The Doctrine of sword: An extract from a book

I do believe that when there is only a choice between cowadice and violence. I would advise violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless victim to her own dishonour. But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.

Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her... But I do not believe India to be helpless; I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature...

Let me not be misunderstood. Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law-to the strength of the spirit.

I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self sacrifice. For Satyagraha and its off-shoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The Rishis who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and thought ........... salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence.

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or regeneration.

And so I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because it is weak. I want her to practice non-violence being conscious of her strength and power... I want India to recognize that she has a soul that cannot perish, and that can rise triumphant above my physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world.

I isolate this non-co-operation from Sinn Feinism, for; it is so conceived as to be incapable of being offered side by side with violence. But I invite even the school of violence to give this peaceful non-co-operation a trail. It will not fail through its inherent weakness. It may fail because of poverty of response...........The high-souled men, who are unable to suffer national humiliation any longer, will want to vent their wrath. They will take to violence. So far as I know, they must perish without delivering themselves or their country from the wrong. If India takes up the doctrine of the sword, she may gain momentary victory. Then India will cease to be the pride of my heart. I am wedded to India because I owe my all to her. I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world.

Mahatma Gandhi.

Source: "An autobiography-Jawaharlal Nehru", Published by penguin Books India 2004-page No.89