

## **Mahatma Gandhi and Satyagraha: A Way of Conflict Resolution**

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### **Abstract**

Conflict resolution can be conceptualized as the method and process of peaceful ending of the conflict and this can also be termed as dispute resolution. It can be argued that human beings can become human and humane only in conditions of peace. Creativity, spirituality, individual and collective achievements attain grandeur and glory only when there is peace. Even the wars of national independence have time and again proven the impotency of superior force when matched against massive grassroots non violent resistance. There is no reason to believe that force and violence will invariably intimidate others and achieve the ends desired of them. Gandhi firmly believed that lasting peace in the world was possible only through nonviolence. He devoted his entire life to the perfection of nonviolent technique of conflict resolution. In contemporary world there is need of Gandhi's Satyagraha in terms of resolving conflicts. This paper will focus on Gandhi's methods and techniques of Satyagraha for resolving conflicts.

Key Words: Conflict, Violent, Resolution, Methods, Techniques.

### **Introductions**

Conflict is a situation between at least two interdependent parties who experience strong emotions and who seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or beliefs. This often results in negative emotional states and behaviours intended to prevail and at least one of the parties recognises the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic. Conflict is an inevitable and all pervasive element in the society. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and

even death, conflict may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationship, and goal attainment. Indeed in human terms conflict is one of the engines of evolution that allows person to learn, progress and grow. Conflict is a matter of perception. If none of the parties involved in an interaction perceives the situation to be one of incompatible outcome, or if none of the parties perceives the situation to be problematic and then conflict does not exist. A situation of incompatible outcomes by itself is only a potential or latent conflict situation.<sup>1</sup>

The world scenario was changed after Second World War. International actors became very active to resolve the conflicts at all level. The destruction of this war compelled each and every nation to work for the establishment of the world peace. The idea of Collective security was introduced as a very important weapon for the peace building. The United Nation Organisation Was formed after League of Nations to maintain world peace and security. The International Court of Justice was established in June 1945 to resolve international disputes. This is the principal body of United Nations for international conflict resolutions. But still all these developments are not able to contribute much in limiting destructive international and domestic conflicts. After the disintegration of Russia, United State tried to curb out the conflicts at global level. But reality is totally opposite and in spite of the efforts by everyone to resolve conflicts, it has remained at their highest level of history.<sup>2</sup> In today's world conflicts, wars, aggressions, disputes and incompatibilities etc are false means and false ends not to be adopted in modern and mechanized world. The present world is the world of technologies of destruction. These demerits are regarded as a menace of human survival and human development. Thus keeping in view the capacity and capability of the modern world, conflict is road to genocide, mass destruction as well as a great way towards annihilation. Therefore there is great primacy and relevance of conflict resolution mechanism to be adopted for the prevention of different conflicts. War has remained as a last option in the political phenomena. Conflict resolution is the best instrument for social justice, harmony, cooperation and peace building process. Conflict resolution as a discipline has thrust upon that conflicts should be resolved only through peaceful means not through violent means of destruction.<sup>3</sup>

Generally three kinds of national and international conflicts threaten peace in any part of the world. Arms race and nuclear confrontation is the first and the most dangerous conflict of the present world. The second conflict can be regarded that of conventional wars between the states for territory, resources, honour and ideological supremacy. The third type of conflict is a consequence of oppression and exploitation of authoritarian and totalitarian rule. Oppression result in the denial of equality, freedom and justice to whole population of a state and or to distinguished groups within it. Although there is very remote possibility of that in the future any state will replace arms with non violent means to deter aggression. Yet one must point out that wars and oppressions do not always obtain their desired ends.<sup>4</sup>

