



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### A STUDY OF GANDHIAN TECHNIQUE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

**\*Uday Pratap Singh**

Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Allahabad, Allahabad (U.P.), India

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2016  
Received in revised form  
22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2016  
Accepted 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2016  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2016

##### Key words:

Conflict Resolution, Satyagrah,  
Ahimsa, violence, Truth,  
Labour-management,  
Disarmament, Panchsheel.

**Copyright © 2016, Uday Pratap Singh.** This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**Citation:** Uday Pratap Singh, 2016. "A study of gandhian technique of conflict resolution", *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (10), 40798-40802

#### ABSTRACT

Gandhian Technique of conflict resolution was closely related to peace. To him, conflict was an ancient method of setting vital affairs of mankind through the arbitrament of the sword. Out of the two modes of conflict, Gandhi was quit near to the approach of productive conflicts. In this context, conflict resolution was based on truth and non violence rather than competition or use of threat or violence. Gandhian approach of conflict solution is likely to be more democratic. Thus, the author has examined the Gandhian approach of conflict resolution and search for a new paradigm become important in understanding Gandhi's method of conflict resolution.

## INTRODUCTION

The first question that arises what is conflict. A conflict may be described as a major disagreement between ideas or interests of two or more persons or groups. According to Michael Brecher, in a wider sense, crisis, conflict and war are intricately inter-related, both conceptionally and empirically. All these are characterized by mutual mistrust, turmoil, tension and hostility between opponents. Violence is the hallmark of crisis and conflict. Conflicts could be productive and destructive. Productive conflicts could be resolved through mutual satisfactory solution. Solution lies in the form of cooperation, compromise, trust, persuasion, conciliation, help, mediation, dialogue, and non-violence. In case of destructive conflict, one is the winner and the other is the loser. In this, conflict tends to increase. Here, the emphasis is on competition, use of threats, coercion, tends to increase. Here, the emphasis is on competition, use of threats, coercion, ambiguity, rigid positions, show of strength, non-negotiable demands, deception, surprise and violent tendencies. Out of the two modes of conflict, Gandhi was quit near to the approach of productive conflicts. In this context, conflict resolution was based on truth and non violence rather than competition or use of threat or violence. Gandhian's approach of conflict solution is likely to be more democratic. Thus, fresh approach and search for a new paradigm become important in understanding

Gandhi's method of conflict resolution. The idea of non-violent resistance as an acceptable methods of conflict resolution apply to the individual and the collectivity, national as well as international conflicts. This is quite evident in Gandhi's ideas of Hind Swaraj.

### Satyagraha

To Gandhi, the most important technique of conflict resolution was the evolution of the concept of Satyagraha. The word Satyagraha, meant Truth and non-violence. Both these are interrelated as means and end. Satyagraha does not merely mean victory but a "relentless search for truth." To him, Satyagraha does not mean "passive resistance" (weapons of the weak). Satyagraha is applicable for all situations, i.e., from inter personal to the groups and national and international conflicts and lowest to the highest level of conflicts. Satyagraha revolves the notion of "individual." Ultimately, all Satyagraha is a personal matter. Even in mass Satyagraha "if a single Satyagrahai holds out to the end, victory is certain." One can see in Gandhi's Satyagraha both the elements of a "practical idealist" and an "irrepressible optimist." He believed that "the true source of right is duty." His approach is ethical as "the Satyagrahi's object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrong doer." It aims at "a restructuring of the opposing elements to achieve a situation which is satisfactory to both the original opposing antagonists and it seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves." According to Bondurant, in Satyagraha dogma gives way to open exploration of context.

**\*Corresponding author: Uday Pratap Singh,**  
Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of  
Allahabad, Allahabad (U.P.), India.

The objective is not to assert propositions but to create possibilities. Satyagrahi involves himself in acts of "ethical existence." On October 15, 1940, Gandhi observed "I know that India has not one mind. Here is a part of India that is war minded and will learn the art of war through helping the British..... Vinobha is an out and out war resister. This led Vinobha to comment at Pauner that it was wrong to help the British war effort with soldiers or money. The only worthy effort was resist all war with non-violent resistance. Unlike the earlier non cooperation movements, Satyagraha this time was purposely to be restricted to the select few, least the movement assume a mass characters.

