

The Nonviolent Community: 90% Constructive Programme, 10% Resistance

For Gandhi, the sword of nonviolence has two edges: cooperating with good, 'Constructive Programme', and noncooperation with evil, more familiarly known as nonviolent resistance, or if you prefer the 'Obstructive Programme'.

Sometimes people think of nonviolence only as a form of resistance or in opposition to violence, injustice, and oppression. True, resistance is vitally important, but it is only part of the story. The ability of nonviolence to obstruct, disrupt and protest is well known; less deliberately practiced and understood is the creative power of nonviolence.

Constructive Programme is the process of envisioning and concretely building a society that reflects the values and principles of justice and the well-being of all. Gandhi believed that the real power of nonviolence resides in the constructive programme.

Gandhi created 17 Constructive Programmes during his decades-long struggle for Indian independence from British rule. His Constructive Programme campaigns included education, gender, village self-sufficiency, Hindu/Muslim unity, the abolition of untouchability, among other issues.

A prime example of Constructive Programme was the spinning wheel. One day in 1940 a young Indian asked Gandhi 'What will it really take to get the British off our backs?' Gandhi brightly replied, 'Phenomenal progress in spinning'.

The British had established a monopoly on the production of clothing. Indians shipped raw material, cotton called *khadi*, to British textile mills that made cloth and shipped it back to India. Gandhi orchestrated both a resistance campaign, boycotting British clothing, and a Constructive campaign, building up the community by empowering the Indians to make their own clothing. Countless Indians heeded Gandhi's call to spin *khadi* at least 30 times a day. Some of the positive effects of the Constructive spinning programme included:

- concrete and practical production of clothing
- effective and long-term solution, locally-made clothing rather than imported
- inclusivity—everyone could participate at some level regardless of class, caste, religion or gender
- communal unity and solidarity as people gathered to do spinning in big halls

Many Indians, especially Westernised city dwellers did not like wearing *khadi*. It's itchy, rough and it's definitely not high fashion. This kind of argument hurt Gandhi to the quick:

'We must be prepared to be satisfied with such cloth as India can produce, even as we are thankfully content with such children as God gives us. I have not known a mother throwing out a baby even though it appears ugly to the outsider'.

You may also recall Gandhi's other great campaign about salt; in a tropical country like India it's an absolute basic necessity. With these two campaigns, the 'obstructive' bid to get the salt back from the government and the constructive project to make cloth at the village level, Gandhi sought to repossess two of the most basic life-sustaining elements of any economy, food and clothing.

Near the end of his life, Gandhi argued that nonviolence work should be 90% Constructive Programme and 10% Resistance.

Sources

The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A promise of peace for ourselves, our families and our world, by Michael Nagler
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