

A Gandhian Concept Towards "Conflict Resolution & Peace"

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts around the world have done great damage to the world society. Conflicts reflected in the form of wars are common phenomenon. This paper explores the detailed perspective of Gandhian philosophy towards conflict resolution and presents this philosophy as the most potent solution to overcome the negativities of conflicts.

CONFLICT

Conflict is omnipresent in the life of an individual living in this world. This conflict is felt at various levels and has been one of the major roadblocks for the happy and peaceful evolution of human civilization. There are so many dogmas, confusions, attachments, cravings, and self-interests that have got associated with modern human beings that their true nature is being hampered. Conflicts which are so apparent and visible in today's society that sometimes it raises doubt that whether the human civilization is progressing or moving back to barbaric age. Millions of lives got lost in two world wars that happened in 20th century.

In this millennium again millions of lives have already been lost in different conflicts that have occurred in Columbia, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and many other countries. Nature of conflicts might have changed but the results are as negative as they were in the past.

One of the worst manifestations of conflict is in the form of war. War is an organized, armed, and often a prolonged conflict that is carried on between states, nations, and parties typified by extreme aggression, social disruption, and usually high mortality (freedictionary.com). War should be understood as an actual, intentional, and widespread armed conflict between political communities, and therefore defined as a form of political violence.

Dutch psychoanalyst Meerlo (2009) held that, " War is often...a mass discharge of accumulated internal rage (where)...the inner fears of mankind are discharged in mass destruction. Thus war can sometimes be a means by which man's own frustration at his inability to master his own self is expressed and temporarily relieved via his unleashing of destructive behavior upon others. In this destructive scenario, these others are made to serve as the scapegoat of man's own unspoken and subconscious frustrations and fears.

Other psychoanalysts such as E.F.M. Durban and John Bowlby (1939) have argued that human beings are inherently violent. This aggressiveness is fueled by displacement and projection where a person transfers his or her grievances into bias and hatred against other races, religions, nations or ideologies. By this theory, the nation state preserves order in the local society while creating an outlet for aggression through warfare. If war is innate to human nature, as is presupposed and predetermined by many psychological theories, then there is little hope of ever escaping it.

Conflicts have a negative impact on the society. According to the UN Human Development Report of 2005, nine of the 18 countries whose Human Development Index (HDI) declined in the 1990s experienced conflict in the same period. Per capita incomes and life expectancy fell in virtually all of these countries. About 25 million people are currently internally displaced because of conflict or human rights violations. Nine of the 10 countries ranked at the bottom of the human development index (HDI) have experienced violent conflict at some point since 1990 (United Nations Human Development Report 2005, p.154)

Conflicts vary and so are the impacts on human civilization. There are countries like India who respect cultural and religious pluralism and unity in diversity is best reflected here despite of so many internal conflicts. Four of the world's great religions were born here, and four other came to us from West Asia and have flourished here for centuries.

From the Vedic dictum of Ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti - the truth is one, the wise call it by many names - down to present times, the vast and varied mosaic that is India has always been a land in which multiple races and religions, languages and customs, cultures and traditions have flowered. But this has not been the case with many other countries who in the name of restoring peace and doing greater good to the society have forced so many wars and ruined so many lives. In the name of clash of civilizations and secularism these countries have led this world to so many conflicts. Political, social, and economical differences have been the reason of many conflicts. The legacy of British Imperialism has been the cause for

so many prolonged conflicts spreading from Kashmir in India to countries like Iraq, Palestine, and Zimbabwe. Many western countries have developed the phobia of supremacy and in the history of modern world it is clearly apparent that this phobia has made many countries and societies suffer and suffocate. Many cultures, traditions, and ideologies have been destroyed. History has been distorted. Great literatures have been destroyed or have been reinterpreted in the wrong way.

Natural resources of many countries have been exploited by these so called developed nations. An independent panel of experts reported to the UN Security Council in October 2002 of how 85 transnational companies based in Europe, the United States and South Africa (including household names such as Barclays bank, De Beers and Anglo-American) had transgressed ethical guidelines in dealing with criminal networks that have pillaged natural resources from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Countries like Afghanistan and Iraq have almost been ruined through the prolonged wars that have taken place in these countries.

