



Non-violence and world peace: Gandhian perspective and the pacifist movements

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Abstract

Two world wars in the twentieth century transformed the world significantly and also the very perception of 'war' and 'peace' as its alternative. While 'pacifism' as a concept stands for opposition to war, violence and militarism, the 'pacifist movements' are about popularizing such practices. Such movements pressurize the governments not to opt for nuclear weapons, to cut down the expenditure on military and popularize the idea of peace among the people. Gandhi as a votary of 'peace' and 'non-violence' remains an inspiration to the practitioners of pacifist movements worldwide. To Gandhi, the practice of non-violence needs a proper training of strong will, moral courage and patience. Its application may range from the transformation of mind and inner conscience to not entering into a war, be it a person or a country. From Martin Luther in America to Nelson Mandela in South Africa and in recent times, Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, Johan Galtung in Norway and many more have applied the twin principles of Gandhian perspective i.e. peace and non-violence in different contexts. The chapter intends to explore these two concepts and their application as practice. It will also underline the centrality of Gandhian perspective in the pacifist movements to highlight the contemporary significance of Gandhi and his ideas. While non-violence is usually understood as 'absence of violence', for Gandhi it is much more than that and it contains the moral/spiritual values such as love, peace and compassion. This chapter on non-violence and world peace attempts to capture the essence of pacifism and pacifist movements in the light of Gandhian perspective. It is divided into three sections – first section maps the nature, meaning and scope of pacifism; second section traces the instances of pacifist movements in the West and the last part underlines the convergences and divergences of Gandhian perspective *viz-a-viz* pacifism as well as some of the limitations of pacifism.

Keywords: War, peace, non-violence, Gandhi, peace and conflict studies, pacifism, pacifist movements

Introduction

The chapter aims at highlighting the relevance of Gandhi and his thoughts in contemporary world through the lens of pacifist movements worldwide. The term 'pacifism' was used in the post second world war to denote an ideological and strategic practice of peace. Thus, the movements to promote peace as an ideology, or to raise their voice against wars of different kinds – be it against nuclear weapons to oppose the ongoing wars in the Middle East, etc. were named as pacifist movements. The root word is a Latin term 'pacific' which means peace making. The understanding of pacifism as opposition to war could be traced since early practices of such kind could be seen at the root of the religions *viz.* Buddhism and Jainism in India and their spread to other parts of the world. In the West, Leo Tolstoy is considered an early pacifist and his influence on Gandhi, especially Tolstoy's book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* is accepted by Gandhi himself in his numerous writings.

While Gandhi is known worldwide for adhering to the values of truth and non-violence, 'peace' became a buzzword after the two world wars. So, there is a need to see these concepts as interlinked to each other. After Gandhi, the leaders such as Martin Luther, Nelson Mandela and many others used non-violence as a technique for mass mobilization. This chapter on non-violence and world peace attempts to capture the essence of pacifism and pacifist movements in the light of Gandhian perspective. It is divided into three sections – first section maps the nature, meaning and scope of pacifism; second section traces the instances of pacifist movements in the West and the last part underlines the convergences and divergences of Gandhian

perspective *viz-a-viz* pacifism as well as some of the limitations of pacifism

1. Pacifism: Nature, meaning and scope

Pacifism is usually equated with peace movements and the pacifists oppose the war and violence of all kinds. Although pacifism as a feature of human history has existed for a long time especially as part of world religions (Richmond, 2014; 38) ^[10] but in the twentieth century the term gained wider currency only in the twentieth century. The range of its usage varies from treated as a philosophy to a movement in different contexts. As a result, we often come across numerous disagreements with regard to its meaning and implications. Pacifism is an umbrella concept used in different contexts to mean a commitment to peace and opposition to war.

