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Satyagraha & Democracy-A 21st Century Perspective

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Prelude

(Roy 2020) Shaheen Bagh protest which started as a spontaneous initiative attracted nationwide attention as it was a classic case of satyagraha affirming a just cause of equality. The protest remained uninterrupted with women demonstrating there day and night for 101 days starting from 15 December 2019 till 24 March 2020 and was called off only after the Covid-19 Pandemic began to have a spike in Delhi. Even though the sit-in had taken place on a part of the public road blocking traffic, police allowed the demonstration to go on. In mid-February 2020 the Supreme Court sponsored a delegation of interlocutors to have a dialogue with the demonstrators to allow traffic on a part of the road. However, right from the beginning, the ruling party's hostility to the initiative was abundantly clear. They scandalised the initiative calling it foreign-funded and Pakistan-sponsored and anti-national. After the outbreak of the communal riots in northeast Delhi in the last week of February, the organisers of the Shaheen Bagh protest were accused of fomenting it. The chargesheet on the riots filed in Delhi High Court in on 21 September 2020 and the supplementary chargesheet of 07 October 2020 included many intellectuals, lawyers and social activists who had shown solidarity with Shaheen Bagh. Interestingly enough, months later, on 08 October 2020 the Supreme Court of India gave a ruling on the Shaheen Bagh event forbidding demonstrations in public place and blaming the police for not taking timely action to clear the road for traffic. This judicial order has shocked many civil society organisations and democratic forces. (Indian Express 2020). But the historic significance of Shaheen Bagh and its long term impact has already become a part of the satyagraha folklore in India and beyond. The anti-CAA campaign had gone on all over the country and many mini-Shaheen Baghs were enacted in many parts of India- three in UP (Allahabad, Kanpur and Lucknow), two in Patna, also three in Kolkata, Pune, Ranchi and Kota many in small scale in other parts of India.(Times of India 2020). Everywhere women were the largest in number. Youth component was conspicuous. Reading the Preamble of the Indian Constitution and affirming equality in citizenship rights were the common themes in the demonstrations. Students in colleges and technical institutes engaged in many innovative methods such as lighting candles, putting up paintings, singing and enacting short plays on the issue of discrimination

and rededicating themselves to the values of the Constitution. Everywhere, they were peaceful and women formed the major part. Muslims, the battered minority facing increasing attacks were very much a part of the campaigns, but what was distinct about this campaign was that it was a movement involving people from all communities, non-Muslims in majority standing up to defend the foundational values of the Republic of India as secular and democratic. (Farooqi 2020)

The movement against the what was considered an unjust law involving large number of people using peaceful methods, reaffirming the values of the Indian Constitution had all the features of a satyagraha in the Gandhi tradition. It had of course made use of elements of modern technology and communication.

Black Lives Matter

In the USA the Black Lives Matter movement spurred into a nationwide mass campaign after George Floyd, an African American man was killed by a white police officer in a gruesome manner by pressing his neck with the knee on 25 May 2020. Several such incidents had taken place in the recent years showing how the American criminal justice system reflected a high degree of racial injustice. The reaction to this incident, however, surpassed all earlier protests. There was an unprecedented upsurge of men and women from both white and black communities along with Chicanos, Asians and others taking peaceful marches in cities and towns chanting slogans such as 'justice for blacks'. Many commentators recalled the civil rights rallies and demonstrations of the 1960s including the famous mass rally addressed by Dr Martin Luther King Jr in 1963 in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 ending discrimination in great many spheres was the result of that. In the wake of the protests against the Vietnam War the anti-racism campaigns had picked up. But the current wave of Black Lives Matter campaign had more people joining, including a vastly larger number of whites and all of them demanding a host of reforms not only in police matters but also in education, health and employment in all of which racial disparities and

even discrimination persisted. In some cases the confrontation with the police led to incidents of violence. But everywhere the organisers scrupulously maintained their commitment to carry on the campaign peacefully. This movement reached a new stage in the history of anti-racist struggles in the US. (Michael D Yates 2020) In the recent years, when it was realised that in the anti-racist campaigns such as the Black Lives Matter, much of the focus was on the male victims of police atrocities and other discriminations, a new stream of anti-racist movement highlighting the plight of black women emerged that was known as SayHerName and quickly acquired major support all over the US. (Brown 2017). Women also turned out in a large number. In July 2020 when one of the stalwarts of the civil rights movement, Congressman John Lewis passed away, in a eulogy delivered by Rev James Lawson- another living legend of the campaign chronicled what he described as the half century's 'satyagraha, soul force, love truth for justice and equality' in America where Dr King, John Lewis and himself were among the active participants in the struggle in the Gandhian tradition. (Lawson 2020)

Both these movements were still going on even though they had slowed down by the continuing rise of Covid infections both in US and India as of December 2020. Racial justice became a major issue of debates during the Presidential elections in the US. While President Trump ridiculed the Black Lives Matter campaign as anarchist action and a law and order challenge, the Biden-Harris team defended it and promised concrete measures to address racial injustice on multiple fronts. The victory of Joe Biden to the office of the President and especially of Kamala Harris who was a child of a Black father from Jamaica and a South Asian mother from India, expectations had been aroused to see structural initiatives in the direction of reducing racial injustice. In India the anti-CAA demonstrations may not be visible for various reasons. But the protest sentiments persisted. The campaigns are likely to continue in one form or the other as the issues demanded fundamental change and there were antagonistic forces in both the countries who are likely to put up strong opposition to them. The votaries of Hindutva politics in India and the forces of white supremacy in the US stick to their perspectives and carry on their agenda by taking advantage of democratic processes on the one hand and strategy of neoliberal economic growth on the other. In both cases modern

communications and technology of mobilisation, repression and surveillance are used to reach the ground level and touch people's everyday lives. In both instance we find that satyagraha which is a quintessential form of people's initiative for democratic transformation, is confronted with democracy in distortions.