The philosophy of the countries that are mostly responsible for conflicts prevalent in the world today is that to make our country prosperous it is necessary to poke the nose in the affairs of other countries. Moreover, the mentality is that all the good things such as natural resources of other developing and poor countries should come under our control and the responsibility of feeding the population and developing infrastructure and facilities should be rested on the shoulders of the host country.

Looking at the conflict scenario of the world following causes comes to light which by the have always been the cause of human problems according to the ancient Indian wisdom:

- Lust for Self-aggrandizement
- Manifestation of Anger
- Greed
- Envy and Jealousy

Lust for Self-aggrandizement

Some countries in the West have become the puppet in the hands of Capitalism with selected set of business organizations creating conflict in the world society to fulfill their unending lust for material gains. For these organizations nothing matter except the financial gains. This lust has blinded them and for them the whole world is nothing more than a place to be exploited to increase the bank balance of their organizations. The natural resource of many

under developed nations has been exploited by big business organizations that have their origins in the western countries. In Angola more than 30 transnational oil companies have paid the government for rights to exploit oil, without disclosing either to Angolans or to their shareholders how much they paid or to whom. In the Caspian region oil exploitation rights are governed by multinational partnership agreements between governments and foreign investors. These have all been negotiated in secret. There are many big business organizations that are ready to resort to any means be it legal or illegal for fulfilling their self-interest and becoming the cause of the conflict. Many civil wars that have taken place recently have been the brainchild of some selfish motives of so-called self-proclaimed developed minds and civilization. These have been the case of created conflict between two parties by the third party which is the actual gainer. 'Divide and rule' has been the legacy of British Imperialism which is still being used by many western countries for conflict creation in under developed or developing countries.

Manifestation of Anger

When self-interests become difficult to pursue because of some barriers being created then it manifests itself in the form of anger. This anger when reflects in the behaviour causes open conflict between those whose self-interest gets blocked and those who have been responsible for blocking that. Recently the case of Iraq is the fitting example. The war in Iraq had hardly to do with any WMD (weapons of mass destruction) but was the result of manifestation of anger of one party over the other who was being considered as the barrier in the path of pursuance of activities with pure vested interests. The result of this Iraq conflict is that it has already cost the attacking country more than the combined GNI of most of sub-Saharan Africa. What will be the gains of this war for the attacking country is still the secret.

Greed

Many global conflicts are the result of greed. Greed for land, greed for resources, greed for influence, greed for power, greed for spreading own ideologies and religion, greed for self-enhancement. The poison of greed has created great deal of conflicts in the society. This greed has affected personal lives, professional lives, and the domain of international business and politics. Global conflict and warfare, as well as the destruction of our precious environment are obvious symptoms of corporate and political greed. Greed, craving, and thirst of powerful nations have affected each of us on a personal and global level. The endless and pernicious cycle of greed demonstrated by many developed nations has brought lot of suffering and unhappiness to the world society. The present violent conflicts in the oil

region in Nigeria involving kidnapping of oil workers, illegal oil bunkering, vandalism of oil installations and militancy are all the outcomes of pure economic greed and powerful oil companies having the tag of MNC's being responsible for that.

Inya Eteng (1997) writes that:

Oil exploration and exploitation has over the decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger Delta- oil bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and the environment and the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people.

Greed element is bound to be found in some proportion for the conflicts.

Envy and Jealousy

Envy and jealousy have also been the cause of many conflicts at the local, national, and global level. Even in ancient times the war in Ramayana and Mahabharata had some element of envy and jealousy in it. The cold war of 1980's between USA and USSR had sufficient elements of envy and jealousy. The Armenian Genocide was carried out by the "Young Turk" government of the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1916 (with subsidiaries to 1922-23). One and a half million Armenians were killed, out of a total of two and a half million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Similarly there was a Jewish holocaust. The Armenian genocide is similar to the Jewish holocaust in many respects. Both people adhere to an ancient religion. Both were religious minorities of their respective states. Both have a history of persecution. Both have new democracies. Both were surrounded by enemies. Both were talented and creative minorities who have been persecuted out of envy and obscurantism. Gotz Aly, a leading German historian in his book 'Why the Germans? Why the Jews?' has claimed that a peculiar German inferiority complex coupled with a lust to 'get on' led to the country's collective moral collapse which led to the Holocaust of six million Jews.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The full costs of conflict cannot be captured by statistics alone (and, in any case, data are often least reliable in countries undergoing violent conflict). The immediate human costs, though enormous, represent a small fraction of the price countries pay for conflict. In protracted conflicts, whole generations of children and youth are brutalized by the effects of war. Families and communities pass on the trauma of rape, looting and violent deaths to

posterity. Natural habitats are devastated, food production and local markets are disrupted, leading to widespread malnutrition and undermining gains made in health and education.