### **Gandhi and conflict resolution**

Conflict is a norm of human life and as human being we constantly make choice of conflict resolution through nonviolent and violent means. Gandhi is eulogised for making a choice of resolving conflicts through nonviolent ways. He termed this technique of conflict

resolution as *Satyagraha*. Gandhi was well aware of the increasing influence of materialistic effects on the society and individuals. The term *satyagraha* means passion for, or firmness in Truth. The term was coined by Gandhi because he believed that passive resistance failed to express adequately the nature of non violent resistance in the active form developed by him. In 1906, a new name for his movement was felt by him for the first time after a long decade South African Indian Movement. According to Gandhi the fundamental difference between the two was that *satyagraha* was essentially a positive and active form of resistance and therefore qualitatively the direct antithesis of passive resistance. In Gandhi's own words, "I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self sacrifice. For *satyagraha* and its offshoots, non cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering... 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."<sup>5</sup> That is so far as the positive meaning of *ahimsa* is concerned. According to Gandhi, the impersonal motive of the *satyagrahi* and his self negating dedication to a cause is another indication of the active character of *satyagraha*. The type of *satyagraha* advocated by Gandhi was essentially a broad social movement involving thousands of men and women. Gandhi was well aware of the fact that it would be unrealistic to expect such broad masses to pass through a period of rigorous and successful *tapasya* before they were allowed to engage in *satyagraha*. Thus Gandhi laid down an absolute ideal for the perfect *satyagrahi* and a workable ideal for the average *satyagrahi*. Gandhi thought that those who would lead the *satyagraha* movements, ought to represent all the virtues of a *satyagrahi* in their pure form. Similarly he advised the masses that it was enough if they followed their leaders faithfully in the field of action and made the maximum possible effort to inculcate in their own lives the ideals of a true *satyagrahi*. Thus in this respect Gandhi likened the discipline of a non violent army of *satyagrahi* to that of a violent army in the battlefield, where the general takes the basic decisions and the ordinary soldiers obey his orders under certain rules of discipline.<sup>6</sup>

The methods of *satyagraha* may be broadly classified into four categories like purificatory, penitential devices, forms of noncooperation, methods of civil disobedience and the constructive programme. The first head of purificatory, penitential devices included pledges, prayers and fasts. The pledge is a public declaration of *satyagrahis* that they will abstain from certain acts to combat untruth or recognised injustices. A pledge could take the form of a prayer, and prayer could precede the taking of a pledge. The second category of modes of non cooperation included *hartal*, boycott, strikes, fasting unto death and *hijrat*. The meaning of *hijrat* is voluntary migration or temporary withdrawal out of the boundaries of a state. This method was advocated by Gandhi to the Bardoli peasants in 1928. By 1931, Gandhi believed that this traditional device was not a necessary part of the purest form of *satyagraha*. The third category of methods of civil disobedience included picketing, marches, and non payment of taxes and deliberate defiance of a specific law. In 1939, Gandhi gave a puzzling remark that when civil disobedience results in an accentuation of repression of the people, its suspension would itself become *satyagraha*.<sup>7</sup> Similarly by the late twenties Gandhi came to stress in the Constructive Programme the positive role and the most novel mode of *satyagraha*. In 1928, he pointed out that *satyagraha* must store up the necessary non violent

energy that could set free an irresistible force in society. He said, “They will not become a non violent organisation unless they undergo a process of what may be called continuous corporate cleansing. This they can only do by engaging in carrying out a well thought out constructive programme requiring combined effort and promoting the common good.”<sup>8</sup> Gandhi pointed out that the best training for the civil disobedience is through constructive programme. He further added, “Handling of civil disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralyzed hand at emptying to life a spoon.”<sup>9</sup>

