UNIT 5: GANDHI: NON-VIOLENCE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of Gandhian concept of God is truth
- describe the meaning of Gandhian concept of truth as God
- discuss the concept of non-violence
- explain the technique of ahimsa
- analyse Gandhian philosophy of end and means

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Non-violence or ahimsa is a fundamental concept in M.K. Gandhi's philosophy. This is a loaded concept in the sense that it includes the other related concepts like Truth or God and Satyagraha. The concept of ahimsa or non-violence cannot be meaningfully practiced unless and until Satyagraha is used as a technique. Therefore, this unit is followed by the concept of God, truth, and the technique of ahimsa.

5.3 GOD AND TRUTH

Gandhi's concept of God is theistic in nature. Like an Advaitist, he mentioned the nirguna character of the real. He did not accept the academic distinction between Saguna and Nirguna concept of God. Rather he held that the concept of God is important not only for intellectual curiosity, but also for imparting strength and solace. By believing in God we can get mental peace. However, the difficulty involves when God and Truth are sought to be identified. He showed that the nature of truth is impersonal and in contrast to this, he opined that the nature of God is personal. Thus, the question emerges- how can the two be identified?

5.4 TRUTH IS GOD

In order to solve the issue- whether Truth is identical with God, he maintained that Truth is God.By this statement it can be held that the concept of Truth is not ambiguous like the concept of God. In favour of this statement it can be viewed that none of the views regarding the concept of God forwarded by differentreligionsareidentical. So, the concept of God may be polytheistic, theistic, pantheistic, atheistic etc. But, this problem is not involved in the concept of Truth. We can deny the existence of God, but we cannot reject the Truth. As for instance, skeptics may deny the concept of God, but they cannot reject the Truth. Therefore, the concept of Truth is universal and comprehensive.Gandhi in this context holds that "I do not care for God if He is anything but Truth."We can worship truth irrespective of cast, creed, and nation. Therefore, the concept 'Truth is God' can bring together Hindus, Muslims, Marxists and Atheists alike.

5.5 NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi's concepts of God and Truth paved the way towards the concept of non-violence. He, therefore, says: "I have nothing new to

teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is try to experiments in both on as vast as a scales as I could. In doing so, I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence…….In fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence." (N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi* p.13.) Truth and non-violence are so intertwined that it is impossible to discuss one without the other. They are the two sides of the same coin.WhileAhimsa is the means and truth is the end.

There are two aspects of the word Ahimsa. One is positive and the other is negative. Gandhi consideredthe positive aspect as fundamental, because it represented its essence andincluded the negative aspect as well.

The literal meaning of the term Ahimsa is non-killing or non-injury.Therefore, ahimsa is considered different from himsa. He held the view that himsa means causing pain or killing any life out of danger or from a selfish purpose or with the intention of injuring it. Ahimsa implies the act of refraining from such activities. Gandhiji in this context seemed to be influenced by Jainism.This system of Indian philosophy recommended the path of Ahimsa not only in thought but also in speech and action. But, Gandhi was not a strict follower of Jainism. He held the view that himsa is unavoidable in case of eating, drinking, walking, breathing etc. It is impossible to continue one's life without harming or injuring other bodies to some extent. Therefore, Gandhi recommended himsa to some extent.

The positive meaning of Ahimsa is not merely a 'non-injury' or 'non-killing'of creature, rather it holds that we should be non-violent to other living beings in a wider perspective which we should practice. On the other handthe negative meaning of ahimsa is nonkilling or non-injury, so it presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice and the like. However,Gandhi viewed that the positive meaning of ahimsa is more basic than the negative kind of ahimsa. In this context he held the view that ahimsa is considered the basic and essential qualities of

mankind. But,it does not mean that there is no place of himsa or violence in our life. Because we have to commit himsa to some extent in order to sustain our life.

According to Gandhi, ahimsa is natural to human being. Although human nature represents himsa in some cases, yet it is not permanent. The only permanent nature of mankind is ahimsa which is inherent in human beings as essential nature. For instance,we can injure a person externally for some personal reasons, but we cannot injure the internal organ of the person that is soul. Therefore, himsa is a by-productto human beings.