William James used the term 'pacific-ism' in 1910 to describe his rejection to militarism (James, 1910) ^[3] but the shorter term 'pacifism' became more common. Pacifism is often used to describe a variety of views that are critical of war. The concept has also been criticized by the followers of just war tradition who argue that 'war can be a suitable means to bring peace' (Orwell, 2002) ^[5]. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy in its entry on 'pacifism' mentions that 'in contrast to the just war tradition, pacifism rejects war as an acceptable means for obtaining peace'. Sometimes, the pacifists are seen as the ones who withdraw from active politics but it is not necessary that they will always be passive since many of them are actively involved in non-violent ways of protests. Many such instances can be seen worldwide and Gandhi as one of the early champions who used the non-violent path to fight the British rule in India.

1.1 From peace as an idea to its practice

Although war and peace have long co-existed in the human history but the devastating effects of two world wars in the twentieth century led to a rethinking over the need to have peace. Prior to the second world war, the efforts for institutionalized version of world peace was tried through establishment of the League of Nations in 1919. However, its failure became one of the reasons of the second world war. In 1945, the establishment of the United Nations Organization (UNO) was another concrete step towards world peace. Since then, although numerous bilateral and trilateral wars have taken place but it has succeeded in preventing the third world war.

Peace as an idea has often been used as synonymous with non-violence, non-conflict, non-killing, etc. Some peace scholars, especially Johan Galtung and his followers have distinguished between *negative peace* and *positive peace*. While negative peace is the absence of violence or war, positive peace denotes the values such as compassion, co-operation and harmonious relations for human well-being. Galtung's contribution to the field of peace studies also lies in addition of numerous concepts *viz.* dimensions of violence namely structural violence, cultural violence, etc. He explained that since peace means 'absence of violence' thus we need to deliberate on different types of violence prevailing in the society. In 1960s, he wrote many theoretical papers based on structural theory along themes such as integration, non-violence, integration, structural and direct violence to name a few.

1.2 Peace studies as a discipline

In the twentieth century, peace studies emerged as an interdisciplinary field with its roots in history to political science and psychology. Johan Galtung as one of the pioneers in this field started the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in 1959 in Norway which works on areas *viz.* environmental conflicts, inter-religious conflicts, ethnic conflicts, etc. to name some of them. Along with training the peace professionals, they also facilitate advocacy to the non-governmental and governmental agencies in conflict prone countries. Some other renowned institutes of global repute are Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt.

Even in India, some universities such as Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) are offering Masters and diploma programmes in peace studies. Gandhian way of conflict resolution and technique of satyagraha comprises an important part in the courses on peace studies. With growing number of conflicts of different kinds, such courses are gaining wide currency. A journal started by Johan Galtung named as *Journal of Peace Research* (JPR) played an important role in flourishing of peace and conflict studies as a discipline.

1.3 Renowned peace practitioners

From the days of Buddha as one of early proponents of peace to Leo Tolstoy as an early advocate of pacifism, one may see the continuous presence of peace as part of human consciousness in different parts of the world. With Gandhi advocating for non-violent action in the twentieth century, peace acquired a new meaning acquired around that. Karuna Mantena argues that the politics of Gandhian non-violence is another realism and the need to engage with it. She writes that although Gandhi is usually seen as an exemplary moral

idealist in politics but his 'nonviolence points toward a transformational realism that need not begin and end in conservatism, moral equivocation, or pure instrumentalism' (Mantena, 2012; 455)^[1].

Gandhi's approach of taking the political and social reforms based on non-violence influenced a range of leaders in twentieth century. Some of the renowned ones among them are - Martin Luther King (USA), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar), Dalai Lama (Tibet/India), Vinoba Bhave and J C Kumarappa (India). It is noteworthy that each of them has used and advocated the non-violent action in different context to achieve a different goal. For instance, while King fought against racism to get civil rights for blacks in USA, Mandela fought against apartheid and for freedom of South Africa, Suu Kyi was protesting against the military rule. Along with use of peace as a political tool, there are thinkers *viz.* Julius Nyerere, Gene Sharp, Daisaku Ikeda, Thomas Weber and Mark Juergenmeyer who have explored the relevance of Gandhian techniques for present times.