This is the problematic we take up in this paper. What insights do we get from Gandhi's own experiences of satyagraha to respond to the current crises in the practice of democracy.

One noticeable aspect of the celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in 2019 all over the world was the scanty attention paid to the concept and practice of satyagraha by Gandhi in his life time or the many instances of satyagraha since his death. Memorial activities of specific landmark satyagraha such as the observance of centenary of the mass protest by the Indian community against the Asian Registration Act in front of the Jewish Empire Theatre in Johannesburg which is regarded as the first conspicuous 'satyagraha' in South Africa on 11 September 1906 led by Gandhi did take place. (Gandhi 1968, Singh 2007). The 75th anniversary of Salt Satyagraha in 2005 or the centenary of Champaran Satyagraha in 2017 also drew some attention. (Ghosh 2019) Which aspects a particular regime or a social group or an institution highlighted when and why, would be an important area of investigation by itself. Our concern here is to stress that satyagraha like swaraj was a key element in Gandhi's philosophy and action and it has an enduring significance.

The value of the concept of satyagraha lies in the fact that it is inherently connected with the idea of social transformation to achieve more desirable conditions of life on earth. People launch satyagraha for achieving justice, equality, freedom for one and all including a mutually supportive relationship between the human species and nature which Gandhi had stressed a lot. It is essentially directed at changing unjust actions, practices and policies and affirming desirable objectives. That is what relates satyagraha with democracy which aims at realising self-rule by people. Efforts to change the conditions which constrain the achievement for

self-rule may take the form of satyagraha. Series of satyagraha movements were launched in course of India's freedom struggle not only to achieve independence from British colonial rule, but also to challenge many unjust social practices. By the time of Gandhi's death, the satyagraha idea had struck a root in the democratic consciousness in India and abroad and it continued to inspire democratic action programmes worldwide and gradually it acquired a permanent place in discourse on transformation.

In this paper I argue that despite much change in historical conditions and technological developments, Gandhi's practice of satyagraha provided important insights and pathways to cope with the variety of challenges that democracy encountered in the twenty first century. That is the reason why satyagraha in different names and forms are living forms of mass action for justice all over the world. They may be acts of civil disobedience, rallies, sit-in, demonstrations, strikes, hunger strikes, gherao and *rasta roko* as conscious obstructions -therefore also forms of civil disobedience. As moral-political action to transform society and strengthen democracy they are prevalent all over the world. Even though it is a mass action, the actual number of protesters does not matter.

To explain this we first take up the relationship between satyagraha and democracy focusing on what I call the 'truth linkage' between them as both challenge untrue premises and seek practice of truth. Then we take up three major crises in contemporary democracies and discuss how satyagraha of Gandhi's time provided key perspectives to attend to each of them.

Truth linkage in *Satyagraha* and *Democracy*

There is a truth premise underlying democracy. If democracy is about people's self-rule or people governing themselves, rather than being governed by a few or one authority from around them or from far, the reason is the belief that the humans are equal to one another and capable of self-rule. Thus the equality principle is the premise of democracy. We also

know the fact that there is inequality in wealth, status, living conditions and life opportunities in societies across the world. Equal value of human life is the principle which drove the thinking towards adopting and promoting the idea of democracy. Inequality of life conditions is also a truth. (Mohanty 2019) Pursuing democracy to transform the unequal conditions and make steady progress towards greater and greater equality so as to achieve equality in real world is the 'truth linkage' between democracy and satyagraha. Satyagraha as pursuit of truth is thus embedded in the practice of democracy.

There are three affirmations on truth in this statement on equality of humans and the reality of inequality in society. One is a normative affirmation which is the commitment to the belief about equal value of all human beings. The second is an empirical affirmation that conditions of unequal possessions, varieties of discrimination and oppression exist in society all over the world. Third is the historical affirmation which is another empirical recognition that human civilisation has acknowledged the existence of inequalities and rearranged human relations for the better, by many modes of transformation. All three statements are truth statements and interconnected. To locate the discourse on truth either in normative or empirical or historical plane exclusively raises many questions. That require a separate exercise.

In all three realms satyagraha has roots. The value statement on such ideas as equality, freedom, social justice or right to self-determination of colonies is the normative starting point of satyagraha. It is the affirmation of that truth which justifies mass action. Similarly, the truth about the empirical situation of inequality, injustice or domination is the reference point of satyagraha which aims at transforming that situation. Finally, this mass action is always linked with historical processes to support both the cherished goal as well as the current agenda of change.

Satyagraha is thus 'truth pursuit' in normative, empirical and historical senses. Whether it is a specific mass campaign against a policy or a practice or a wider phenomenon of social process consisting of a whole spectrum of

action it always challenges the untrue premise of that policy or practice. In the case of the anti-CAA campaign in December 2019 for example, the exclusion of the Muslims from the list of victimised communities in the neighbouring countries had a false premise. A biased regime seemed to have decided to exclude Muslims from the citizenship claims because it did not favour excessive number of Muslims to populate India. This view of India as a 'Hindu nation' is an untrue statement. The Partition of India that created a Muslim-majority state of Pakistan retained India as a multireligious, multilingual and multi-ethnic country. The Hindutva forces made it the central plank of their political mobilisation to redefine the character of the Indian society. The CAA was one of the latest campaigns in that series.