By the positive meaning of ahimsa we understand that ahimsa is nothing but love. Gandhi maintained that love is a kind of energy which can sublimate one's mind and uplift the quality of human beings. As a result, through love one can comprehend the noble feelings like benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc. Therefore, it can be viewed that love-force or energy helps us to free our mind from the feelings of anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealousy etc. On the other hand, these ill feelings forbid us to comprehend the nature of love.

Gandhi held that the act of violence is not for a coward or weak person, but for a strong person. He opined that a person who is inwardly weak is a fearful person in the sense that he develops a kind of fear. And out of this fear he starts fighting against real or imaginary enemies.That is why, it can be viewed that violence grows out of fear. Thus, it can be opined that one can be a non-violent person when he is able to win over fear. Although violence may be a picture of strength, yet it is rooted in fear, so, it is a sign of weakness. So, he stated that "Non-violence presupposes the ability to strike". By this view he indicated that a non-violent person in the true sense has the capability to win over violence or brutal force.

Non-violence is a dynamic or a continuous or a relentless effort. It involves sacrifice and suffering. Itis connected with the concept of love

which denotes going beyond or self transcendence. Hence,it is a kind of self-suffering or tapasya.

Gandhi's belief is that non-violence can be practised in the universal sensewhich is not restricted to time, place or other people.But, it prescribes some values like sincerity and purity which can be practiced by anyone or even by societies or nations.

Gandhi's concept of ahimsa is essentially linked with the concept of God. He held the view that one cannot practice ahimsa unless and until he/she is an ardent believer in God. By believing only in God's nature, one canfollow the concept of ahimsa. It also shows that by the act of faith or belief in God, one can develop the concept, that is, we are essentially one. This kind of feeling generate the concept of ahimsa. It also implies that the concept of ahimsa is conditional in a sense that one has to be a firm believer in God for practicing the concept of ahimsa.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Give a brief distinction between God and Truth. (Answer in about 25 words)

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Q 2: What are the two aspects of Ahimsa?

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Q 3: State the literal meaning of the term ahimsa.

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Q 4: What do you mean by the negative meaning of ahimsa? (Answer in about 30 words)

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Q 5: Make a distinction between positive and negative meaning of freedom from Gandhi's viewpoint.

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Q 6: State whether the following statements are True or False

a) Gandhi's view is that truth is God. (True/ False)

b) The concepts of Truth and God are required to comprehend the concept of non-violence. (True/False)

c) Non-violence is a kind of self-suffering. (True/False)

d) The concepts of Truth and God are the two sides of the same coin. (True/False)



ACTIVITY: 5.1

Is non-violence inescapable for a peaceful society?

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5.5.1 The Technique Of Ahimsa- Satyagraha

Satyagraha is a priceless and matchless weapon which Gandhi used in order to free India from the shackles of British administration. He knew that it is impossible to defeat the English through other ways. So, he utilised the technique of Satyagraha through the concepts of Truth, Non-violence etc. He compares the word "Satyagraha to a banyan tree in which satya (Truth) and ahimsa (Non-violence) together represent the parent trunk with innumerable branches of which civil-disobedience is one."For the first time Maganlal Gandhi coined the word 'sadagraha' (Sat=Truth, Agraha=firmness). But in order to make it clear Gandhi changed the word to 'Satyagraha' which had been used in Gujrati language as a designation for the freedom movement. Satyagraha is a model of Gandhi's life. Because it indicates values like love, tolerance, patriotism, truth, ahimsa etc. His view is that 'The sword of the satyagrahi is love and the unmistakable firmness that comes from it.'

