

Mahatma Gandhi's Doctrine of Ahimsa: Implication on Noted Filipino Students' Values

Maria Luisa A. Valdez, Ph.D.

maluhvaldez888@gmail.com

College of Arts and Sciences, Batangas State University ARASOF Nasugbu Campus

PHILIPPINES

ABSTRACT

This study generally aimed to analyze Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of ahimsa and its implication on noted Filipino students' values. This paper employed the qualitative philosophical method of research in analyzing the tenets of ahimsa in the representative literary works chosen. This involved the science of textual criticism and hermeneutics supported by the researcher's analysis and insights with reference to the content of the texts to bring about the philosophical treatment of the identified works.

The results of analysis and interpretation revealed that: 1) Ahimsa refers to the principle of nonviolence based on the sacredness of all living creatures and an important tenet of ancient Indian religions specifically Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism; 2) Gandhi is one of the writer-thinkers who philosophizes that ahimsa is the ontological core of existence; 3) The salient points of the doctrine find their noblest expressions and exemplifications on his life and works; 4) While leading nationwide campaigns to ease the humanitarian issues of poverty, women's rights, religious and ethnic harmony and injustices of the caste system which are quite evident in his works, Gandhi applied the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, playing a key role in freeing India from foreign domination, (<http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/voices-for-human-rights/champions/mahatma-gandhi.html>) and 5) Gandhi's writings can inspire the Filipino students to turn to the transcendental diversion of humanity and to change the way they think and review their values through the tenets of literature supplied by the re-examined nonviolence advocate and his commitment to life here and thereafter.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Ahimsa, and Nonviolence

I. INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a century of war, a century in which hundreds of millions of people died violent deaths. Have men learned anything from those horrific tragedies? In the new era of the twenty-first century, humanity must be guided by the overriding principle that killing is never acceptable or justified-under any circumstance. Unless men realize this, unless they widely promote and deeply implant the understanding that violence can never be used to advocate one's beliefs, they will have learned nothing from the bitter lessons of the twentieth century.

Since its foundation over 60 years ago the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) took over that mission in conformity with its Constitution which asserts that, "*since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.*" In this regard, the same Constitution highlights that "*a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind*". This mandate has gifted the Organization with a longstanding experience in promoting

mutual understanding while fighting discrimination, intolerance and violence.

The real struggle of the twenty-first century will not be between civilizations, or between religions. It will be between violence and nonviolence. It will be between barbarity and civilization in the truest sense of the word, according to Ikeda (2005).

In its essence, the UNESCO's program of action emphasizes that the culture of peace and nonviolence is a commitment to peace-building, mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, peace education, education for nonviolence, tolerance, acceptance, mutual respect, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. It is a conceptual as well as a normative framework envisaged to inspire thoughts and actions of everyone. Therefore, it requires cognitive as well as the emotional abilities to grapple with man's situation in a rapidly changing world as well as with the emerging world society. This aim entails not just more factual knowledge, but also the broadening of one's consciousness and the willingness to develop a new awareness, a new way of being in this world, a new "mental mapping".

The culture of peace continuously brings new challenges prompting men to reconsider the fundamental principles of humanity by highlighting what binds cultures and societies to

each other and from within. Since what unites them is deeper than what separates them, there is a true ethic of living together that is taking shape in the culture of peace and nonviolence process.

The world today, in fact, has an extraordinary and unprecedented opportunity. Men have the chance to open a new page in human history. According to Heffron (2003),

“The belief in non-violence, if it is ever to achieve its object, must seek a deeper anchorage than our fleeting convictions would allow it. It must begin, not with specific projects (although it must ultimately move to them) but with a profound inner revolution, a truly existential determination to seek one’s fundamental, inherent humanity and to transform one’s entire being.”

Such a declaration, put into action, would certainly be met with the unstinting praise of future historians and generation. More than half a century ago, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi sought to break the cycles of violence and reprisal. What distinguishes men from brute beasts, he said, *“is man’s continuous striving for moral self-improvement. Humanity is at a crossroads and must choose, he asserted, violence (the law of the jungle) or nonviolence (the law of humanity).”*

Much has been written about Gandhi as the apostle of nonviolence and how he pondered on this life principle called *ahimsa*-the nonviolence. However, he never wrote a treatise on nonviolence.