In the same way Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name campaigns questioned the untrue premise of the 'white supremacists'. Whether the nature of the US society was to be seen as predominantly WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) thus taking all kinds of measures to limit immigration, pursue cultural and educational policies to maintain the hegemony of Christian values of West European origin and build state institutions accordingly was the point of debate. The truth is that Europeans arrived in the American continent with superior military strength, cleared much of the land by fighting and killing local population and confining the remaining native Americans in forest reservations and settled themselves to begin building a society in the image of their original European model in the sixteenth century. Another truth was the white Americans' slave trade with Africa, again using force and employing the new technology of naval transport on the seas making slave labour a component of the growing agricultural economy in the US. The American Civil War of 1863-1865 abolished slavery in legal terms under the leadership of President Abraham Lincoln, but discrimination against the Blacks continued denying equal rights in voting, housing, transportation, schooling, employment and many other spheres. The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s led by Dr Martin Luther King Jr resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965. But in real life discriminations against Black people persisted. Poverty, unemployment, poor health conditions, educational underperformance and many other disabilities are most visible among the blacks even today. This situation had led to riots in

many cities in the 1960s. But the general consciousness favouring equal opportunities across races had grown in the US. The election of Barack Obama as President for two terms in 2012-2016 was an indicator of this. But white supremacist ideology continued to exist and it surfaced in many places from time to time. The killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 was one of the many instances manifesting racism in state institutions. It gave rise to widespread rallies and demonstrations demanding institutional reforms to afford justice to the Black people.

Both these campaigns, the anti-CAA campaign and the Black Lives Matter illustrate one truth about the continued difference of opinion on values such as equality. If we take caste and patriarchy it is even clearer. Many still believe that white race is superior to other races. Many believe that their own religion is superior to other religions. This was so in the past causing crusades, invasions and colonisation. It has many modern forms in terms of various missions or subtle programmes. Anti-colonial struggles challenged this proposition and promoted the concept of equality of respect for all religions. The United Nations adopted this framework of equality in its many declarations. Majority of Constitutions in the world adopted freedom of religion as a basic human right for all. Yet, as seen in the post 9/11 era, assertive currents were evident in all religions of the world and they continued to grow. (Juergensmeyer 2017) In case of caste order, even though Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and enshrined right to equality as a fundamental right, upper caste domination in society, economy and politics persisted. Atrocities against Dalits continued to take place despite many legal steps to prevent it. In case of women, the situation is no different. Unequal opportunities in every sphere, discrimination at home, in work place and in society is a persisting phenomenon. One could give many more examples from these and other realms. But the point to stress here is that inequality persisted in real life even though the value of equality among races, religious groups, castes, men and women and many other criteria such as place of birth has been accepted as a desirable value in everywhere in the world.

This is where satyagraha becomes the arena of intervention to pursue the goal of equality in an unequal condition. The truth about the normative

value of equality, the truth about the empirical situation of persisting inequality and the truth that there is a history of struggle against inequality which has achieved successes- in all three realms truth linkage between satyagraha and democracy is clear. Such debates had started in different parts of the world from the early days in history when democracy in one form or the other was declared as a cherished value though the exact term for the idea may be different. When Buddha challenged the caste order in the sixth century BC, questioning the right of the Brahman-Kshyatriya class to rule over the Shudras and Atishudras (Dalits in current parlance), and had affirmed equality of all humans in a Janapada, it was a democratic assertion. At that time and even now in many places, the upper caste believed that the lower castes were 'not fit to rule'. In Greece the dominant view was that 'men of reason' or 'men of wisdom' had the right to rule assisted by the 'men of spirit' or the soldiers over the 'men of appetite' or the workers while the slaves were to be kept out of the political order. Thus the supporters of monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy had many 'justifications' saying that only the wise, rich, strong and powerful were divinely ordained with the right to rule over the others. In the same way, nations claiming superiority in knowledge, culture and race or having 'civilisation', using their armed forces invaded other territories to colonise and rule over many parts of the world. They set up empires and imposed their values and institutions proclaiming their 'noble intentions about helping natives', using religious missionaries to 'enlighten the savages in the dark regions'. It was only when movements against such claims gathered momentum, through many kinds of upheavals ranging from cultural campaigns to armed uprisings by natives or oppressed groups that the untruth of their claims was exposed. That is, in a nutshell, the genealogy of the truth linkage between democracy and satyagraha which overthrew colonialism, apartheid, slavery and has achieved many substantial gains in the struggles against patriarchy, race and caste oppression.

But there are new modes of domination in the functioning of democracy which market economy and communication technology manage in the current era. Does Satyagraha offer some insights to promote the democratic agenda in the face of the new challenges in the era of neoliberalism?

Three crisis points in contemporary politics

Democratic theory had long been preoccupied with one central dilemma as to whether procedure must be given precedence to substance. Institutional procedures such as free and fair elections as a mode of change of rulers in a peaceful manner, freedom of expression including freedom of press and independence of judiciary as stipulated in a country's Constitution were considered as the key elements defining democracy. This was based on the assumption that after all methods must be designed to achieve self-governance. This led to multiple methods such as various types of party systems, numerous voting systems, distribution of power and above all multiple modes of separation of powers to ensure accountability and responsibility. Formal institutions of the state coexisted with important socio-political institutions such as the free media, civil society organisations, organisations of economic actors and so on. On the other hand, those who emphasised the primacy of substance of democracy as a system guaranteeing equality, freedom, social justice, human rights and reason viewed preoccupation with procedures as an inadequate notion of democracy. Those who insisted on the centrality of procedures and institutions also believed that all initiatives for change must be taken through electoral campaigns and legislations rather than mass movements. We have no intention to revisit this familiar debate or the many debates and controversies on the various dimensions and waves of democracy. We only wish to assert that that both procedures and substance are integral to the concept of democracy.