Abune Panlos writes that "Gandhi's definition of the word 'Satyagraha' given to the movement implies truth, openness,

honesty and fairness, encompassing physical and mental non-violence and self-sacrifice, instead of inflicting suffering on the opponent. All these values indicate harmony with the teaching of the holy books. That is why, today all peace-loving and genuine nations individuals or groups in the world, regardless of their religious or philosophical outlook, ethnic background, etc. give great value to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi."Gandhi's technique of Satyagraha is a multidimensional concept. So, the question naturally emerges that is, is there any relevance of the concept of Satyagraha in the present context? In reply it can be readily viewed that it has relevance in the present context too. To Gandhi-"it is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It can be used not only in political but also in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by man, women and children as well. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak."It is known to all that violence begets violence just as love begets love. But it cannot give us the opposite result. As for instance, we take a simple example, suppose someone slaps a man and in retaliation the later one also behaves in the same way, then the question can be asked from the given instance that is- what is missing here? The answer is that values like love, tolerance, sympathy etc. are missing in this instance, which cannot be bought from today's global market. Again the (values) are not palpable like bank accounts. Rather they come from within. From this context, we can make a distinction between *freedom of* and *freedom from*. Gandhi did not accept the concept of *freedom from*. He thought that external freedom (freedom from) can bring untruth or violence. Generally, we are following the concept *freedom from* in our domestic, political and economic field. As a result the values like Love, Truth, Non-violence, Concern for others, Justice and Tolerance etc. are missing gradually from human life. So, the

question naturally comes to our mind, what are the reasons of emerging conflict in the present context of society? Answers not only can be placed from social and political backdrop but also from economic viewpoint. If we go through the social backdrop then we see that we generally emphasis on only search for individual peace rather than the concept of searching for Truth. Peace does not come from heaven. It comes from the concepts of Love, Truth, Non-violence, Equality, Tolerance, Justice, and Patriotism etc. which have latent forces, which are unseen, unperceived and unobserved. That is why, they have intrinsic value. Therefore, Gandhi wrote: “there is no defeat for the satyagrahi’s till they give up the truth. Satyagraha is a relentless search for truth and determination to reach truth. In the path of Satyagraha there is always unflinching adherence to truth. The sword of Satyagraha is love and the unmistakable firmness that comes from it. Satyagraha is utter self-effacement, greatest humiliation, greatest patience, and brightest faith.”Today’s people follow the technique of Satyagraha only in black and white. So, it can be undoubtedly said that we are taking Gandhi only as a model for delivering lectures in the meetings instead of using it in our daily life.

Again if we see it from political viewpoint then it can be opined that politicians are busy with their party work. They ignore public sentiments like the concept of equality, justice etc. which are really the subjects to discuss in public forum. It is clear from the present scenario of politics. As for instance we can talk about welfare of a state. It is a fact that we are free Indians, but the important question is- are we enjoying freedom in a real sense? From the Gandhi’s point of view no one will be free from the concept of Satyagraha. Satyagrahies always can enjoy their freedom not only from external side but also from internal side because they adhere to truth. Therefore, Gandhi chose to employ the technique of Satyagraha not only in domestic but also in

political and economic fields in order to achieve freedom not only from the British but also from within.

Again if we see it from economic side then it can be viewed that Gandhi also employed the technique of Satyagraha in the economic side in order to enrich India. If it is not entertained, the welfare of mankind cannot be thought of. If bureaucrats are corrupt and financial packages are not properly utilized, it will deter the economic growth of a country. That is why Gandhi wrote-"in Satyagraha there is no place for fraud or falsehood or any kind of untruth. The very nature of Satyagraha is such that the fruit of movement is contained in the movement itself. Satyagraha is based on self help, self-sacrifice and faith in God."Gandhi therefore, through the concept of Satyagraha wanted to render the following messages to masses for the betterment mankind: the message of love, the message of truth, the message of non-violence, the message of tolerance, the message of equality, the message of justice, and the message of self- discipline. The time has come to rethink on Gandhi's concept of satyagraha in order to save human being from the value-crisis that emerged in our society as a threat, otherwise society will be paralyzed or jeopardized soon. That is why Gandhi put enormous emphasis on the concept of Satyagraha which can play a vital role by preserving human values for a peaceful society. Therefore, he said "Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violent. Hatred can be overcome only by love." And he also viewed: "If liberty and democracy are to be truly saved, they will only be by non-violence resistance no less brave, no less glorious than violent resistance."He significantly mentioned that any result based on violence cannot be enduring and lasting. That is why, peace based on war cannot be everlasting. He was against hatred, anger, war and other vices. Wars can never be the means of achieving any positive result. Just as love begets love so also a war can start another war. Therefore, only love can stimulate

the spirit of peace. So, Gandhi said: Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. And hatred can be overcome only by love.