Gandhi’s thinking was ahead of his own time and alive today in our time. And underlying all this, as an available source of inspiration for each new generation, is Gandhi’s indomitable faith in the possibility of a radically better human future if only men will learn to trust the power of nonviolent openness to others and to the deeper humanity, and indeed divinity, within us all. To most people this seems impossible. But Gandhi’s great legacy, according to Hick (2006), is that his life has definitively shown that, given true dedication, it is possible in the world as it is.

The wisdom embodied in the selected works of Mahatma Gandhi is one of the motivating factors that could help the Filipino students re-examine their lives and values when they become aware of their genuine philosophical dimension. His writings could describe habits that define the Filipino attitude towards life in general and towards specific actions in particular. They may rightly be regarded as modifiers of human acts, influencing their deep motivations. They are intertwined in the raw materials of the social development of a Filipino student as a person existing in a community of persons. They lend support certainly to the efforts of nation building.

With this thought in mind, the researcher was deeply motivated to explore and undertake an analysis of how *ahimsa*-the nonviolence is reflected in the selected works of the Mahatma Gandhi and gain honest implications on the

influences noted and dominant in the Filipino students’ values. Specifically, the study aims to trace the historical root of nonviolence in India; to determine how is *ahimsa* dealt with in selected works of Mahatma Gandhi; to show how the literary pieces manifest the salient points of the said doctrine with reference to the: subtle forms of *himsa*; quality of the strong; gradational practice; benefits of the practice; power of *ahimsa*; limitation to the practice; and universal vow; to identify the humanitarian issues given focus on the selections; and the implication of Gandhi’s doctrine of *ahimsa* on noted Filipino students’ values.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Every research promises to serve a purpose or significance for the readers to experience and enjoy. In this case, the most important element is the value centered on the knowledge of *ahimsa* provided for by Mahatma Gandhi, whom researchers consider to be among the greatest writer-philosopher in the recent years. Gandhi is a political and religious man of India who wrote dialogues, telegrams, notes and numerous letters to show his feelings against killing and *ahimsa* - or nonviolence. He chose these literary forms because they are popular in India and Indian readers would be comfortable with them. These forms also allowed him an opportunity to critique his own ideas as thoroughly as possible by acting as his own nemesis. A study of his works, therefore, would hopefully introduce him to a wider literary reading public in any part of the world.

Another relative value of the study is the lesson related to the meaning of human existence as derived and presented from the analysis and interpretation of the selected works. So substantial are the citations of Gandhi’s works to illustrate his phenomenology of life. Thus, after serious handling of the values in this study, the readers are expected to catch the breadth and depth of Gandhi’s works. The knowledge and experience they may gain from the study will be fully crystallized and reflected in his deeds and ways.

The study features the interplay of literature with philosophy. The intertwine of these two disciplines will guide the readers, particularly the teachers and students, to broaden their perspective of love among human circle. As readers of researches, it is their responsibility to live among human circle. As readers of researches, it is their responsibility to live by the values this study offers. The true essence is love, which is the quintessence of human existence. And this will provide the explanation why love is inherently and justifiably part and parcel of man’s being.

Likewise, this study may serve as an instructional material in the teaching of humanities specifically Asian Literature in English and inspire further literary research. Reading the selected works shared by this study will certainly widen the teachers’ horizon on spirituality and human existence and thus transform them to persons and teachers who treasure literature and meaningful life.