### Basic principles of satyagraha

Satyagraha, as a technique of conflict resolution, is based on following assumptions:

Firstly, among the disputants some kind of common interest is always present: Secondly, disputants could be amenable to an appeal to the heart and mind; and Thirdly, the aim of the Satyagraha his the attainment of ultimate end.

Gandhi emphasis was on common interests among the adversaries and dialogue must be initiated. If this is done then "the three fourth of the miseries and misunderstanding in the world disappear if we steps into their shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint." "A Satyagrahi never misses, can never miss, a chance of compromise on honourable terms," Gandhi asserted. "Human life is a series of compromises and it is not always easy to achieve in practice what one had found to be true in theory." To clarify this statement, Gandhi's thought that he would not have fought the Dutch and the Britishers without a readiness for compromise. Compromises does not mean to give up at the cost of the cause or country. Fighting against the British empire, he had give up at the cost of the cause or country. Fighting against the British empire, he had political differences with Subhas Chandra Bose. He said, "I am not spoiling for a fight. I am trying to avoid it. I am eager to have compromise with Britian if it can be had with honour. Indeed, Satyagraha demand its. And yet, if time comes and I had no followers, I should be able to put a single handed fight." Finally, my life is made up of compromise but they have been compromises that have brought me nearer the goal." Conversion of the adversary also involves Satyagrahi's personal sincerity by making sacrifices for the cause in the form of reasoning, persuasion, and moral appeal through self-suffering. If all these methods fail then one can adopt the strategies of non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Gandhi emphasized the notion of means and end. Means are the methods to obtain the end. Hence, non-violence and truth become important in understanding his technique of conflict resolution.

### Ahimsa or non-violence

Gandhi believed that violence is related to ignorance or untruth and non-violence is much concerned with truth. "Non-violence and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of the coin. Nevertheless non-violence is the mean, truth is the end. Means must always be within our reach and so non-violence is our supreme duty." (Gandhi From Yeravada Mandir, 1935) Violence is often associated with insecurity and in a conflict situation if violence is used then there is no distinction between

the sin and the sinner. Hence, the reasons against violence are based on following factors:

- (a) continuity, i.e., once violence is used, one cannot avoid it;
- (b) reciproci..., i.e. violence creates and recreates violence;
- (c) Violence needs to be justified because violence and hatred are always interlinked.

For Gandhi non-violence was far more than what was hatred by the apparent negative terminology. He believed that "such non-violence must be lived day by day. It is not like a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart and it must be an inseparable part of our being." (Young, 1926) Gandhi was deeply influenced by Tolstoy's writing on non-violence. Tolstoy believed in the dictum, "resist not evil" and by ordering ones, life in a completely moral way, one should allow the evil of violence to die like the dead leaves in autumn. But, Gandhi did not totally agreed with Tolstoy. Gandhi held the view that he could not wait until a sufficiently large number of men and women had started recording their lives. He believed that man had to begin to resist the evil of violence individually and collectively by means of progressive non-cooperation. He added that the war against violence must be carried into the enemy's camp. But all this should be done by non-violent means alone. Hence, Gandhi's observation "organization is the test of non-violence." In this context, one has to remember Gandhi's contribution of disarmed people both in South Africa and India into an opportunity to demonstrate the significance of Satyagraha as a technique of non-violent mass struggle for freedom and justice.

### Truth

In reality, Gandhi's Satyagraha was derived from the doctrine of truth. His Satyagraha was not an abstract philosophy but a philosophy of action. He once said "action is my domain." He justified this statement by focusing on the need for a absolutes by which to orient one's life. A more mechanical adherence to truth and non-violence is likely to break down at the critical moment. Hence, Gandhi have said "Truth is God."<sup>4</sup> Truth is that which you believe to be true at the moment and that is your God."<sup>5</sup> Infact, he came to the conclusion "that for myself god is truth. But two years ago, I went a step further and said that truth is God. You see the distinction between the two statements."<sup>6</sup> Gandhi's had discovered that "pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent but that it must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy, for what appears to be truth to one may appear to be error to the other."<sup>7</sup>

