Nature Cure. He struggled hard to observe the principles of Chastity and Renunciation in thought, word and deed. And we know, he frequently accused himself in failing, in being weak, not strong on his path of Non-violence – the same with Tolstoy who went almost desperate and insane. Both, Tolstoy and Gandhi, knew that they were not able to live up to their principles completely, but nevertheless continued their **“Experiments with Truth”** on the path of Non-violence.

3. Pacifism / Antimilitarism: Tolstoy and Gandhi advocated the abolition of the military, of military conscription and the military system! They were opposing any kind of war or civil war or military aggression, even the use of the military as means of defending the borders, the territory, the people or the democracy. Of course, Tolstoy and Gandhi learnt their lessons in their life: Tolstoy as a soldier in the Crimean War, Gandhi as a stretcher-bearer in the South African Boer War and the so-called Zulu Rebellion and in the First World War. Both, Tolstoy and Gandhi, became followers of the principle of Non-violence, pure and simple, and Pacifists who advocated the end of any war, the end of all wars. But both of them knew how immense the struggle would become to secure State action in the desired direction, because each would be afraid and distrustful of his neighbour. Tolstoy's active

support for conscientious objectors to military service, not only in Russia, but also in several other countries, was the basis for his sympathy and solidarity in his correspondence with young Gandhi in South Africa. Gandhi, in his later years, did not insist on imposing his own principles on his contemporaries, like e.g. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, but he kept his principles until his very last days when he wanted to actively reconcile the relations between India and Pakistan.

4. Trusteeship: Tolstoy and Gandhi believed in God and knew that their individual lives were given to them by God. They knew that they were trustees in all respects. Everything that was given to them was only lent to them. That meant: They were not forever the owners of their body, of their intellect, of their life. Their ideal was to live according to the principle that they should gain the confidence of the weakest and poorest of their fellow citizens by acting in such a non-violent way that would benefit to the welfare of all: *Sarvodaya*. And they knew that their relation to property would be the same: only for a certain period of time during which they fulfilled their duty for the benefit of all, not only for a majority, but for everyone, every human being. Trusteeship was, in principle, just another concept which they could find in the Christian Gospels. And they could apply this principle of Trusteeship to Democracy, Industry, Culture and Society. Of course, this principle was excluding brute force or violence against any owner or class of owners, but no owner deserved his wealth and possessions unless he realized his individual and social responsibilities to support and help everyone in the society, most of those entire outcasts without public voice and vote. That is why Tolstoy

wanted to become himself a peasant that is why Gandhi wanted to become himself a farmer and weaver that is why Tolstoy supported the Vegetarian Pacifist farmers and craftsmen of the Doukhobors that is why Gandhi supported the outcastes in his society, the so-called untouchable Dalits or Harijans.

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