This study in the areas of research and humanities will provide a bridge to explore the rich literature of contemporary times and further inspire them to explore other unheard and read literary studies. In one's exploration, literature readers will build bridges of strong connection to literature and life as it is. This study hopes to contribute to the body of Asian prose in English, which needs urgent support from people in the literary field. Finally, the real development and appreciation of philosophical and literary enrichment can best be found in the rich thoughts of Gandhi, *ahimsa* and eventual reality.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is an analysis of the selected works from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* pointing out events and situations on how *ahimsa* is reflected in his works. Likewise, the study aims to trace the historical root of nonviolence in India; to determine how *ahimsa* dealt with in selected works of Gandhi; to show how the literary pieces manifest the salient points of the said doctrine with reference to the: subtle forms of *himsa*; quality of the strong; gradational practice; benefits of the practice; power of *ahimsa*; limitation to the practice; and universal vow; to identify the humanitarian issues given focus on the selections; and the implication of Gandhi's doctrine of *ahimsa* on noted Filipino students' values.

This research was guided by the idea that literature can be a writer's channel for conveying the philosophical dimension of *ahimsa*. In the conduct of this study, the qualitative philosophical method of research was used. This involved the science of textual criticism and hermeneutics supported by the researcher's own analysis and insights with reference to the content of the selected texts.

III. METHODS

This study employed the qualitative philosophical method of research in analyzing the tenets of *ahimsa* in the representative literary works chosen. This involved the science of textual criticism and hermeneutics supported by the researcher's own analysis and insights with reference to the content of the selected texts to bring about the philosophical treatment of the identified works and its implication on the noted Filipino students' values.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Root of *Ahimsa* in India

With regard to the etymological origin of the word, the term *ahimsa* is formed by adding the negative prefix *a* to the word *himsa* which is derived from the Sanskrit root '*han*', i.e. '*to kill*', '*to harm*', or '*to injure*', and means not killing, not harming, not injuring. The commonly used English equivalent '*non-violence*' is inadequate as it seems to give a false impression that *ahimsa* is just a negative virtue. *Ahimsa* is not mere abstention from the use of force, not just abstention from

killing and injuring. It also implies the positive virtues of compassion and benevolence because not killing and not injuring a living being implicitly amounts to protecting and preserving it and treating it with mercy (Ahankar, 2014).

The *ahimsa* is an important spiritual doctrine shared by Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahimsa>). In the said religions, the said doctrine has a much wider spiritual connotation and forms an integral aspect of their principles, philosophies and practices.

For over three thousand years, nonviolence was considered the highest virtue or the virtue of virtues in the ascetic traditions of ancient India.

For the people in ancient India who made liberation their primary aim or for the enlightened minds that focused upon spiritual practices, the practice of nonviolence was not a mere theory.

The Buddha practiced it and actively applied it to resolve differences among rulers of his times and prevent wars. He advised people to practice right living on the Eightfold path and avoid hurting or harming others. He preached against cruelty. The Jains practiced extreme forms of nonviolence as they did not want to injure even the smallest organisms. They made it part of their vows. The Hindus practiced nonviolence toward all by refraining from hurtful thoughts, words and actions (Jayaram, 2014).

Doctrine of *Ahimsa* as Reflected in the Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi added a new dimension to *ahimsa* in modern times when he transformed its principles into a viable and effective instrument of political will against the oppressive rule of the British in India. His theory on nonviolence was however political in nature and very different from the kind practice in the ascetic and spiritual world. Gandhi advocated passive resistance to the rule of British and submission to their aggression, whereas the nonviolence practiced in the ascetic traditions advocated sameness and equanimity under all conditions without any willful whatsoever to all external phenomena (Jayaram, 2014).

The selected prose works of Mahatma Gandhi considers the direct union of the human soul with the Divine through letters, essays and personal notes and interviews as the end of his philosophy. For in these selected prose works emerge his ideal that 'all life is one'. He believes in the unity of human life - this unity is a synthetic whole and can neither be divided in spheres like social, religious, political, moral or ethical nor can it be distinguished in levels like individual or collective. What seem to men to be separate segments are, in fact, different facets of human life; they are related to each other and act, react upon one another. Gandhi believes that it's manifestation in humanity is strengthened by *ahimsa*: thus *ahimsa* - also

called truth, love or God - is the core of human life and the divine supreme law that guide humanity at all cost. God or the Supreme Being, who is the Creator of all and called by different names, is the power behind the above unity; for Gandhi, He is also the 'Truth' and it is His voice within everyone that inspires to follow the vision of Truth, and that is possible only by complete realization of *ahimsa*-the nonviolence (Kumar, 2007). This affirms then that the signification of *ahimsa* in literature defines the deep philosophical meaning of the quintessence of human existence, as hypothesized.

