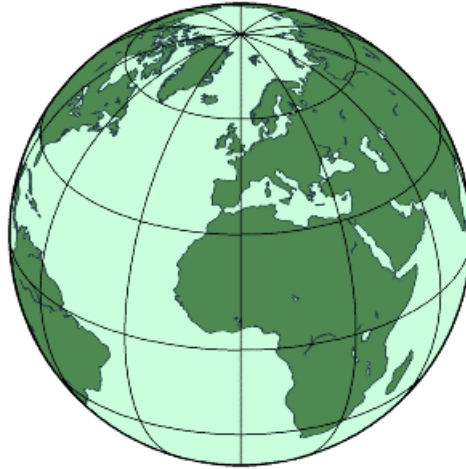


# Practical Aspects of Satyagraha



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# Introduction

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- The previous chapter explained the main principles of Satyagraha
- This chapter explores some practical aspects of Satyagraha

# Time period for a Satyagraha campaign

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- Many Satyagraha campaigns run for a long time
- To understand why, imagine Fred is a member of the apathetic majority:
  - Fred sees “Police use violence against peaceful protesters” in the news
  - Initially he thinks “That’s not right. But there’s nothing I can do.”
  - If Fred sees the similar headlines *repeatedly* over many weeks then he grows uneasy
    - It is only at this point that he *starts* to apply peer pressure
  - When the headlines continue, he slowly increases the peer pressure
- Look at biographies of Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr.:
  - Their campaigns usually lasted *at least* several months
  - King’s Montgomery bus boycott lasted 1 year

# Required skills

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- Two skills are vitally important for a Satyagraha campaign
- Scalable communication skills (typically media skills)
  - You need this to generate peer pressure
- Training for the peaceful protestors:
  - You must ensure no violence is *ever* used
  - Tips:
    - Teach protestors about the Bell Curve of Intolerance model so they understand *why* refraining from violence is important
    - Have protestors sing peaceful songs (such as hymns) to dissipate their anger
  - If *any* protestor (or any person who could be mistaken for one) uses violence then immediately stop the protest
    - Both Gandhi and King applied this tactic successfully
    - Otherwise the media will report the 1% of violence

# Target *one* feature of oppression

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- Do not run a Satyagraha campaign against anti-X oppression in general
- Instead, campaign against *one* feature of the oppression.  
Examples:
  - Unequal pay for X and non-X employees in a specific company
  - Segregation of *one* facility, such as buses, restaurants or toilets
  - Denial of a particular service to X people
- Benefits of this focussed approach:
  - It makes it easier for the apathetic majority to understand the issue and sympathise enough to apply peer pressure
  - Success for one issue makes it easier to achieve success for other issues later on
    - Your opponents will think “They caused disruption for 6 months for that first issue. We don’t want to go through that trouble again.”

## Target *one* feature of oppression (cont')

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- This anecdote is from: Chapter 16 (“The Albany Movement”) of *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*
- Black rights protestors in Albany ran simultaneous campaigns against:
  - Discrimination in public places (libraries and parks)
  - Denial of voting rights
  - Segregations in schools
  - Segregation on buses
  - Denial of free speech and assembly
- King’s analysis:
  - “The mistake I made there was to protest against segregation generally rather than against a single and distinct facet of it. Our protest was so vague that we got nothing, and the people were left very depressed and in despair.”

# Target economic power instead of political power

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- A Satyagraha campaign can be more effective if it is aimed at *economic power* of oppressors rather than *political power*
- Limits of targeting political power:
  - Oppressed X people may not have enough votes to bring about change
  - Even if they do, elections occur only once every, say, 4 years
- Benefits of targeting economic power:
  - Often, oppressed X people are customers of their oppressors
  - Boycotting an oppressor's business *quickly* affects its profits
  - In addition, economic problems quickly get the attention of politicians
- King's analysis of the Albany movement:
  - "We attacked the political power structure instead of the economic power structure. You don't win against a political power structure where you don't have the votes."



# Think nationally, act locally

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- A *localized* Satyagraha campaign can generate *national* media coverage:
  - Because of this, a local win can affect national policy
- There were two examples of this in earlier chapters:
  - These examples are repeated on the following slides for ease of reference

# Recap: Gandhi tackled job discrimination

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## ■ Sequence of events:

- Gandhi had a law degree
- Gandhi applied for a license to work in the South African Supreme Court
  - No non-white person had such a license
- Existing barristers invented silly reasons to deny him his request
- Gandhi was enraged by this, “but I restrained my feelings”
- Gandhi’s autobiography does not mention him communicating the issue to newspapers. But he must have done so because...
  - “Most of the newspapers condemned the opposition and accused the Law Society of jealousy.”
  - In this way, peer pressure was applied
- Result: Gandhi obtained his license:

## ■ Gandhi’s win was well publicised so it set a precedent for national policy

# Recap: King secured black voting rights

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## ■ Sequence of events:

- In many states in the USA :
  - Black people could not vote
  - Or racist bureaucracy made it almost impossible for black people to register to vote
- King asked the US president to introduce a bill to tackle this
- President said that public and political opinion would defeat such a bill
- King organized Satyagraha-based protests in Selma
  - Selma had racist bureaucracy to hinder black voter registration
  - As planned, peaceful protestors were met with violence
- Nationwide media reported the protest
- Result: the apathetic majority applied peer pressure
  - The president was able to introduce a bill for black voting
  - The bill passed

## ■ Total elapsed time: 5 months

# Summary

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- A Satyagraha campaign is not a one-day protest. It can last for months
- Vital skills:
  - Media communication (for peer pressure)
  - Self-discipline to *never* use violence
- Campaign on *one* specific issue.
  - If possible, make it an economic issue
- A successful *local* campaign can have *national* impact

# Exercise

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- Amnesty International ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)) uses Satyagraha tactics:
  - It campaigns only for people who have not used violence
  - An international letter-writing campaign is used to apply peer pressure
  - Letter writers instructed to be polite and respectful
  - Campaigns can last for a long time
  
- Exercise: analyse the tactics of other organizations
  - Are those tactics compatible with Satyagraha?
  - Could those organizations be more effective if they embraced Satyagraha?