

Gandhi And His Trajectory World Peace

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The present world is passing through a very difficult period. Violence and terrorism have become the catch words of international politics. After the 9/11 attacks on World Trade centre and Pentagon, there is increasing realization that existing military solutions are inadequate to provide security to the people concerned. People all over the world are living in constant fear and insecurity. This precarious situation and the futility of the weapons of mass destruction in ensuring peace prompt one to think about non-violent methods.

In this context, we should not miss this point that the growing concern of international community has been reflected in the declarations and decisions of international organizations including the United Nations. The United Nations in its 61st General Assembly declared October 2, the birthday of Gandhi, as the International Non-violence Day. The wide co-sponsorship of the draft resolution reflected the universal acceptance of the non-violent method successfully employed by Gandhi in South Africa and later in India. Gandhi has now become a synonym for non-violence and peace. The contribution of Gandhi is that he changed the very meaning of peace and non-violence. In other words, he has revolutionized these concepts and practically demonstrated its use on a massive scale.

As is well known, Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest preacher of peace the world has seen after Buddha and Christ. His notion of world peace is centered on nonviolence, individualism, soul force and forgiveness. At first glance, world peace initiatives might be perceived as far-flung methodologies that have wholly diverged from his ideologies. Many modern researchers and philosophers feel that today's conflicts are far more complex, so as their solutions. World peace, global citizen, neo-modern trends and global issues have placed Gandhi at the backseat of the global forum. But, there exists a fundamental correlation of what Gandhi

had said and what the world is doing these days to combat violence and bring peace.

This paper tries to find how his ideologies can be put in current day's world peace initiatives.

Gandhi's reflections on the issue of world peace are for the most part narrowly understood in the welter of the secondary literature on Gandhian thought. The problem of world peace has mostly been studied by way of analyses of Gandhi's various comments and rejoinders on the international affairs of his times. The works of this type are preoccupied with unraveling Gandhi's often puzzling and seemingly inconsistent standpoints on the war effort of the Allies in the First and Second World Wars. Although these analyses do provide some factual information about how Gandhi responded to the current events of his day, their authors often miss how Gandhi stood with respect to the fundamentals of world peace. His response to some of the well-meaning but ineffective crusaders for peace in the western countries was: "All activity for stopping war must prove fruitless so long as the causes of war are not understood and radically dealt with."¹

Theorising World Peace

At the outset of this article, a word or two about the concept of world peace may not be out of place here. World peace is defined as an ideal of freedom, peace, and happiness among and within all nations and/or people. It generally includes an idea of planetary non-violence by which nations willingly cooperate, either voluntarily or by virtue of a system of governance that prevents warfare. Today, peace has predominantly become political work towards settlement of issues between the nations through military involvement, cessation of arms and weapons and dialogue on less-violent, civilian matters.² Peace has also included some humanitarian efforts that stretch its helping hands to the calamity-hit regions in the world.

Today, nation-states worldwide have not used much of democratic means to maintain peace, rather bound to display their military character and

power to settle down issues that disturbed peace. They often fail to realize the fact that violence erupts at the social level, commutes to the political level and seeking a resolution finally at the military level. Diplomatic efforts have become more so customary and ineffective in front of military powers. The economic status of the nations too plays a crucial role in determining the degree of success of any peace initiative.³

Gandhi is not seen in this platform of world peace. His ideologies remain neglected at the global forum and are considered as a tonic for social and cultural development only. As he is known as the Father of the nation politically, economically his dictum stands as a medicine merely for building local economy. Global communities have not come and thought of Gandhi as a "solution provider", "conflict breaker" or even as a peace activist. World peace continues to be at the hands of world powers that use violence and warfare. Indeed the situation is so grim that even a global peace campaigner is quite plausibly to localize and narrow down himself and his campaign giving in to the pressures and rigid policies of the governments.

Today political leaders take chances of peace in their hands and play a role in making or breaking the nations. Nations engage in dialogue and negotiations to settle down their ethnic problems and border issues. Political, diplomatic and media powers contribute their part to facilitate this peace process but hatred and hostilities dominate the situation as peace is not achieved at the individual levels. World governments fail to identify the key personals and power-centers that govern the war frameworks and conflict centers. Dialogues are meant for mutual understanding, not for nurturing hatred and obscuring manipulations. They shall not give the slightest chance for eruption of violence or war by both the military and the militant or rebel groups. Misrepresentation and shallow understanding of conflicts between the groups within a country and between the countries rather complicates the situation. Changing political conditions shall not set hurdles in the ongoing conflict resolution process.