As Gandhi pursued his experiment with truth, the concept revolved around the sphere of ethical consideration. The emphasis become increasingly intended upon the problem of means. Again, Gandhi declared "they say means are after all means." He would say "means are after all every thing. As the means so the end. There is no wall separation between means and end."<sup>8</sup> The law of reaping what you sow applied as much in this life as it affects future social, economic political milieu. Gandhi prophetically declared" there is law of nature that a thing can be retained by the same means by which it has been acquired. A thing acquired by violence can be retained by violence alone."<sup>9</sup> Thus, his emphasis was on non-violence rather then violence in obtaining ultimate end.

## Psychology of Satyagraha

Aggression in its applied form of self assertion strives for perfection and growth but in common term it implies violence. As such, aggression, in the form of building biological theories leads to following assumptions. Ethnologists considers human, like animal, are by nature more aggressive causing more bloodshed than animals. Discovery of new weapons balance the potential and social inhibitions. According to Freud, "men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved They are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness." Gandhi, on the other hand, emphasised the need of basic goodness and violent nature of human beings. For Gandhi, "man's nature is not essentially evil; brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love." Hence, Optimists views of human being are essential for the success of Satyagraha.

## Application of satyagraha

There are general principles of Satyagraha which could be applied in various crisis situations. Each principle has specific characteristic for resorting the crisis. Hence, it requires specific approaches which are as follows:

**(a) Inter personal conflicts:** In these cases, Satyagraha depends on its values that have been internalized rather than on a conscious adoption of tactics. Tremendous presurance and wider experience of internal conflict become important in studying the means of conflict resolution. Gandhi believed that in every walk of life one should adopt Ahimsa and in a crisis situation act in such a manner that is most natural to him. One can start practicing non-violence on personal relationship. In most conflicts both parties tend to dominate because of fear or insecurity. Hence, non-violence aims to help both parties to a more secure, creative and truthful relationship. Satyagrahis should be flexible in his outlook. In this way, by following the cooperative approach of Satyagraha the conflictual results are avoided or contains. It is through success in interpersonal conflicts results are avoided or contains. It is through success in interpersonal conflicts that one progresses in theory and practice of Satyagraha.

**(b) Legal Conflicts:** Individual or groups problems related to crisis are resolved through legal institutions. The Gandhian approach is quite different from the western approach. Gandhi's Satyagraha is based on the India tradition, dialogue, meditation and compromise and the western approach involves articulation and confrontation of alternatives and victory of one over the other.

The parties generally interact through lawyers. Gandhi, himself being a lawyer, saw lawyers as mediators rather than mere conducting legal proceedings. He felt that it was his duty to provide justice to both the parties. This was so because for 20 years he was preoccupied in bringing about private compromises in hundred of such cases. Courts are also the method of resolving those conflicts that nevertheless still occur. As Gandhi believed that truly men became more unmanly and cowardly when they take the help of court of Law. The decision of a third party is not always right. As a result, many traditional forms of dispute mechanism in the form of respect to elders, trusted priests and village leaders, have disappeared from our urbanized society. The proposal of

community justice centres even though seeking accommodation rather than conversion comes closer to the Gandhian ideal.

## Industrial conflicts

It may lead to strike which have great economic and social impact. His technique for combating conflict termed by Eriksson as "militant non-violence". It emerged probably out of the event that occurred in Ahmedabad in 1918.<sup>10</sup> It became an effective peaceful instrument to use Eriksson's expression, "industrial peace." It meant the peaceful solution of a labour-management dispute in the textile industry. Gandhi, too, believed that in order to avoid industrial disputes labour should have the same status and dignity as capital. "Employees, being co-owners in industry," should have the same access to the transaction of the mills as the shareholders. What he wanted that workers should be organised and disciplined by adopting non violent means of Satyagraha. Gandhi emphasized on the following principles for solving labour-management industrial conflicts:

- the demands of the workers and their leaders should not be exaggerated and be prepared for correction if convinced by the opponent;
- strike should be the last resort to be used as weapon if negotiation, reconciliation and arbitration have not yielded any result;
- workers should opt for non-violent means inspite of provocation by the other party;
- workers, as Satyagrahis, must not bow down before force or hardship; and
- workers, should be truthful, courageous, just, free from violence and should be ready for voluntary work.