This is where the truth linkage in satyagraha and democracy amplifies the dynamic and developmental interdependence between procedures and substance, between institutions and people's movements. A people's movement challenges an unjust practice and when more and more people see the truth underlying the demand and the falsity represented in the wrong practice, then there is a movement for a new law or a constitutional amendment and other structural guarantees. Once that is enshrined in law the system must implement it and people while respecting it need to continue the efforts to ensure its enforcement. In course of further practice new inadequacies and injustices in that very provision of law may be

discovered and that may be pointed out in fresh waves of people's movements. Thus satyagraha constantly increases the substance of democracy. This constantly changing and developing process takes the society into a relatively more and more just and acceptable stage. This is the process of the emergence of a creative society where hitherto subdued contradictions become manifest and as people become aware of their creative potentiality they launch struggles to eliminate constraints on realising their creativity.(Mohanty 1998)

This process now faces new threats endangering the core principles of democracy. Neoliberal market economy and advancing communication technology now produce three crisis points in all political systems seriously distorting democracies. They are:

Mobilisation through communication technology steadily overpowering the possibilities of reason which should guide discussions from various viewpoints in a democracy.

Emptying institutions and laws of their spirit and using them merely as formal procedures.

Unprecedented magnitude of centralisation power suppressing voices, choices and rights of individuals, groups and regions.

To respond to all three challenges and preserve the basic tents of democracy and pursue the path of democratic social transformation we get some important insights from Gandhi's satyagraha experiences.

High Voltage Mobilisation vs Reason

The first challenge has come from the way market economy has grown investing enormous resources in terms of money, material incentives and

human resources in the hands of politicians and political parties in modern democracies. This has made contesting elections such an expensive affair that ordinary citizens find it extremely difficult to enter the electoral competition. It has meant close alliance between wealthy corporate houses and politicians with multiple combinations presenting a spectacle of competition. This relationship makes the notion of autonomy of government or even of the state an unreal and outdated idea. The resources are utilised for electoral mobilisation in more and more intensive ways. Maintaining cadres of a party, doing door-to-door mobilisation and even engaging in gratification of the electorate and many similar things cost money. In a competitive party system the amounts continue to increase. Add to it the modern means of propaganda on television, in social media, through multiple kinds of advertisements. New social media involves organising armies of trolls, paid offices of experts and investigating and data gathering personnel who design propaganda strategies, attack opposing views and present the leadership's view in apparently most attractive and convincing manner. The electoral bond law in India in 2017, for example, legalised anonymous donations to political parties facilitating the process of direct contributions to ruling parties easy and unaccountable. Ironically the Government of India had introduced the scheme in the 2017-2018 Union Budget to make political funding 'transparent'. (Anuaja 2019).

A parallel provision was made by the US Supreme Court in the case, *Citizens United vs Federal Electoral Commission* in 2010 allowing unlimited contributions openly given to parties.

This combination of large money in electoral mobilisation and technology of new media in digital and satellite age has made reason in discussions a casualty. Like equality, freedom and justice the element of reason is an integral part of democracy that links procedure of decision-making with substantive goals in a democracy. Whether it is parliamentary debates or writings in newspapers and magazines, whether it is discussions in public forums or in television studios presentation of arguments and counterarguments on various aspects of a subject based on evidence and logical reasoning is extremely important to arrive at a desirable decision.

Here respect for the minority opinion is most important because often it is the minority at a point of history that may have captured a fact or condition which may lead to a change for the better. At a future date that opinion may become the view of the majority. Here formal institutions and social movements both become equally important arenas for reasoning and deliberations. Formal institutions may have become tied to established ways of functioning with routinised patterns of behaviour. This is why social movements in multiple forms open up new possibilities. All the mass movements in history including the of satyagraha episodes were rich with multiple forms of creative work. They may be in the form of literary creations , poetry and drama or films. They may be street meetings and demonstrations. In case the message of the people’s movements do not attract the attention of the rulers, there may be strikes by workers and rallies and marches, and mass fasts. In case that does not have any effect on the rulers, the next stage is resort to civil disobedience, violating law and courting arrest or punishment. Then of course, the issue of strategy of political movement is debated by the rebellious forces as to how to increase pressure on the regime. In all this, presenting the alternative vision by reasoning is the key common point and history vindicates this. This is the central message that Gandhi’s ‘experiments with truth’ gave to history. Several instances of faulty perceptions, misunderstanding and wrongdoings are narrated explicitly in *Gandhi’s An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* from which experiences in life – it covers till 1921-he derived the method of pursuit of truth and the concept of satyagraha. (Gandhi 1968) He explained that truth is based on reason and therefore eventually reason will prevail and truth shall be vindicated. Satyagraha is founded on this principle. He stressed this aspect so strongly that he said that according to him “Truth is God”.

It is commonly believed that satyagraha is an ethical principle. Gandhi’s many discourses and actions and his stress on non-violence may, on the surface, convey that feeling. But seen in depth, the political element in it becomes clear as it aimed at altering the power structure inherent in the policy or practice that was the target of a satyagraha. Therefore, it is better to characterise *satyagraha as a moral-political principle* having both ethical and political dimensions. Firstly, a desirable value is argued with reason by not only a few leaders but also by the masses and that reasoning is directed

at the rulers. Thus the moral dimension is embedded in the reasoning of the value as just and objectively desirable. Secondly, at the same time it is a political act because arguing it in public with political programmes such as civil disobedience, long marches, fasting and other actions creates mass support that acquires power for the demand and is thus put forth before the regime. But if in an apparently functioning democracy such acts are overwhelmed by electronic mobilisation and expensive propaganda pushing the line advocated by the rulers the element of reason is lost. The rulers assert that they are justified in what they were doing and they sell it well making it difficult for alternative views to be heard. The very first instance of Gandhi's political protest of this kind in South Africa illustrated this.