Gandhi held the view that the concepts of truth and non-violence can be practiced only when there is a way of practicing or using the concept of ahimsa. It indicates the developing stage of ahimsa which can be named as Satyagraha.

The concept of Satyagraha is based on love. Therefore, it is a love force. Gandhi considered it as the religious pursuit because it maintains that there is one God who is omnipresent. Love is the basis of human beings and without this basis we cannot practice the concept of Satyagraha.It is also known as truth force or soul force or love force.Gandhi throughout his life attempted to use the concept of Satyagraha and succeeded in his life.

Gandhi formulated the concept of Satyagraha against violence, tyranny and injustice. He held the view that the problems involved in our society due to our ignorance that truth is universal, eternal, all-pervasive and all-comprehending. In this context Gandhi views that we should not reply the context of violence through violence, evil through evil, anger through anger. Rather we should think of how we can get rid of this problem involved in front of me. Gandhi's answer is that there is only an answer to this crisis that is to embrace the concept of Satyagraha.

Satyagraha also provides a chance to a wrong doer to amend or realize the mistake done in life. It is based on the belief thatthere is an essential quality that is goodness present in every man because each man holds divinity within himself. Therefore, the important aspect of human beings is to awake the concealed essential qualityin order to be free from anger, hatred, intolerance etc.

Gandhi asserts that a satyagrahi can amend him/her by taking painfor the sake of truth. In this context ahimsa or non-

violence is conscious suffering. Therefore, a satyagrahi can convert the opponent mind.

Satyagraha consists of the concepts of love, ahimsa and conscious suffering. By the help of these concepts, the forces of evil can be thrown out in the sense that it is a way of truth. Gandhi in this context points out that it is universal in a sense that it can be practised by children and adults, by men and women, by individuals and communities and by societies and nations.It also can be employed in domestic, social, and political field. This universal nature of the concept of Satyagraha is derived from the concept of God.

5.6 PHILOSOPHY OF END AND MEANS

This is a very significant and interesting concept in Gandhi's philosophy. It can be related to the traditional ethical concepts 'right' and 'good'. The word 'Right' is considered the means to the realisation of 'good', so the end is 'good' and the means is 'right'. Here we have seen a necessary relationship between 'right' and 'good'. We cannot think of the concept of 'good' withoutthe concept of 'right'. Just as there is a necessary relationship between 'right' and 'good', so also there is an intimate relationship between 'end' and 'means'.

These two concepts have a link or connection with Gandhi's concepts of truth and non-violence. According to Gandhi, end and means are essentially related to each other and both are convertible terms in his philosophy. Whilementioning the relationship between the two Gandhi wrote that "the means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." (Hind Swaraj, p.39) This saying symbolises the necessary relationship between seed and the tree andthrough this relationship he shows the intimate connection between means and the end.

This relationship involves the important questions in Gandhi's philosophy. The questions are: Does the end justify the means? Can we

attain good ends by whatever means we adopt? Should means also be good if a good end is to be realised? Is purity of means an essential aspect of the way to the realization good? Gandhi in this context emphasises that a good end cannot justify any and every means. Rather, he shows that if a good end is to be realised, the means to attain the good should be essentially good. Therefore, Gandhi in his philosophy of life gave importance to means. So, he said, "means are after all everything". Again it can be viewed that in order to realise the good end, the means which we adopt for attaining the good end may not be the same from person to person as we consider that means are many.That is why; Gandhi had answered that end cannot justify the means.