In the modern world is facing violence, terrorism, ecological imbalances, rising tensions and wars has created unprecedented interlinked crisis. Gandhi demonstrated the practical applicability of non-violence to all fields of human endeavour and its usefulness throughout the world. The concept of non-violence as interpreted by Gandhi assumes ecological importance for its sustainability and enables people to live with nature without exploitation and stands as a solution and an alternative to violence and terrorism. The technique of non-violence is a way of life for humanity at large and helps achieve lasting global peace. *Satyagraha* was evolved by Gandhi as an effective substitute for conflict resolution. It is a technique of action. It is characterized by adherence to a stated truth by means of behaviour which is not violent but which includes self suffering. It seeks to effect change and it operates within a conflict situation. The character and the result of the force of *satyagraha* are essentially different from those of conventional violent techniques of action during conflict.<sup>10</sup> *Satyagraha* may use any of several forms of nonviolent action. Those which were most commonly employed during the nationalist movement in India are noncooperation and civil disobedience. Constructive Programme is a positive aspect of *Satyagraha* in action and is the concomitant of resistance action. *Satyagraha* had been recognised as an efficacious method. Jawaharlal Nehru records in his autobiography that in the beginning he had keen misgivings about Gandhi’s approach, but that he finally had come to embrace the method of *Satyagraha*. He stated, “What I admired was the moral and ethical side of our movement and of *Satyagraha*. I did not give an absolute allegiance to the doctrine of nonviolence or accept it forever, but it attracted me more and more...A worthy end should have worthy means leading up to it. That seemed not only a good ethical doctrine but sound, practical politics, for the means that are not good often defeat the end in view and raise new problems and difficulties.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Gandhi advocated *satyagraha* not as a new religion but as a superior means for attaining social harmony and human advancement of peace. He resembled realist in his approach so far as he was primarily concerned with war in the international system. Gandhi firmly believed that war was never a just means to attempt to create peace or reason to achieve a noble goal. He mainly focused on the root cause of the war. He 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?”<sup>12</sup> Gandhi considered racism, inequality and exploitation to be the main cause of war. He viewed imperialism and greed as two of the great enemies of peace. As Gandhi stated, “there can be no living harmony between races and nations unless the main cause is removed, namely

exploitation of the weak by the strong.”<sup>13</sup> Gandhi’s prescription for peace rests on attacking root causes of war. Not only just resolving conflicts temporarily. He strongly argued that peace is not just the absence of war; it is the elimination or destruction of all kinds and forms of tyranny. According to Gandhi, the Marxist idea of banishing private property to create equality in the society is not enough. The road to peace requires spiritual revolution. In relation to World War II, Gandhi said, “While all violence is bad and must be condemned in the abstract, it is permissible for, it is even the duty of, a believer in Ahimsa to distinguish between the aggressor and the defender...some nations will have to disarm herself and take large risks.”<sup>14</sup> In the present political state real disarmament cannot come unless the nations of the world cease to exploit one another. Gandhi’s ideal society focus on resolving international conflicts by helping neighbours to alleviate their economic problems. It would not exploit any other nation. He condemned war and reminded that war demoralize those who are trained for it. It brutalizes men of naturally gentle nature.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly conflict transformation is another method of conflict solving. Many of ideas in Gandhian *satyagraha* is related to modern conflict transformation. His concept of conflict transformation maintains self purification and reformation. Gandhi stressed that self purification is training their followers in nonviolence. Constructive programme of Gandhi is another best example of external transformation of the parties. For Gandhi, conflict transformation meant progress towards more and more meaningful adjustment. This can be achieved only when violent relationships are transformed into non violent relationship and energies of the opponent are utilised in a higher integration. Gandhi pointed out the new and dynamic way of non violence. He tried to convert a passive principle into a dynamic doctrine of *satyagraha* to fight against injustice, exploitation and different other forms of violence.<sup>16</sup> Similarly mediation aim at third party intervention for resolution of their disputes. It is more consistent with the aims and principle of *satyagraha*. Gandhian model of mediation would be located to the development of skills and attitudes in the parties that contributes to the building of a non violent society. The Gandhian mediators would aspire at both fostering empowerment of the disputing parties and recognition between opponents.<sup>17</sup> Gandhi always aspired for third party resolution and avoided legal adjudication and legal establishment.

## References

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<sup>5</sup> Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *Social and Political Thought of Gandhi* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1969), p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>7</sup> Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.306.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Bombay: Oxford University press, 1959), p.36.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Biplob Gogoi, "Gandhian Principles and Their Relevance for World Peace," *International Journal of Research in Social Science*, Vol.8, Issue 10, October 2018, <http://www.ijmra.us>, pp. 110-122. Accessed on 15.5.2020.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Manoj Kumar, "Gandhi's Concept of Conflict Resolution" Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Jaipur, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Manoj Kumar, "Gandhi's Concept of Conflict Resolution" Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Jaipur, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.