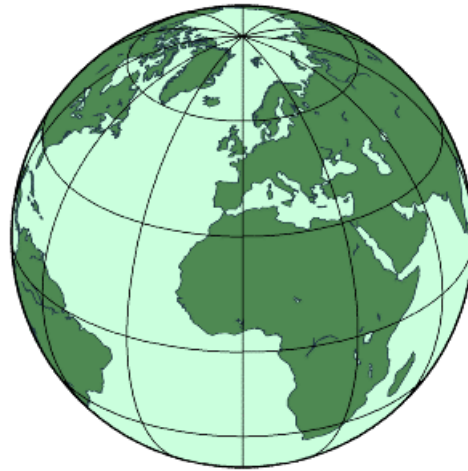


Bell Curve Insight into Satyagraha



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1. What is Satyagraha?

Gandhi and Satyagraha

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) was:
 - One of the most significant people of the 20th century (according to Time magazine)
 - One of the most successful activists of all time
- Some other famous activists were inspired by Gandhi:
 - Examples: Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela
- Gandhi used peaceful tactics to fight violent oppression
 - He did not like the term “passive resistance”
 - He coined the term *Satyagraha*, meaning truth-force
 - From Sanskrit. *Satya* means truth; *Graha* means firmness or force

Outline of Satyagraha strategy

- Outline of Satyagraha strategy:
 - Lead peaceful demonstrations and refuse to obey unjust laws
 - Do not resist arrest. Do not defend yourself against attack
 - Do not try to destroy, hurt or humiliate your oppressors (instead, leave the door open to friendship)
- The oppressors typically respond to this strategy with:
 - Mass imprisonment of protestors
 - Beatings and even murder of the protestors
- Surprisingly, Satyagraha (eventually) worked
 - Gandhi had many successes with it
 - Eventually, he used it to end English rule of India
- What is the explanation for Satyagraha's success?

Gandhi's explanation of Satyagraha's success

- Gandhi described Satyagraha as
 - “The vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self.”
 - Chapter 11 (“Gandhi Goes to Jail”) of Part One in “The Life of Mahatma Gandhi” by Louis Fischer
- There are longer descriptions of Satyagraha but they all are based on religious ideas, such as:
 - Love can conquer hate
 - Self-suffering, penance and self-restraint are good for the soul
- Satyagraha worked, but it does not seem logical
- The bell curve of intolerance offers another explanation
 - Much easier to understand, regardless of your religious beliefs
 - If you can understand Satyagraha then you can use it in your activism

2. Insight provided by the bell curve

The bell curve explanation for Satyagraha's success

■ Initial events:

- X and pro-X activists do a peaceful protest *designed to provoke* anti-X extremists
- Anti-X extremists react, usually with violence and mass arrests
- X and pro-X activists *do not* defend themselves or resist arrest

■ Then:

- The asymmetrical conflict is *widely reported* in the news
- The *apathetic majority* become sympathetic and take action:
- “I don’t like X people much but they don’t deserve *that* treatment”
- They put *peer pressure* on anti-X extremists to stop
- The international, apathetic community also becomes sympathetic
- They put political peer pressure on the government to stop anti-X extremists

Comparison of explanations

- Gandhi did not discuss mass communication (to generate peer pressure) as being a part of Satyagraha
 - Perhaps he thought this was obvious & therefore not worth mentioning
 - Or perhaps he was so focused on spiritual issues that he discarded non-spiritual aspects of Satyagraha
 - Mark Shepard (author of “Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths”) believes Gandhi did not realize the importance of mass communication
- Mass communication is important because:
 - It enables the apathetic majority to see the horrifying truth of oppression
 - Many anti-X extremists believe they are carrying out the will of the majority
 - When the majority express horror at the actions of the anti-X extremists:
 - The extremists’ pride turns to shame
 - The extremists no longer feel safe from prosecution by the majority

Examples of Satyagraha

- You can find many documented examples of Satyagraha-based campaigns in:
 - Biographies of Gandhi
 - *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*
- The following slides provide two examples:
 - The first example is from Gandhi
 - Chapter 18 (“Colour Bar”) in Part II of Gandhi’s autobiography
 - The second example is from Martin Luther King Junior.
 - Chapter 26 (“Selma”) of *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*

Example: Gandhi tackled job discrimination

■ 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

■ Note: this example shows that Satyagraha can work even if your opponent uses bureaucracy instead of violence

Example: King secured black voting rights

■ 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
- The president said 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

5. Summary

Summary

- Satyagraha is usually explained in religious terms
 - Something like “love is more powerful than hate”
 - Or “penance and suffering are good for the soul”
- The bell curve model offers a better explanation for the success of Satyagraha
 - A non-religious explanation is easier to understand
- This chapter has only scratched the surface of Satyagraha
 - Satyagraha has many subtleties you need to understand before you can use it properly
 - See the “Satyagraha” chapter for more details