Gandhi's concepts of 'end' and 'means' have a direct relation with the notions of 'truth' and 'ahimsa'. In order to realise the end or the ideal that is truth, Gandhi adopted the path of ahimsa as a means. That is why, Gandhi said:truth is the end and ahimsa is the means. Gandhi during the Freedom Movement of Indiautilized the weapon of non-violence as a means of attaining freedom as an end or ideal from British colonisation. And Gandhi was succeeded in case of attaining freedom by the means of ahimsa.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: State whether the following statements are True or False

i) Satyagraha is a technique which Gandhi employed in his philosophy. (True / False)

ii) Satyagraha is a multidimensional concept. (True / False)

iii) Satyagraha is also known as love force. (True / Fase)

Q 8: Who for the first time coined the word 'satyagraha'?

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Q 9: What do you mean by *freedom from*, to Gandhi? (Answer in about 40 words)

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Q 10: Why did Gandhi employ the concept of Satyagraha in his philosophy? (Answer in about 50 words)

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Q 11: Why is Satyagraha known as love force? (Answer in about 40 words)

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Q 12: What do you mean by the concept that 'Satyagraha' is universal in nature? (Answer in about 50 words)

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Q 13: Does the end justify the means? According to Gandhi? (Answer in about 60 words)

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ACTIVITY: 5.2

Is the concept of Satyagraha relevant in the present moment? What do you think?

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

- Gandhi viewed that the nature of truth is impersonal, on the other hand the nature of God is personal. In order to solve the significant issue, Gandhi opined that truth is God. He mentioned the reason that we can deny the existence of God, but we cannot reject the truth. So, the concept of truth is universal in nature.

- Truth and non-violence are interconnected in the sense that one cannot be discussed without the other. They are the two sides of the same coin. *Ahimsa* is the means and truth is the end.
- The literal meaning of the term is non-killing or non-injury. So, *ahimsa* is considered different from *himsa*. His view is that *himsa* means causing pain or killing any life out of danger or from a selfish purpose or with the intention of injuring it. Hence, *ahimsa* implies the act of refraining from such activities.
- There are two aspects of the word *ahimsa*. One is positive and the other is negative. The positive aspect holds that *ahimsa* is not merely a 'non-injury' or 'non-killing' to creature, rather through this aspect heheld the view that we should be non-violent to other living beings at the same time. Besides, it denotes the concept of love. Love is a kind of energy which can sublimate one's mind and uplift the quality of human beings. On the other hand by the negative aspect of *ahimsa* Gandhi means non-killing or non-injury. It implies that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice etc.
- The concept of *ahimsa* is essentially dealt with the concept of God. One cannot practice *ahimsa* unless and until he/she is an ardent follower or believer in God. By believing in God's nature, one can follow the concept of *ahimsa*. It is also significant that by the act of faith or belief in God, one can develop the concept that is we are essentially one.
- Gandhi utilised the technique of Satyagraha through the concepts of love, tolerance, patriotism, truth, ahimsa etc. His view was that 'The sword of Satyagrahi is love and the unmistakable firmness that comes from it'.
- Satyagraha is a relentless search for truth and the determination to reach them. In the path of Satyagraha there is always unflinching adherence to truth. The sword of Satyagraha is love and the unmistakable firmness comes from it.

- Satyagrahis always can enjoy their freedom not only from external side but also from internal side because they adhere to truth. Therefore, Gandhi chose to employ the technique of Satyagraha not only in domestic, but also in political and economic fields in order to achieve freedom not only from British but also from within.
- Gandhi viewed that the concepts of truth and non-violence can be practiced only by using the technique of Satyagraha. That is why the developing stage of *ahimsa* is known as Satyagraha.
- The concept of Satyagraha isbased on love. It is also known as love force or soul force. Gandhi succeeded throughout his life by this force.
- The concepts of 'right' and 'good' have a direct relation with the notions of 'Truth' and 'Ahimsa'. Just as 'right' is the means of obtaining 'Good', so also ahimsa is the means of achieving the result of 'Truth'. Gandhi was successful in getting freedom from the English rule by the means of *ahimsa*.