## Satyagraha against the state; civil disobedience

In the political field opposing unjust law may take the form of Civil Disobedience by the Satyagrahis. Gandhi emphasized that in the case of civil disobedience Satyagrahis "must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based on some well understood principle and have no ill will or hatred behind it." Before resorting to Satyagraha, Satyagrahis take all possible peaceful means like negotiation, public opinion and putting his case before the people who would like to listen him. Gandhi believed in the state authority in a democratic set up. Civil disobedience is not a state of lawlessness but a combination of law abiding and self-restraint spirit. The state has its own law and to judge what is right and wrong. Every state law gives the subject two options; (i) to obey the law and (2) accept the ordained penalty. Hence, Gandhi said "civil disobedience is the present form of constitutional agitation. Criminal disobedience has no place in Satyagraha." The state is not only concerned with internal security but is also concerned with external security. In case of war with another country, Gandhi indicated that he was not sure if free India would adopt civil disobedience and non-violence as its foreign policy. He said, "let us suppose the case is that there is no Indian army, no defensive fortification, no rifles cannons, shells, airplanes and tanks. And let us suppose that India stands entirely by herself and that vast and powerful armies of a modern edition of Nero descend upon her." In such a situation India's effort would be let the invaders come. They would tell the invaders.... on the frontier that Indian people would refuse to cooperate in any works. They would refuse to obey orders

despite all threats and punishment inflicted upon them. This is civil disobedience and that is India's defence. Further Gandhi said that India is a land of millions and if they stand idle the whole country stands idle. Civil disobedience, the invader would soon find, is a very powerful weapon. Therefore "in the end the invader must be beaten by new weapon, peaceful weapons, the weapon of civil disobedience and non-violent resistance. Practically there would be no greater loss in life than if forcible resistance was offered to the invader. How many men have been killed in Holland, Belgium and France? Hundreds of thousands? Would the invading armies have shot down hundreds of thousands of men in cold blood if they had simply stood passively before them? I do not think so."<sup>11</sup> In this way, Gandhi thought non-violent resistance was bound to succeed and highly equipped armed, violent resistance was doomed to bitter failure. In a democratic country there are "defensive" and "offensive" civil disobedience. Defensive civil disobedience involves non-violent methods while offensive civil disobedience is adopted only when the country becomes corrupt, repressive or dominated by an imperialist power. Thus, necessary steps for adopting Satyagraha could be; negotiation, arbitration, preparation for group action, agitation such as propaganda, marches etc, economic boycott and strikes, non cooperation, non payment of taxes, boycott of public institutions, usurping the government's functions and forming parallel government.

### Disarmament

Gandhi knew that for a less armed world "some nations will have to disarm herself to take large risks." In the present political state, Gandhi's ideal produces a graduated and reciprocated initiative which would give a productive start. For years, Gandhi believed that peace was a matter of justice rather than strength." All over the world a true peace depends not upon gun powder but upon pure justice." Hence, armaments were both a symbol of force and an urge to use force. Instead of placing more emphasis on mere restriction on the quality and quantity of weapon, Gandhi propagated for complete and universal disarmament. To Gandhi, total disarmament was an outward and visible sign of that inward mental disarmament on which alone outward peace can secure. So long, however, one is actually subjecting another to itself by superior military might even the very first step toward this inward mental disarmament has not been taken.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi held the view that Europe should take the first step in disarming its arms. At the same time, it would be equally disastrous for India, after gaining independence, joins the arms race. For India to enter the arms race amounts to commit suicide. Hence Gandhi hoped that "India will make non-violence her creed, preserve man dignity and prevent him from reverting to the type which he is supposed to have raised himself."<sup>13</sup>

Gandhi advocated that India, along with Asian countries, should take a lead in disarmament process. At the concluding session of the Asian Relation Conference at Delhi on April 2, 1947, Gandhi saw that the west is despairing of a multiplication of the atom bomb because these bombs will result in the destruction of not only of the west but of the entire world. Gandhi has, Infact, opposed the idea of forced disarmament of a nation. In the same fashion, he criticized the disarming of the vanquished as a punitive measure. If the great powers disarmed themselves then there would be an end of the imperialistic tendencies and exploitation of the weak. Gandhi believed that disarmament process would take sufficient time.