Gandhi said, "If we have no charity, and no tolerance, we shall never settle our differences amicably and must therefore always submit to the arbitration of a third party."⁴ Many of today's conflict management techniques and resolution process have a clear shadow of what and how Gandhi had seen inter-national issues in his times. A war-hunger nation has nothing in this world whilst a starving nation needs every kind of help from the world. A nation endangering peace in the world has no security for itself.

Peace can never be achieved by one-dimensional and unilateral talks or efforts. It has numerous facets of social, ethnical, religious and political elements and copious ways to deal with them to bring and stabilize worsened situations under control. The true character of a conflict must be identified and may perhaps be attributed any of those hidden elements. Gandhi's perception of bringing peace and resolving conflict had such a diversified point of interest every time when he insisted on taking fast to bring hostile situation under control. Whether there is a riot in the eastern Bengal or unrest in the north-western part of India, peace lived in his soul consciously demanding him to take on fast even if he resides in another corner of the country. Thus, peace becomes universal and eternal.

In the following paragraphs, Gandhi's views on world peace, as he wrote or said on various occasions when violence and warfare prevailed over nonviolence and peace in the world have been underlined.

Gandhi and World Peace

An investigation of Gandhian concept of world peace reveals that the philosophical root of Gandhian peace emanate from his seminal work "Hind Swaraj" which he wrote in 1909, where he criticized the modern model of development as inherently violent. One who scrutinizes Gandhi's speeches, writings and actions will understand his deep commitment for the cause of peace and non- violence which was a part of his philosophy of life and his world view.

Gandhi insisted on examining and attacking the root causes of war and, in fact, stated: "all activities for stopping war must prove fruitless so long as the causes of war are not understood and radically dealt with. And what are these

causes he is referring to? Gandhi considered a world system built on inequality, racism and exploitation to be the cause of war. He saw the manifestation of this exploitation in the form of imperialism, and viewed imperialism and greed as two of the greatest enemies of world peace. As Gandhi states "there can be no living harmony between races and nations unless the main cause is removed, namely exploitation of the weak by the strong. Not surprisingly, Gandhi's prescription for world peace rests on attacking these root causes of war, not simply applying temporary remedies to a conflict. He strongly argued that world peace is not just the absence of war; it is "the elimination or destruction of all kinds and forms of tyranny. Further, world peace is never the end in itself; it is "a means to a nobler goal - that of a just world order".⁵ Yet, to eliminate greed and create equality "in the world, the Marxist idea of banishing private property is not enough. For Gandhi the road to peace requires a spiritual revolution, harking back to the ideals of aloofness at the heart of Satyagraha. He contends that "to banish war we have to do more. We have to eradicate possessiveness and greed and lust and egotism from our own hearts."⁶

Gandhi adopted a skeptical approach towards the ability of peace treaties and international institutions to create peace in world affairs. He saw many peace treaties like the treaty of Versailles as being punitive and vindictive. He contended that the vindictive nature of this treaty actually led to World War II. Just as peace treaties are often signed out of fear and distrust, Gandhi also perceived world organizations as being built upon a foundation of suspicion and fear of other nations. In Gandhi's mind, to actually contribute to a lasting peace, an international body should not simply be created to protect one's interests, or to end a war. Gandhi's other main contention about international institutions was that they simply perpetuated an unjust world order and served the interests of a minority of powerful states. Gandhi criticized the League of Nations for wielding no real power and merely acting as a tool of Britain and France.⁷

Gandhi was equally critical of pacifist and anti-conscription movements' approaches to achieving peace. In light of his conception of the causes

of war, and the path to true peace, it is easy to understand his discontent. His problems with the Pacifist movement arise on two levels: one, on the issues they addressed, and two, on their mode of expression. Gandhi viewed the Pacifist movement as limited simply to an antiwar posture, based on the assumption that, by boycotting wars, they would be contributing to world peace. Gandhi however viewed this as narrow-minded and criticized Pacifists for not attacking the real problem - an unjust, oppressive world order that caused war. On a second level, Gandhi went as far as to question the Pacifist movement's commitment to the ideals of nonviolence. Gandhi perceived that many pacifists supported pacifism in a half-hearted way. They did so "with the mental reservation that when pacifism fails, arms might be used. With them, it was not nonviolence, but arms that were the ultimate sanctions. This is not the full spiritual commitment to nonviolence required by Satyagraha. Gandhi further criticizes the lack of action by many pacifists and those opposed to conscription.⁸