1.4 Pacifism and non-violence

In recent past due to overlaps between non-violence and pacifism, a related term 'non-violentism' has been coined by Holmes. He describes it as a position which goes beyond merely anti-war pacifism and embraces its opposition to violence in any form (Holmes, 2013: 157)^[6]. There are many varieties due to debates on pacifism ranging from absolute vs. contingent pacifism, maximal vs. minimal pacifism and universal vs. particular pacifism to name a few. Given the fact of philosophical nature of these debates, we will concentrate merely on its political aspect of pacifism with special reference to its Gandhian perspective. In the latter part of the chapter, we will explore the twin principles of Gandhi namely non-violence and peace as the building blocks of pacifism. However, before doing that let us first understand the pacific movements in the Western part of the world.

Gandhi distinguished between 'non-violence' and 'pacifism'. In narrow sense, pacifism implied 'negation of possible violence' between the state and governments and gradually it started being used for opposition to all forms of militarism. But, while pacifism is a method of non-aggression, non-violence has to be seen as 'a way of life' and 'a way of understanding and managing of relationships of human-beings with each other' (Jahanbegloo, 2000)^[23]. One may easily say that non-violence as a moral value stands for much more than merely the absence of war and militarism.

2. Pacifist movements in the west

As mentioned earlier, pacifism as a practice and also as an ideology emerged in the twentieth century especially in the wake of two world wars. With a unifying theme or its philosophy comprising of opposition to war, one comes across its many variants due to extent of opposition. The strategy of its practice differed from place to place and group to group. David Hardiman writes that Gandhi and his movement played an important role in 'development of modern pacifism, which stands for principled rejection of the use of violence at all levels of politics' (Hardiman, 1999; 245).

After the first world war, many people who opposed the war considered 'Gandhi as a shining example of pacifism in action'. A noted psychologist Fredrich Fisher wrote that

Gandhi appeared on the world stage at right psychological moment (Fisher, 1970) [8]. What Fisher tried to convey is that only when violence and unrest was hovering all around that people started realizing the significance of peace much more than ever before. By the end of 19th century, various 'friends of peace' movements in the West provided the basis for organized peace movements. In Britain and the USA, a range of people writers, thinkers, artists, social reformers, scientists etc. came together in the name of peace. Let us explore the link or crisscross between Gandhi and the pacifist movements in the West in two contexts namely Europe and America.

2.1 European context

In Europe, one gets to see the vignettes of pacifism in numerous countries such as Germany, France and Switzerland to name a few. Dutch anarcho-syndicalist Bart de Ligt (1883-1938) [9] was a leading figure of pacifist movement in 1920s. He had correspondence with Gandhi and then they met in Switzerland in 1931. Hardiman writes that Ligt persuaded Gandhi to join the Paris based anti-war organization, the Reassemblément International Contre la Guerre *et al* Militarisme (RIGM). In his book *The Conquest of Violence* (1937) [9], Ligt argued that the non-cooperation of syndicalist strike should be joined with Gandhi's principled non-violence.

However, Ligt had certain disagreements with him e.g. he felt that Gandhi was inconsistent in following non-violence especially in the context of Gandhi's support of Britain in the first world war. Hardiman defends Gandhi from Ligt's criticism by underlining how Gandhi soon admitted his error soon after the war was over (Hardiman, 2003; 247) [3]. To quote Gandhi's comment in his own words, 'I am sorry I had nothing to do with this war. I believed Woodrow Wilson's dream; that it was a war to end war. But I now see that force can never banish force' (Fisher, 1970; 58-59) [8]. Ligt also detested the trend of Gandhi being 'idolised as a new and infallible messiah' and stressed the need to have a continuous scrutiny over his practices. He felt that Gandhi's nationalism came in conflict with his non-violence.