On 7 June 1893 Gandhi was evicted from a train in the Pietermaritzburg station in South Africa because the coach was reserved for 'whites only'. Gandhi had the requisite ticket for the coach, still he was asked to move to a rear compartment of the train because he was not white. When he refused to move he was thrown out of the train along with his luggage. Incidentally this operation was carried out by the guard, the constable and a co-passenger who had complained about Gandhi's entry into the compartment. Mark the complicit state at play with its coercive organ, the police and the guard, as well as the racist members of society maintaining and enforcing the unjust racist system. That is the pattern that operates all unequal structures which enforce false claims about the justification of the existing discriminations and oppressions. White supremacists in the US and the lynch-mobs in India are sometimes let loose to attack their targets- Blacks in US and Muslims or Dalits in India- while the police stand by. On that day, Gandhi instantly decided to challenge the discriminatory treatment given to coloured people by the white regime and refused to move out of the railway platform and stayed put there all night. After that incident got wide publicity, more and more people in South Africa joined him in solidarity. That was the beginning of what was later christened as satyagraha. On the occasion of the celebration of the 125th anniversary of this incident, Gopal Krishna Gandhi (2018) writes:

'Pietermaritzburg 1893 gets re-enacted ever so often in the lives of disempowered citizens, not so much in the hands of fellow-passengers, guards and constables, but at the invisible hands of those with social, political and economic monopoly.'

Between 1893 and 1913 Gandhi engaged in numerous protest actions by masses demanding justice for all. These were in many forms which had wide impact on all sections of society, spreading the appeal of the reasoned argument for equal treatment for all races. It also attracted the attention of the rulers who time and again resorted to coercive measures against Gandhi and the protestors. One such action was the burning of their identity cards by over 2000 coloured people on 16 August 1908. Similarly in 1913 a mass satyagraha was organised when the racist regime ruled discouraging inter-religious marriages between Hindus and Muslims by levying a tax of three sterling pounds. Most such actions landed Gandhi in jail, but each time the court trial brought the reasoned argument for racial justice into the public consciousness through the media and people's discussion forums. Men and women of the oppressed races who had accepted racial hierarchy as impregnable now saw possibilities of change. Meanwhile the white racists themselves evolved a variety of management strategies to maintain their power through the Apartheid system. The saga of the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela which reached momentum success in 1990 had not only got inspiration from Gandhi's satyagraha, but has itself enriched the global history of satyagraha. Nelson Mandela's speech at Pietermaritzburg celebrating the centenary of the train incident vindicated this. He said:

The Mahatma is an integral part of our history because it is here that he first experimented with truth; here that he demonstrated his characteristic firmness in pursuit of justice; here that he developed Satyagraha as a philosophy and a method of struggle.

(Mandela 1993)

While leaving Africa in 1914, Gandhi had said that he felt that satyagraha was 'perhaps the mightiest instrument on earth'. The term that he had chosen out of a number of suggestions that had reached the pages of his journal, *Indian Opinion*, in response to a competition that was announced, was *satyagraha*. But its fuller implications became clearer as his experiments with truth went on. Gradually what had become clear to Gandhi and his colleagues in South Africa was that reasoned argument for a just demand, backed and steadily amplified by mass action, was the key element of satyagraha. That turned a society into a creative society where the latent contradictions came into the open, leading to handling of them through cultural and political activities until they were addressed and resolved progressively in course of the transformation of a society. Satyagraha is thus a critical component of a creative society. (Mohanty 1998)

The Black Lives Matter campaign in the US and the anti-CAA agitation in India among many other cases such as atrocities against Dalits and women and persecution of tribal people struggling to defend their land and forest rights show that truth pursuit is a continuous process as new forms of domination on the very same relations of race, caste, religion, ethnicity and gender etc emerge from time to time. Thus satyagraha and democracy are mutually reinforcing phenomena in an unfolding process of transformation. Space for reason in all forums, institutions and entire public sphere must be a basic condition for the practice of democracy in the twenty first century where money and technology threaten to undermine it and authoritarianism has risen in the garb of democracy worldwide.

Manipulation of Institutions Violating the Spirit of Laws

A related trend is the widespread phenomenon of using institutions of democracy in ways that go contrary to their original purposes. Same is true of existing laws. Money and technology are used to strongly project their current use as desirable in the interest of society and new demands for development. The fact that a leadership had been elected with majority support is cited as the source of authority justifying such use of laws and

institutions. But practice of democracy means that the governing values of democracy such as equality, freedom, justice, common good and reason must at all time guide behaviour of institutions and the personnel running those institutions. When the Supreme Court of India had decreed in the Golaknath Case in 1967 that the 'basic structure' of the Indian constitution such as the chapter on Fundamental Rights could not be altered by any legislative measure that was the spirit. But an Internal Emergency was imposed in India in 1975-1977 suspending the Fundamental Rights, suppressing freedom of speech and arresting opposition leaders and activists. That kind of tension and manipulation have gone on in India ever since, as attempts to recover the spirit of laws also continue with mixed results. In the context of the new capacities of money and technology this had acquired special features.

Over the years, the regimes in India have resorted to three kinds of measures to suppress protest, dissent and opposition. First is the use of institutions such as Parliament, Courts, Election Commission using the resources of the state to steer policies in the interest of the agenda of the ruling party. Pushing bills without full scale discussion and making basic changes in the existing policies is a frequent occurrence. That procedure is a violation of the principle of reasoned debate for which many procedures had been designed over years of parliamentary practice in India and other countries. The passage of the farmer bills and the labour codes in the Indian Parliament in September 2020, despite the opposition boycott was one such example which caused widespread discontent among the farmers and workers leading to prolonged agitations. Pressuring courts and autonomous bodies like the Election Commission has been another form of institutional manipulation where objectivity and non-partisan actions have been compromised. (Lokur 2020) Another example of misuse of institutions is the use of intelligence agencies, Enforcement Directorate and other investigative agencies by the government against dissenters and critics of the regime and the ruling parties. The regime selectively picks up cases to silence critics and harass opponents frequently levelling charges of sedition or conspiracy. (Singh 2018) Members of Opposition parties are subjected to many kinds of investigation and persecution. The third is the enactment and application of extraordinary laws under which state can arrest, detain and persecute any one alleging that the person was a threat to