Absence of conflict is peace. When any conflict ends and peace is restored it is called as conflict resolution. Conflict resolution could also be conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. Conflict resolution is basically a generic term used for any sort of method that is used for solving the conflict.

In this paper the method, philosophy, and belief of Mahatama Gandhi regarding conflict resolution is presented as an ideal for restoring peace and sanity in the world society.

GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Mahatama Gandhi was a pioneer of Satyagraha, or resistance through mass non-violent civil disobedience and became one of the major political and spiritual leaders of his time. Satyagraha remains one of the most potent philosophies in freedom struggles throughout the world today.

Even after his death, Gandhi's commitment to non-violence and his belief in simple living--making his own clothes, eating a vegetarian diet, and using fasts for self-purification as well as a means of protest--have been a beacon of hope for oppressed and marginalized people throughout the world.

Given below are some of excerpts of his speech which he gave in 1919 on non-violence:

"I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. 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 the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless treasure. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the holy people 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, 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." He further said:

"I have therefore ventured to place before Indian the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For satyagraha and its off shoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The risbis 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 taught a weary world that its 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 pitting 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 its regeneration.”

Social and political changes can be achieved not only through violence and terror, but also through love and compassion of which Gandhi was a staunch follower, believer, and practitioner.

Gandhi's message of peace permeated everything he did in his life, from the spiritual to the political realm, from family and communal life to the national and global realms. Indeed, it is still reverberating today and will continue to influence and inspire future generations. The doctrine of ahimsa, or non-violence, was one of Gandhi's core principles, and ultimately involved active, ceaseless love for all life (Richard Gregg, 1959).

He said that by working with this law, human beings expressed the harmony and order of the Cosmos.

Gandhi believed in the absolute oneness of God and humanity; therefore, he identified with all fellow beings.

“There is nothing on earth that I would not give up for the sake of the country excepting of course two things and two only, namely, truth and nonviolence. I would not sacrifice these two for all the world. For to me Truth is God and there is no way to find Truth except the way of nonviolence. I do not seek to serve India at the sacrifice of Truth or God. For I know that a man who forsakes Truth can forsake his country, and his nearest and dearest ones.” (Mahatma, II, Speech, 12/20/1926, in *All Men are Brothers*, p. 73).

Careful thinking had to enter in the mindsets if we want a peaceful world. Decision makers need to stop being crazy in exhibiting their angers and fears and becoming sketchy in their actions. Conflicts are the part and parcel of all of us but common sense calls for constructive measures to be followed to resolve that instead of following the path of destruction. Revenge, bitterness, violence, fear, anger, suppression, exploitation, hatred are curser to any

society. Non-violence has no alternative in the long run to overcome these deficiencies of society. Social, economic, and political conflicts have to be resolved on the basis of non-violence so greatly and practically demonstrated by Gandhi in his life. Ideal of non-violence which is required and desired by the society has to become practical and should be a part of normal conduct of leaders, nations, and global society as a whole.

Mahatama Gandhi was able to resolve so many conflicts with his policy of non-violence. In Champaran, northern India, there were some anti-peasant laws in 1917 where 15% plantation of indigo was compulsory for peasants in a forceful manner. Planter's behavior was also miserable towards the peasants. Gandhi solved that matter peacefully. The law was repealed and justice given to the peasants. All this was done by Gandhi in complete nonviolent mode (Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*). This was a struggle for economic justice, with no political implications.

Another non-violent struggle, this time for social rights, took place in a village called Vykom, in the State of Travancore in southern India. It was also directed by Gandhi, through some of his followers.

The struggle resulted in change of policy and had reverberations all through India and aided in removing similar restrictions against "untouchables" in other parts of India, and in strengthening the cause of caste reform (Rajendra Prasad, 1940).