2.2 American context

In the 1920s, a lawyer named Richard Gregg played an important role in making Gandhi and his strategy of non-violence popular in America. He was active in labour movement and later went to India to study the Gandhian movement and consequently wrote three books namely *The Psychology and Strategy of Gandhi's Non-Violent Resistance* (1929), *Gandhism and Socialism* (1931) and *The Power of Non-violence* (1934). These writings were followed by foundation of Committee for Non-Violent Revolution in 1946. This body opposed the armament industry. It also encouraged the people not to join the armed forces and also to serve in the armed forces industry. Gregg considered that if necessary, mass civil disobedience could be deployed for such actions.

The War Resisters League (WRL), one of America's largest pacifist organisations was founded in 1923. Since its early days, WRL has played an active role in anti-militarist movement and it is currently active in campaign against nuclear weapons (Ryan, 2002) [27]. In the post second world-war period, especially after the nuclear attack on Japan and its devastating impact, anti-nuclear weapon movement started gaining ground worldwide. Gandhi condemned the

act by stating 'War knows no law except that of might' (Gandhi, 1946 a) [14] and also that 'I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science' (Gandhi, 1946 b) [15]. Gandhi strongly denounced the use of nuclear weapons acts as a deterrent against war. For him, there was no other way than peace which will be lasting the humanity.

In 1950s, in Europe and America, the instances of anti-nuclear movements were quite evident. For example, in Britain, the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War was formed in 1957 and it followed the techniques of struggle suggested by Gandhi. It eventually led to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) based on civil resistance. However, by 1960s and 1970s, CND abandoned the civil resistance and gradually started fading but the anti-nuclear movement once again became popular in 1979 when the NATO announced to station its missiles in Germany. In 1980, European Nuclear Disarmament (END) was formed by the initiative of noted intellectual and peace activists such as Heinrich Boll, Gunter Grass and E. P. Thompson.

3. Gandhi's and pacifism: convergences and divergences

To have learnt about the nature and meaning of pacifism as a concept and the pacifist movements in the West in the earlier part, this section will deliberate on Gandhi and pacifism. Leo Tolstoy who is one of the prominent figures in modern pacifism had a profound impact on Gandhi. Tolstoy (1828-1910), a Russian author, moral thinker and social reformer much known for his book *War and Peace* is often described as a 'Christian anarchist' and pacifist (Richmond, 2014; 38) [10]. He became famous for his opposition to militarism through non-violent resistance and civil disobedience. Another motivational leader for Gandhi was Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) who wrote an essay 'Civil Disobedience' and called the individuals to oppose the unjust laws.

These techniques suggested by Tolstoy and Thoreau were later used by Mahatma Gandhi in India during the independence struggle against the British rule. In USA, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68) also used them during civil rights movement in 1960s. So, one may notice the continuous presence of peace as an idea getting translated into practices *viz.* civil disobedience and non-co-operation in different contexts. Gandhi was a proponent of active non-violence and had an ability to motivate a large number of people to join him and his cause. His strong leadership skill often made him translate the individual initiatives into mass movements. Later, the leaders *viz.* Nelson Mandela and Dalai Lama have owed to Gandhi for their commitment to the cause of peace and non-violence.

3.1 Was Gandhi a pacifist?

One may agree or disagree as to whether Gandhi was a pacifist or not. As such the term was not so popular in India at that time and was hardly used to describe Gandhi. In recent times, many scholars have portrayed Gandhi as a 'qualified pacifist' and his techniques of conflict resolution being so significant. As mentioned earlier how vehemently Gandhi criticized the violence in any form and nuclear attack as one of the most severe kinds of violence on humanity, one would necessarily consider Gandhi as a pacifist.