national security or was 'waging a war'. India has had a series of such laws among which some of the most controversial are the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and many similar laws in the states. (Singh 2007) The rise of militancy in various forms ranging from autonomy and self-determination movements in Kashmir and Northeast to armed struggles by the Maoists in tribal areas were the ostensible reasons which led to such laws. But they have been used indiscriminately causing the detention of thousands of adivasis, Dalits, Muslims and others on the one hand and many human rights activists and social workers on the other. All these trends have been extensively documented in India. Similar trends are visible in many other countries such as the US where the post-9/11 measures such as the PATRIOT Act produced many draconian measures especially victimising Muslims, African-Americans and other minorities and the poor. (First Post 2018) During the Covid-19 pandemic the erosion of democratic institutions and civil liberties was even more conspicuous.

With the erosion of institutions when avenues of reasoned discussion and consideration are closed people find other means to pursue their demands which they believe are just. That is where the idea of satyagraha provides opportunities to proceed on the path of truth. (Juergensmeyer Gandhi's Satyagraha initiatives in South Africa questioned racism first through petitions, then through small scale, symbolic protests and then through mass actions such as burning of identity cards, further by organising massive rallies , marches and demonstrations. In India, Gandhi led satyagraha against the British regime on many fundamental issues concerning the livelihood rights of people as a part of the freedom movement. The Champaran Satyagraha in Bihar in 1915-1917 was a largescale mass movement of farmers questioning the British government decision to force farmers to cultivate indigo to meet the demand for the dye in Europe. Farmers on the other hand wanted to cultivate their native crops such as rice and jute. It had involved confrontation with the colonial bureaucracy and suffering multiple punishments in the hands of the police. The farmers had to also confront an alliance of local landlords and traders with the colonial administration. The institution of bureaucracy had forcibly imposed an unjust decision on the farmers. Gradually the satyagraha gathered momentum.

Champanan turned out to be the experimental base of the rising movement of majority of the peasants where intellectuals from all over the country landed along with the leaders of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi camped there and undertook not only close investigation of the conditions of the rural area, but engaged in a series of people's support programmes in health, education and employment using local material and cultural resources. This experience demonstrated that Satyagraha for Gandhi was a comprehensive revolutionary programme with multidimensional engagement with common masses. The movement gathered so much popular support locally and countrywide that the British government had to change its decision. The persistent reasoning of the just demand, people's support, determination to pursue the demand through a variety of channels shook up the institutional structure of the colonial regime. The phenomena of institutional erosion and denial of reasoned debate are unjust and illegal trends at all times irrespective of the type of regimes, colonial or post-colonial. After all most elements of state structure including bureaucracy, police and extraordinary laws which were given shape in the colonial times continued in the post-colonial systems as well. Lessons from Champanan and Kheda Satyagraha continued to inspire latter day peasant movements in India including the powerful farmers movement against the three farm laws in 2020.

Authoritarian Centralisation

Besides overpowering mobilisation and institutional erosion, another even more dangerous trend is centralisation, in fact, over-centralisation of power suppressing public voices of individuals, groups and regions. This goes totally against the fundamental premise of democracy as a system of self-rule where individuals, groups and regions enjoy freedom and equality and help one another in mutually fulfilling their aspirations. This was a key idea engrained in the concept of 'swaraj' developed by Gandhi as early as 1909 in his dialogic book, *Hind Swaraj – Indian Home Rule*. Swaraj for India, according to Gandhi not only meant Indian people gaining political independence from British colonialism but also every village achieving self-rule. In the subsequent decades, right till his death, Gandhi stood by its thesis. (Parel 1997) *Swa* or self for Gandhi could be an individual, a group

or a region and was not poised against the 'other' seen as an antagonist. The *self vs other* categorisation with colonialism and the colonised, the white vs the Black people, the Brahmin and the Dalit or non-Brahmins, the landlord and the tenant or the capitalist and the worker has been the familiar conceptualisation of antagonistic contradictions where the ruler or the dominant considers itself as the self and systematically tries to reshape the oppressed to conform to its values. (Mohanty 2017) For Gandhi such unacceptable relationships had to be transformed through struggle. As a result a new relationship of positive mutuality, a relationship between self and self was to be established. Swaraj or self-rule thus ushered in a new perspective on democracy where multiple, intersecting contradictions had to be transformed into a new state of democracy or a community of swaraj witnessing the blossoming of a creative society.

A century after *Hind Swaraj*, the world had produced exactly an opposite order- a centralised polity nationally and globally but this has happened while the urge for swaraj by deprived individuals, oppressed groups and regions has continued to grow exponentially.

The new centralised order is created and maintained by technology of coercion and manipulation supported by big capital that presents the system as a democracy. The regime of coercion uses high tech methods using police, paramilitary and military in umpteen forms and guises. Its methods of surveillance using big data, communication records and profiles of vast number of people considers practically every questioning citizen as a source of threat to the regime. In fact the new order evolves in its new avatar irrespective of the ideology and public commitments of political parties all of whom may swear by democracy as an ideal and the Constitution as their sacred document. The investigative agencies of the state learn from foreign practices. For example, Israel and the US are so advanced in the both hardware and software technology of intelligence and counterterrorism operations that many countries obtain these packages from them. As democratic consciousness has grown among oppressed groups and various forms of protest against injustice have multiplied, regimes have resorted more and more to repressive measures. New modes of torture are invented to give the appearance of maintaining democratic

values of respecting human dignity. New techniques of seemingly high-tech interrogation using 'truth machines' are the latest in that impressive 'scaffolding' of the modern state and its elaborate structure of the liberal-democratic institutions. (Lokaneeta 2020) Rather than negotiate with alienated groups and respond to some of their just demands in time, most regimes have in the recent decades had routinely resorted to suppressing the dissident voices and opposition forces. The ostensible reason is the need for social and political stability to facilitate fast process of economic growth which has been the clarion call of neoliberalism. But this has meant more instability in reality as more and more coercion is needed to establish law and order. More coercion means more alienation and more probability of violence. Militarised polity with increasing budgetary expenses on internal and external security and expanding armed forces and more and more sophisticated surveillance techniques has become the norm in the new 'security state'. (Bhatia 2020, Kazin 2017) The idea that a democratic polity and its management had people's voluntary consent thus not requiring such high level of security arrangement everywhere on a day-to-day basis is a thing of the past now in all countries.