The Salient Points of Gandhi's Doctrine of *Ahimsa* Manifested in the Selected Works with reference to:

According to Gandhi, there is only one great spiritual force and only one religion - the religion of love, of peace. *Ahimsa* is the only means to preserve life, to attain salvation and to enjoy uninterrupted peace and bliss, as stated by Sivananda (2005).

- a. The subtle forms of *Himsa*. It can be gleaned from the selected works of Gandhi that the use of harsh and rude speech is considered as subtle forms of *himsa* (violence or injury). Same thing holds true by wounding the feelings of others through gestures, expressions, tone of voice and unkind words.
- b. The quality of the strong. In his literary works, Gandhi advised people that they should put on with insults, rebukes, criticism and assaults. All people get hit by life's slings and arrows from time to time. They may not be able to stop someone's harsh words or careless actions but they can change how they deal with those negativities. He reminded people that these negative things don't have to take them down or tempt them to retaliate nor wish to offend anybody even under extreme provocation.
- c. The gradational practice. It can be gleaned from the selected works how Gandhi emphasized that men must try to control their physical body and speech first and must not "keep their wounds green" which otherwise would heal and do well. He reminded the people that revenge and hatred come at a price. Instead of helping them to move on with their lives, these negative thoughts can leave them dwelling on the situation and remain unhappy. He stressed that it is not good to be less forgiving, less benevolent and less focused on universal-connectedness-type values.
- d. The benefits of the practice. According to Gandhi, if people are established in *ahimsa*, they have attained all virtues. *Ahimsa* is the pivot and all the virtues revolve around it. It is the soul-force. Hate melts in the presence of love. Hate dissolves in the presence of *ahimsa*. There is no power greater than *ahimsa*. Its practice will make one fearless. One can do and undo things.
- e. The power of *ahimsa*. Many people think that love is just a sentiment good for prose or poetry. How easy it is to forget that *ahimsa* is a law as inescapable in the world of human

relations. It is an inexorable law of thought and emotion. The violation of which can bring about broken hearts and broken lives. Being a law, its operation involves energy transformation. The energy of love is the most powerful and unique kind of energy in the universe. Its transformation is the very expression of the Divine Mind itself. It fills the entire universe, but its mightiest seat of operation is in the hearts of men. The power of *ahimsa* is greater than the power of the intellect. Gandhi said that it is easy to develop the intellect, but it is difficult to purify and develop the heart.

- f. The limitation to the practice. Absolute *ahimsa* is impossible. To practice that one must avoid killing countless creatures while walking, sitting, eating, breathing, sleeping and drinking. One cannot find a single non-injurer in the world. One has to destroy life in order to live. In the selected works, Gandhi stressed that it is physically impossible for men to obey the law of non-destruction of life.
- g. The universal vow. *Ahimsa* is a Mahavratam or "great universal vow." Gandhi emphasized in his works that *ahimsa* should be practiced by all people of all countries. It does not concern the Hindus or Indians alone. Whoever wishes to realize the truth must practice *ahimsa*. According to Gandhi, it is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problems of human existence.

The Humanitarian Issues Given Focus on the Selections.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is widely recognized as one of the twentieth century's greatest political and spiritual leaders. Honored in India as the father of the nation, he pioneered and practiced the principle of Satyagraha - resistance to tyranny through mass nonviolent civil disobedience.

While leading nationwide campaigns to ease the humanitarian issues of poverty, expand women's rights, build religious and ethnic harmony and eliminate the injustices of the caste system which are quite evident in his works, Gandhi supremely applied the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, playing a key role in freeing India from foreign domination. He was often imprisoned for his actions, sometimes for years, but he accomplished his aim in 1947, when India gained its independence from Britain.