Julius Nyrere writes, 'Mahatma Gandhi was a rare person. He was one of those human beings whom God sends into the world once in millennium to remind us of the meaning of life and dignity and responsibility of being human' (Nyrere, 1998; 1) ^[21]. Nyrere, who was Tanzanian anti-colonial activist argues that Gandhi's uniqueness lies in his life based on principles and how his message is not limited to India and is relevant for every human being everywhere. He writes how Africa applied nonviolence in the struggle for the independence of their countries and Tanzania being one of them.

Some scholars argue that Gandhi's own approach towards pacifism changed over a period of time. As mentioned earlier that he supported Indians joining the British army during the first world war is seen as him being selective about his views on war. During the second world war, he sought for India's independence at the earliest and India to become a defence for nuclear attack against Japan. Gandhi felt that Roosevelt and Churchill were as much equally responsible for the war as Hitler and Mussolini. So, when it came to becoming parties to wars, he did not see any difference between democracies and totalitarian regimes.

3.2 Gandhi's twin principles: Non-violence and peace

In his 'Quit India' address, Gandhi spoke, 'I and my *ahimsa* are on trial today.....when the earth is being scorched by the flames of *himsa* and crying for deliverance'. Even today, his words seem so relevant as the violence of different kinds is rising all over the world. How to overcome the violence is one of the biggest challenges of our times. The root of violence lies at the dichotomy between the notion of 'self' and the 'other'. This othering may range from two individuals to two communities to two or more countries and their behavior shaped by the self-interest. As a result, conflicts of different kinds get manifested all around us. Gandhi with his innate belief in devotion of love stressed on the oneness of all the beings and thus the need to overcome any kind of othering was so significant for him.

Daisaku Ikeda writes, 'in Gandhi's life, we can observe an absolute consistency between action and philosophy, spirit and body.' He argues that while Buddhism discovered the ignorance lying at the heart of the othering, Gandhi worked tirelessly to conquest the inner darkness (Ikeda, 1998; ^[15]). Based on non-violence and peace, Gandhi devised the technique of *satyagraha* as a substitute for military action. While initially it was considered being same as passive resistance but eventually Gandhi wrote a piece to make his position clear. In this context, it is interesting to note Gandhi's distinction between passive resistance and *satyagraha* (Gandhi, 1924) ^[13]. To him, while passive resistance is weapon of the weak, *satyagraha* is the weapon of the strong. Similarly, while passive resistance makes one weaker, on the contrary, *satyagraha* makes one stronger. In passive resistance, there is a possibility of armed violence, there is no doubt about non-violence in *satyagraha*. The limitations of *satyagraha* have been highlighted by Mark Juergensmeyer in the book *Gandhi's Way*. Even Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian parted from Gandhi on the issue of Jewish question. Gene Sharp, one of the leading theorist of non-violence has written several scholarly writings, of which his three-volume *Politics of Non-violent Action* is most notable.

To Gandhi, non-violence was infinitely superior than violence and similarly forgiveness was more manly than punishment. As mentioned earlier, Gandhi's commitment to non-violence was unconditional. He wrote, 'non-violence in its dynamic condition means constant suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting off one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant' (Gandhi, 1922; 3-4) ^[12]. To him, practice of non-violence is not possible without having courage. Influenced by Jain philosophy, he maintained that even violence in thought and intention is unacceptable. As a result, peace and non-violence become complementary to each other. For Gandhi, peace is 'both a process and a goal' (Richmond, 2012; 36). However, Gandhi and his vision had many critics who argued that it would lead to chaos and ultimately the collapse of the society. Even some leading practitioners of non-violence such as Gene Sharp criticize 'Gandhi's principled version as being less productive, other-worldly and confusing' (Weber, 2006; 270) ^[26].