Other instances of the successful use of organized mass nonviolent resistance include the Ahmedabad mill strike in 1917 and the struggles against the government at Kheda in 1916-17 and at Borsad in 1923 against unjust taxes, and at Nagpur in 1927 for the right to parade with an Indian Nationalist flag. All of these were conducted or supervised by Gandhi (Richard Gregg, 1959).

Besides these there was the all-India non-cooperation struggle of 1921-22 which was unsuccessful in its immediate objective and yet immensely successful in awakening that country with its population of 350,000,000 people to desire freedom and to work concretely for its attainment. It profoundly altered the entire political situation in India, and thereby in the British Empire (Andrews, 1930).

In 1947, after twenty-six years of nonviolent struggle under Gandhi's leadership, India won her political freedom from Britain. Not a single Briton, to the best of everybody's knowledge, was killed by Indians as part of this struggle. It was the Indians who voluntarily

endured the necessary deaths and suffering. This was the first time in the history of the world that a great empire had been persuaded by nonviolent resistance to grant freedom to one of its subject countries. Of course, as in all great and complex events, there were many reasons for the result, but the nonviolent method is what eventually unified all Indians and gave them the necessary self-respect, self-reliance, courage and persistence, and also resulted in mutual respect and good feeling between Great Britain and India at the end (Richard Gregg, 1959).

Cruelty is a complex of fear, anger and pride (Gene Sharp, 1959). Greed is a distorted desire for security and completion. In a sense it is a fear of lack. Pride is another mistaken sense of divisiveness. Bigotry is an obstinate, narrow religious pride. In all such instances, the tendency of nonviolent resistance is to remove fear, anger and any foreboding or dread of loss or sense of separateness and to replace these with feelings of security, unity, sympathy and good will. Since fear and anger are elements of cruelty, the removal of fear and anger will tend to reduce cruelty. This was what Gandhi did.

CONCLUSION

Conflicts have led this world into lot of wars at various levels and in different parts of the world. It has claimed so many lives, created huge physical damage, generated trauma, losses of resources, and many times making the generations suffer. There is an urgent need, in order to prevent war, democratically and without violence, to change the society from its very foundations and throughout its entire structure and motivation.

Competition and conflicts should take the form of cooperation. Non-violence principle of Gandhi is here proposed as the most authentic, complete, and simplified pattern for the social, economic and political activities of society. It is a means of building up a conscious purpose and practice of mutuality and friendly cooperation. Non-violence has the power to integrate societies and providing opportunities to people for their growth and prosperity. World could get united peacefully only when non-violence would come out of the theory and becomes an integral foundation of thinking and behavior of world leaders who are presently found wanting on the front of acting as a true global citizen. Ends should be tied with means to have a more holistic view of the conflict resolution. Teachings of Gandhi provides us a way of developing the sentiments, motives, mutual trust and moral power needed to carry us without violence through the vast changes that are coming so swiftly, a way to make a beginning of effective, remedial economic action, to bring about wise

changes, and to support the new forms of society and assure that they will be better than what we now have. We must build a much stronger moral foundation for society than we now have.

World leaders have to stop talking of non-violence unless their actions reflect that. The duality shown by many powerful world leaders has time to time raised doubts on their true intentions. Gandhi is so respected today because his thinking, words, and deeds all matched and that was the reason why millions of Indians resorted to non-violence in the fight of independence despite of so many tortures and suppressions by the British rule. World leaders should realize this fact that to get the trust and respect of masses they will have to first become true to their own conscience and demonstrate highest level of integrity and non-violence in their actions to generate influence on people. Power should not be abused instead should be used to bring maximum benefit to the world society. Violence has always done more damage than the good to the society. Leaders who aspire to alter that bad social system must themselves become better men and women than they were before. And they must continue that progress and remain humble in order that when they attain power they do not become corrupted and sell out the cause. Only the method of nonviolence can be proof against such corruption.

Richard Gregg (1959) following words reflects what Gandhi thought and did:

“We have more control over our own characters than we have over the external forms of society. So we must begin with ourselves, knowing that to the extent that we can win self-control and strength in the qualities needed for this struggle, we will be able to begin to modify society. Indeed, that part of society in our own neighborhood will begin to change as soon as we start. The responsibility thus rests squarely on ourselves and our work begins there. We must change the character of our own lives.”

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