Due to his stature, he is now referred to as Mahatma, meaning "great soul." World civil rights leaders - from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Nelson Mandela - have credited Gandhi as a source of inspiration in their struggles to achieve equal rights for their people (www.youthforhumanrights.org.)

The Implication of Gandhi's Doctrine of *Ahimsa* on Noted Filipino Students' Values.

The implications of *ahimsa* on Filipino students' values can be hauled out and discerned in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi. This nonviolence advocate with the serene confidence of his faith and his equally confident trust in humanity is very

much two-dimensional person who through his writings inspired and awakens the Filipino students' to see beyond the surface of the transcendent dimensions in their lives. The Filipino students need an inner ear to listen to the wisdom embodied in his selected works. These readings are expressions of greatness from a mind that challenge and inspire readers to a nobler step for posterity. These selected works are embodiments of essential elements for anyone's spirituality. His spirituality is not limited on prayers and contemplation but life itself. It touches man's whole life lived in its totality under the influence of God's spirit. Then men's lives are changed and charged when they become aware of their depths and limitless self with God.

It is the discovery of this dimension of human existence that will make the lives of the Filipino students worth living. The destiny of the Philippines will radically change by bringing into its own human affair a genuine spiritual dimension through the letters. There is a need for transforming the Filipino youth's world of politics and economics and involving them into a faith with dimensional wealth and reality in the world of nonviolence advocates. The new Filipino youth is certainly at hand, with literature and thoughts intertwined through Mahatma Gandhi.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Ahimsa is a Sanskrit term which refers to the principle of nonviolence based on the belief in the sacredness of all living creatures. It is a rule of conduct that bars the killing or injuring of living beings. It is an important tenet of the religions that originated in ancient India specifically Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Gandhi has pondered deeply on the predicament of human existence. He is one of the thinkers who philosophizes that *ahimsa* - also called truth or love - is the ontological core of existence. He concluded that the essence of being is love and the self cannot genuinely encounter reality unless man assumes the existential attitude of love.

The salient features of Gandhi's doctrine of *ahimsa* with reference to the subtle forms of *himsa*, the quality of the strong, the gradational practice, the benefits of the practice, the power of *ahimsa*, the limitation of the practice, and the universal vow find his noblest expressions and exemplifications on his life and works. There surfaces the mystifying thread interwoven in the selected works. It is his consistent and balanced yearning to be united with the Divine that sketched the final picture and not a mirage. Thus, readers see *ahimsa* a means to the end of the spiritual life, not an end in itself; and that the true proponent of this doctrine would hold that only life has intrinsic value and *ahimsa* obviously is the penultimate means of preserving life.

Gandhi supremely applied the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, playing a key role in freeing India from foreign domination while leading nationwide campaigns to ease the humanitarian issues of poverty, expand women's

rights, build religious and ethnic harmony and eliminate the injustices of the caste system.

Mahatma Gandhi, with the serene confidence of his faith and his equally confident trust in human reason, is very much a two-dimensional person who through his writings can inspire the Filipino students themselves see beyond the surface and turn to the transcendental diversion of humanity. The Filipino students can change the way they think if they first step into spiritual growth reviewing their values through the tenets of literature supplied by the just re-examined nonviolence advocate and his commitment to life here and thereafter.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Mahatma Gandhi's works be taken as required home reading and class requirements for students not only for the author's craft and literary technique but also to develop among students appreciation and sense of values to guide and allow them to crystallize and synthesize what philosophy of life is best to learn and live. That literature teachers may work in partnership with teachers of philosophy and humanities in presenting *ahimsa* and the meaning of nonviolence using their own instructional approaches, materials and media for wider dissemination and readership. That teachers of philosophy and humanities be invited to attend conferences, seminars, workshops, trainings, retreats and recollections to get the feel of the values intrinsic in *ahimsa*. That researches be done for other works written by Asian and Filipino writers in the veins of the recent research for academic enhancement to have a cross dissection of views of life and the nature of an Asian and his political, theological and intellectual background.

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