Coercion is accompanied to a vast degree by much new ways of legitimation using modern communication and information technology. The expansion of satellite television, mobile phone with fast increasing generations – now 5G and counting- and easy access of practically the entire population to the media had made leaders directly reach people as frequently as they wished, even on a daily basis if needed. Election times are no longer the only occasions for such experiences. Covid-19 illustrated the power of the new media with which the leader approached the whole nation. The state media was no longer the principal channel of communication between the regime and the masses even though it remained an important source. Because of the direct and open link between government and the corporate houses, the latter had their own channels which were used to propagate government views. Through advertisement both the government and the corporates had enough influence over the channels. No doubt the contradictions within the system allowed some space for debates. But that helped more to show the 'liberal democratic face' of the system than truth linkage with substantive premises of democracy. As mentioned earlier the social media was a big channel of communication leaders having millions of followers. The army of

trolls is a new phenomenon arranged and mobilised to promote or attack selected trends and ideas from the point of view of the dominant forces. Theoretically it was accessible to democratic forces and alternative voices. But in reality they are often swept off by torrents of the trolls.

The techno-authoritarian state continues to acquire new sophistication in the evolving history of neoliberal capitalism. It is the 'silicon state' that uses increasing innovations in communication and information technology for the global market through the combination of coercion, response and legitimation functions. No doubt, these three functions were integral to the character of the modern state in the post-World War II world and manifested clearly in various points of time in various combinations. (Mohanty 2000) But at this point of history the combination has acquired a self-propelling element from a new lethal mix of monopoly capital and highly innovating technology serving it in the so-called fourth Industrial Revolution. (Mohanty 2020) Covid-19 demonstrated the open play of the growing fault-line of centralised polity passing as democracy. (Mohanty 2020 b.)

Gandhi's massive initiatives in satyagraha which were the driving forces for moving towards Independence give us clear and confident clues creatively equipping us with modes of politics that can confront a powerful adversary such as the silicon state. (Juergensmeyer 2002) This techno-authoritarian regime has new and varied instruments of domination and repression using them in cunning ways to appear to win popular support. It insists that unlike a colonial regime it has the people's mandate to rule and is thus authorised to take any measures that it wished. But democracy's basic premises of truth linkage make certain principles like freedom and reason non-violable. Therefore, satyagraha becomes relevant to all situations of injustices and untruth not only in colonial times but also in post-colonial era and beyond.

Non-co-operation movement in 1921, Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 and Quit India Movement of 1942 were three stages of satyagraha against a strong, powerful adversary, British colonialism which had always

presented itself as 'benevolent rule' and a 'modernising force in a backward society' like India. The three stages from moderate protest to absolute confrontation were characterised by increasing militancy in people's movements. Each new stage learnt lessons from the old and creatively developed new methods of struggle. Interestingly enough, the term satyagraha was used for specific campaigns rather than the broad strategic programme of action by the Indian National Congress even though Gandhi played the key role in the congress decision about launching each one of these major struggles. Non-cooperation involved not doing things for the British such as paying taxes, joining in jobs and so on, so that the system could come to a standstill. It had all the characteristics of satyagraha as a mode of challenging unjust rule by the British through moral-political protest by masses. Gandhi was insistent that the movement must be non-violent- another essential characteristic of satyagraha for him. So when violence broke out in Chauri Chaura with people attacking a police station and burning it, Gandhi protested and withdrew the movement which had spread throughout the nation. It surprised Nehru and shocked many others who had noticed how the movement had spread widely with more and more people joining it actively. But Gandhi was clear that such campaigns must remain non-violent in order to gather momentum and if it turned violent it could be easily suppressed by the rulers who possessed powerful military weapons. With this Gandhi's moral authority over the Congress organisation was demonstrated yet again in course of India's freedom struggle and was going to use it for steering the movement in specific direction in future, though not always successfully.

Civil Disobedience Movement was the actual act of violating existing colonial laws and engaging in doing forbidden acts. Henry David Thoreau's 1849 essay on Civil Disobedience calling for disobeying unjust laws had inspired Gandhi and he had integrated this thinking into his evolving notion of satyagraha since the South Africa days. Gandhi and the Congress had denounced and boycotted the first Round Table Conference 1930 for the way it was composed of and its terms of discussion. By then the Congress had adopted '*purna swaraj*' (full independence) as its goal and they wanted to discuss the path to that goal with the British. The previous decade had kept Gandhi busy with major initiatives in social issues such as upliftment of the depressed classes whom he called Harijans and now we call them

Dalits and also with the anti-liquor campaign, women's welfare and also new kind of educational programmes. In 1930 he guided the Congress to launch the civil disobedience movement with the call to the people in the coastal areas to question the British monopoly of manufacture and distribution of salt and break the law and make salt defying the colonial government's ban on it. Starting on 12 March, the 385 km epic Dandi March from Ahmedabad reached Dandi near Surat on the Arabian Sea coast on 5 April in course of which hundreds and thousands of people were galvanised in the entire country. Similar marches were organised all along the coast of India and attempts were made to make salt with massive number of people including Gandhi, Nehru and Sarojini Naidu courting arrest. (Raj 2009)