5.8 FURTHER READING

1) Lal, B.K. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Benarsidass Publishers. 1973
2) Sharma, Anand (ed.) *Gandhian Way*. Academic foundation. 2007
3) Verma, B.R. & Bakshi, S.R. (ed.) *Gandhian Satyagraha and His Techniques*. (1920-1928). Commonwealth Publications. 2005
4) Chakravarty, Meera. *Essays on Philosophy and Culture*. New Bharatiya Book Corporation.2009



5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Gandhi held the view that the nature of truth is impersonal and in contrast to this he views that the nature of God is personal.

Ans to Q No 2: Positive and negative meaning of ahimsa

Ans to Q No 3: The literal meaning of the term ahimsa is non-killing or non-injury.

Ans to Q No 4: The negative meaning of ahimsa implies non killing or non-injury, so it presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice etc.

Ans to Q No 5: The positive meaning of ahimsa is not merely a 'non-injury' or 'non-killing' to creature, rather it holds that we should be non-violent to other living beings in a wider perspective which we should be practiced. The positive meaning also indicates the concept of love.On the other hand,the negative meaning of ahimsa is non killing or non-injury, so it presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice etc.

Ans to Q No 6: a) True b)True c)True d)True

Ans to Q No 7: a)True b)True c)True

Ans to Q No 8: Maganlal Gandhi

Ans to Q No 9: By the concept *freedom from,* he indicates the external freedom (freedom from) which can bring untruth or violence. Generally, we follow the concept *freedom from* in our domestic, political and economic field.

Ans to Q No 10: Satyagraha is a priceless and matchless weapon which Gandhi used in order to free India from the shackles of English. He knew that it is impossible to defeat English through other ways. So, he utilised the technique of Satyagraha through the concepts of Truth, Non-violence etc.

Ans to Q No 11: The concept of Satyagraha is based on love. Love isconsidered the basis of human beings and without this basis, we

cannot practice the concept of Satyagraha. That is why, it is known as love force.

Ans to Q No 12: Gandhi's context of Satyagraha is universal in a sense that it can be practiced by children and adults, by men and women, by individuals and communities and by societies and nations. It also can be employed in our domestic, social, and political fields. This universal nature of Satyagraha is derived from the concept of God.

Ans to Q No 13: Gandhi held the view that end cannot justify the means in a sense that there can bevarious means to realisethe ideal or end, so end cannot justify any and every kind of means. Besides, Gandhi laid emphasis on means than the ideal which is considered the ultimate aim of actions. Hence, end cannot justify the means in the language of Gandhi.



5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Objective Questions

Q 1: What is the nature of truth, to Gandhi?

Q 2: What is the main distinction between Truth and God?

Q 3: State the positive meaning of ahimsa.

Q 4: What do you mean by the negative meaning of ahimsa?

Q 5: Write the literal meaning of ahimsa.

Q 6: Does Gandhi advocate the nirguna character of God?

B. Short Questions (Answer in about 50 words)

Q 1: What is meant by *Truth is God?* To Gandhi

Q 2: Do you find any link between the concepts of*God is truth* and *Truth is God?* Explain in brief.

Q 2: Briefly explain the difference between positive and negative aspect of *ahimsa*.

Q 3: Write a short note on ahimsa.

Q 4: Write a short note on Satyagraha.

Q 5: Explain a brief note on the concept of God is truth.

Q 6: What ismeant by the technique of *ahimsa*? Briefly explain.

Q 7: Does end justify the means? Briefly explain

C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the nature of *ahimsa*.

Q 2: What is meant by the technique of *ahimsa*? Explain

Q 3: Is that Satyagraha a way to the concept of non-violence? Explain

Q 4: Describe the concept of Satyagraha.

Q 5: Can we discuss the concept of Satyagraha without the concept of non-violence? Explain

Q 6: Can a Satyagrahi change the opponent mind? What do you think? Explain

Q 7: Does end justify the means? Explain

Q 8: Do you find any relationship between means and end? Explain with reference to Gandhi's viewpoint.

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