3.3 Anti-nuclear movement in India

In 1974, when Indira Gandhi led the explosion of atom bombs declaring it for 'peaceful purposes', it was considered a severe attack on India's commitment to peace. It is noteworthy that in the early 1970s, Jayprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP played an active role in India's military action against China, Pakistan, Nagaland and Goa. He saw war as a crime against humanity and demanded for international disarmament. In 1980s and 1990s, noted Gandhian Narayan Desai led the demonstration against building of nuclear plant. His daughter Sanghmitra, herself a doctor along with her scientist husband Surendra Gadekar run a journal named *Anumukti* with a sub-heading 'devoted to non-nuclear India' (Hardiman, 2003; 251) ^[6]. Gadekar has carried out series of research and investigations of the radiation effects of nuclear power-plants, nuclear mines and the nuclear explosions at Pokharan in 1998.

Two more prominent opponents of nuclearisation in India are Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik who have played key role in formation of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP). It is a network of more than two hundred groups with many of them with Gandhian influence and others committed to the cause of peace with other ideologies. Post 1998, there has been a lot of debate in India on the positive and negative aspects of nuclear energy. While the advocates champion the cause of alternative source of energy in the light of existing power crisis in India, the opponents highlight the issues such as radiation, excessive use of water, etc. The opponents range from Gandhians to Leftists to Pacifists. The declared nuclear sites *viz.* Jaitapur in Maharashtra and Fatehabad in U.P. have led to protests by the civil society activists. In Jaitapur, Konkan Bachao Samiti has been formed.

3.4 Limitations of pacifism

Pacifism as an ideology has been criticized on numerous grounds. Some of the major criticisms are that it is for the free riders and cowards. The opponents argue that the pacifists are those who are weak as they are not strong enough to take on or fight with their enemies while the supporters say that it takes a great deal of courage to

practice pacifism. The fact remains if pacifism could be practiced by a larger section of the society worldwide, the arms industry and military complexes will gradually become less relevant. Some people consider pacifism being primarily based on theology. Most of the religions, especially early Christianity advocated for wars being unjust.

Sometimes, the use of nonviolence could be limited in its impact. For example, Julius Nyrere quoting the context of horrendous massacre in Rwanda in 1994, wrote about the possibility of failure of peaceful negotiations. He wrote that there is no doubt about the moral superiority of non-violence but one does often come across the conflicts arising from poverty which eventually give rise to the loss of civil rights in a society. In another context, Gandhi has written that when it came to choice between cowardice and violence, he would advise violence. He argued that the world is not entirely governed by logic and we need to choose the path of least violence (Gandhi, n, d.). Many critics have argued that Gandhi often kept changing his stand on various issues and if fact Gandhi himself admitted the same.

Some scholars have criticized pacifism for being inconsistent and not clear in its approach. They even call it self-contradictory because on the one hand pacifism is committed to justice and human rights and at the same time it is unwilling to use violence to achieve the same. For instance, how to deal with the Nazis and terrorists by using non-violence. U.S President Obama in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech paid respect to the pacifist leaders viz. Gandhi and Martin Luther. He said, “there is nothing weak, nothing passive, nothing naive in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.” But he also claimed that a head of state cannot be guided by pacifism. He concluded the speech by saying “a nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies. Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms” (Obama, 2009). So, one may see that even today pacifism and its practice remain a much debated and contested issue.

Conclusion

With the declaration in UN general assembly on 15th June, 2007 that 2nd October (birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi) to be celebrated as International Day of Non-violence, Gandhi has been recognized as a global icon who inspired the civil rights movements and freedom struggles in numerous countries across the continents. Gandhi’s words, ‘strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will’ (Gandhi, n.d.) are based on his immense faith in non-violence as an active force. His inspiration coming from Buddhism to Jainism and Christianity to Hinduism made his approach so inclusive and appealing to people irrespective of regions and religions. Martin Luther rightly said, ‘Gandhi was inevitable. If humanity is to progress Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving towards a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our own risk’ (Hawthorne, n.d.). No matter how some people consider the world peace being a utopia but at the same time the search for peace indeed

remains inevitable and Gandhi has become synonymous with peace and non-violence.

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