Although Gandhi was critical of the pacifist movement and of the international institutions of his time, he did believe that peace was possible. He believed that humanity's urge for peace is innate and insatiable, and that humans have the potential to achieve peace. Gandhi was confident that "we can certainly realize our full destiny and dignity only if we educate and train ourselves to be able to refrain from retaliation. The peace that Gandhi aspired to create was a durable peace that would weather the ages. This peace must address the root causes of war and would be firmly based on the nonviolent principles of Satyagraha. For Gandhi the road to world peace began with a free India, and proceeded to include an attitude of internationalism, or even the promotion of a world government, and the absolute necessity of total worldwide disarmament.⁹

Gandhi prescribed three other important concepts in his blueprint for durable peace: internationalism, world government and disarmament. For Gandhi, nationalism was an essential prerequisite of internationalism. Gandhi considered it essential for countries to be self-sufficient, a concept he termed "Swadeshi", before they could be equal and productive players in the international scene.

Nationalism was not narrow or exclusive in Gandhi's mind, nor inherently dangerous. It was greed and selfishness that caused nationalism to get out of hand and threaten international cooperation. In Gandhi's world, healthy nationalism was essential in creating a spirit of international understanding. Gandhi was not concerned that internationalism would threaten national identity, for he believed true internationalism can function only if nations maintain their individuality while working together.

Gandhi dreamt of a world government, preceded by a world federation. The federation would be based on voluntary interdependence. The first step to further integration would be the freedom of exploited nations and once this was accomplished with India leading the way, a World State could replace the federation. The World State "takes its place in which all the states of the world are free and equal ... no state has its military.' It would be composed of one central governing body, and while it retained no permanent army, if required, it would have a police force during the transition period to complete the nonviolent evolution towards the World State.

His idealistic vision of world peace ultimately pointed towards a total disarmament of all nations. Nations are armed out of fear and mistrust of each other. They would have to dispel this fear and discard their defensive persona. Gandhi realized that it would be difficult to start the process of disarmament and therefore argued that unilateral disarmament was necessary even if others do not follow. Gandhi was adamant in stating that, for the survival of the human race, nations must disarm even without the promise of reciprocity by other nations: "if even one great nation were unconditionally to perform the supreme act of renunciation, many of us would see in our lifetime visible peace established on earth."¹⁰

Last but not the least, in the recent decades, Islamic world - more particularly in the middle-east Asian countries, various sects of the Muslim people have indulged in battles. The inter-religious differences among the groups rose to the level of destructing each other sending devastating waves to the entire

region. A careful study on the conflict on this region would reveal the truth about how incongruent and corrupt political systems kindle the religious feelings of the people. The differences in economic and political structures in these nations have taken toll the true character of the Islamic religion. As Gandhi put it, "The very word Islam means peace, which is Nonviolence. Without prayer there is no inward peace."¹¹ Their prayers have become just an integral part of a religion's rituals rather than promoting peace among the people. Religious leaders continue to preach harmony but not the peace that tranquilizes the region.

Striving hard to find peace from within our thought and mind is a tool for attaining peace where as the usage of arms and violent force will end up cleanly as a demon for destruction. Each one of us finds happiness in practicing some spiritual exercise that gives us a short-time relief from day-to-day pressures. The central power of peace as many people believe lies in the practice of spirituality. We try to fight with the outside world full of fuss and chaos and finally resort to the spiritual way of seeking inner peace. Some of us are even flopped in attaining the inner peace when our thoughts and relationships become hollow and worthless in times of grief and pain. The importance of peace is felt and experienced only at such times and one needs to master his (her) mind, body and soul to develop peace. To quote Gandhi, "The gap between the inner peace and global peace must be filled with a path of nonviolence and a better understanding of the divergence between the self-identity and the global requirements". Gandhi believed that "Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts."¹² Our religions too point the same to us.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis brings to fore the point that nonviolence or ahimsa is a central problem in Gandhian thought, and throughout his creative life Gandhi attempted to clarify the philosophical meaning of nonviolence and traced its role in the building of human society as well as its implications for the contemporary human condition. Since nonviolence pervades all aspects of human life, being as Gandhi calls it "the law of our Being," it also sustains what is known

as world peace or peace among nations or absence of war. Thus, Gandhian thought offers us sane original but basic insights on the subject of world peace.

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