THE CLASSICAL ROOTS, RELEVANCE AND DYNAMICS OF NON-VIOLENCE
AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: A DISCOURSE IN NUTSHELL

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ABSTRACT

Every action involves either ‘doing’ or ‘not-doing’. Non-violence is the philosophical doctrine that upholds non-killing or non-destruction as virtuous and sacred. In other words, it is the philosophy that denounces violence as a channel of getting things done or as a means of social change. The philosophical idea of non-violence is historical, and its roots can be traced to the ancient Buddhist/Jainist doctrines of the oriental world, aspects of the Bible, and the practice of oath in African traditional sense. A remarkable development of this is the fact that recent conceptualization on the doctrine seem to emphasize its practical aspects, otherwise called civil disobedience. In the following paragraphs, we shall point out that non-violence as a philosophical doctrine is traceable to some classical traditions and teachings of such as the Gita, Socrates, and Jesus; and that has been developed to its practical aspect called ‘civil disobedience. We conclude that although Thoreau, Gandhi and King have, in recent history, developed from the doctrine of non-violence a philosophical programme of action, not much of the doctrine, in its classical conception, has changed.

Keywords: Philosophy, Violence, Non-violence, Civil Disobedience