When the British government dragged its feet on the question of India's independence saying that fighting the anti-fascist war was its priority, Congress under Gandhi's leadership decided to launch the 'Quit India Movement' on 9 August 1942, demanding that the British immediately grant independence to India. The clarion call, 'do or die' given in the Congress Resolution electrified the Congress cadres as well as common people all over the country. This movement became the peak of the freedom struggle even though a large number of people's struggles had gone on in different parts of the country for many years. Moving the resolution of the Congress Working Committee in the Mumbai AICC session Gandhi reiterated his commitment to non-violence and also clarified that the struggle was against British colonial rule and not against the British people. (Gandhi 1942)

The accounts of the Quit India Movement show three important things. One was the near total reach of the message to all sections of Indian people throughout the country. That the rulers were unreasonable in delaying the granting of freedom on the plea that they were busy in fighting the war and the Congress had struggled for decades to achieve independence now exercised everyone. Second, arising from the call itself, the militancy of struggle rose to new heights. Going beyond acts of civil disobedience, people now resorted to new forms of direct action, stopping traffic, picketing railway tracks, blocking roads and many incidents of violent

attacks on state offices and personnel. Police stations, courts, post offices, railway stations and government offices and other symbols of imperial regime were attacked in a number of places. Everywhere massive number of people were out on the streets showing anger and determination. In many places the Congress flag was hoisted defying the police. Third, the repression by the colonial government was swift and massive. Leaders and activists were taken into custody in large numbers everywhere. There were many case of police firing resulting in casualties. The cumulative effect was that the movement sent out a clear message to the most diehard imperialists in London that India could not be kept in chains any longer. (Hutchins 1974)

There are many aspects of the Quit India Movement which would continue to be debated. For our purpose the point to be made is that it was a form of satyagraha with many fresh dimensions which are extremely relevant to face political crises of the 21st century. It challenged the deep injustice of colonial rule with such an intensity that every participant felt it directly. That kind of commitment to the pursuit of truth makes satyagraha a very special form of protest which the adversary cannot easily ignore. Second, the spread of the movement across the country involving all sections of people, both urban and rural surpassed any previous movements that the Congress had led. Even though some organisations such as the CPI did not formally support the Congress decision because of their political line relating to the ongoing war against fascism, their cadres and followers participated in the movement at the ground level in large numbers. (Pati 2019) Third, The strategy of the Quit India Movement was no doubt was one of continuing the non-violent struggle, yet in practice it was a mix of both peaceful and violent actions by the participants. In fact, Gandhi, in his impassioned speech moving the Resolution in the AICC on 8 August 1942 had stressed that it must remain non-violent and he had not changed his view on this since 1920. Therefore, even though Gandhi and the Gandhians insisted that satyagraha must be a non-violent protest, the Quit India Movement experience is often cited as an example of a different kind involving both peaceful and violent acts. But it is important to note that Gandhi did not condemn the violent acts during the movement. Therefore, to call the Quit India Movement a 'passive revolution' did not capture the full import of the epic struggle. Fourth, this Movement targeted the

strongest possible adversary who had ruled mainly on the basis of coercive power, but not only by that. It had built a whole apparatus of legitimation by promoting its preferred mode of education and cultural work and setting up a network of state institutions. On the one hand, British colonialism had caused economic plunder leading to famines and impoverishment, but also laid down channels of relief and food supply at the same time. It had used modern techniques of military operations and industrialisation as a part of its extractive strategy. It also laid down in the process, rudiments of scientific and technological education ostensibly to help modernise India. In other words, all the characteristics of coercion, response and legitimation whose advanced technological form we notice at work today as a part of neoliberal techno-authoritarianism of the silicon state were already evident in the 1940s. Of course, we must certainly acknowledge many qualitative and quantitative changes in the global and local social, economic, political, military and ecological environment since then. But accordingly satyagraha must be creatively developed to meet new situations while the essential premises on the truth linkage between satyagraha and democracy must be retained, and this was the most important lesson from Gandhi's many satyagraha experiments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that satyagraha has enormous significance both in defence of democracy and in enriching it further. Satyagraha is founded on the belief that truth must be pursued to create conditions for a better society where each and all realise their best self or swaraj. Democracy has the same foundational premise which is that self-realisation is achieved through self-governance. For Gandhi democracy is swaraj which synthesises procedural and substantive dimensions of democracy. It also shows how important was it to continuously address areas of injustice and untruth in democracy and pursue satyagraha to transform it. That is why the attraction of satyagraha as a resistance movement against untruth evident in colonialism, racism, casteism, patriarchy, and other forms of domination as well as a truth-affirming movement for equality, freedom, justice and reason has spread the world over.

Satyagraha is an essential feature of creative society where struggles go on to address contradictions that were becoming more and more manifest. It was significant that right in the wake of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in the US, the iconic civil rights leader Rev. James Lawson in his eulogy at the funeral of another famous civil rights fighter and long-time Congressman John Lewis recalled the history of the anti-racism campaigns since the sit-in in Montgomery in 1958 and the de-segregation drive in Nashville in 1959 as ‘satyagraha – soul-force and love-truth’ movement. The story of Dr Martin Luther King Jr in the US and Nelson Mandela in South Africa is already embedded in the global history of satyagraha. A deeper view of this history no doubt raises many questions about whether satyagraha as non-violent resistance worked in the face of fascists and dictators or whether it was legitimate to resist elected leadership or whether the number of people must be large to make an effect and many such issues. In this essay, an attempt has been made mainly to show how the moral-political concept of satyagraha as ‘truth pursuit’ has an abiding significance in the making, maintaining and developing democracy in coping with the political crises in the 21st century.

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