The evils of armaments can be cured by non-violence which in due course would become the weapons of all nations. It is wrong to imagine that armaments give strength but the real strength comes from self-sacrifice. Thus, nations should focus more on spirituality because "internal spiritual forces are stronger and induce a more certain and lasting life." On the other hand, "external arms, guns, cannons and gas have only evil and passing results."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the real goal of disarmament would be when one nations stop exploiting the another nation. Thus, peace will prevail only when " great powers courageously decide to disarm themselves... I have an implicit faith-a faith that today burns brighter than ever, after half a century's experience of unbroken practice of non-violence-that mankind can be saved through non-violence."<sup>15</sup> In such an external and internal threat to state and world security, Gandhi come out with his thought on disarmament. There was an urgent need for disarmament as it was moral and desirable and to protect the world from self-destruction. On these premises, one can think of Gandhian approach towards disarmament in the management of conflicts.

### Conclusion

K.M. Munshi, in an article, "the Spiritual Basis of Satyagraha", said that "Gandhi was too near us in time to enable us to judge him from the perspective of history and human thought. Patriots may call him. "Father of the Nation" and historians may call him the "Liberator of India." However, Munshi states that he must not be forgotten that "he was a Mahatma in the line of the great men who have stood, fought and suffered for vindicating the moral and spiritual values against the forces of barbarism." Gandhi fought for the people's right and their place in society. His revolution against racism, violence, unbridled consumerism and technology provide human motivations to fight against the evil forces of the society. Gandhi was neither a visionary nor a revivalist but his writings contain an element of idealism and pragmatism. He had the added advantage of knowing and coming into close contact with the modern civilization. But, he was not overawed by the great progress made by science and technology during the last one hundred years or so. He clearly saw the inherent weakness in the materialistic modern culture as represented by the industrialised West and he vehemently criticised it. The focus of Gandhi's writing on political, socio-economic and even national and international security was on the idea of non-violence. It was well said by Albert Einstein that in our age of moral decay, Gandhi was the only statesman who represented that higher conception of human relations in the political sphere to which we must aspire with all our power. We must learn the difficult lesson that the future of mankind will be tolerable only when our course in world affairs as well as in other matters is based on justice and law rather than on the threat of naked power."<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi's thought assumed much importance in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His peaceful methods were well appreciated by Willy Brandt when in 1968 delivering a speech at UNESCO Conference highlighted the peaceful coexistence as the spirit of solidarity. He said that peace is not merely the absence of war and violence but peace also demands freedom from oppression, hunger and ignorance. If we analyze the strategic environment during the cold war period one can say that Pandit Nehru formulated India's foreign policy by adopting Gandhian prescription which found its supreme expression in the policy of Panchsheel. Further, the policy of

non alignment reflected the essence of Gandhi prescription of Panchsheel and today it has grown into a big movement having 121 members. Similarly, the USA and the Soviet Union in late 1950 came close by adapting the policy of 'peaceful competition' and peaceful co-existence in the form of political and military rapprochement or detente. In today's world one see various forms of conflict interests:

- Conflict of religious interest i.e. conflict between Christian and non-Christian, Islamic and non-Islamic and fundamentalists and moderates.
- Conflict of economic interest, i.e., conflict between haves and have not
- Conflict of political interest, i.e., east-west relations.

Gandhi showed the world these forms of conflict of interests could be solved by the method of non-violence. This was the method by which he brought about the liberation of the political, social and economic conditions of India. The relevance of Gandhian thought could easily be seen in the works done by political and social activists. The impact of Gandhian message on Martin Luther King Jr was so great that he practiced the message and techniques for the liberation of the black people in America. In his 'Pilgrimage to Non-violence.' Martin Luther King Jr. declared "if we assume that mankind has a right to survive' then we must find an alternative to war and destruction. In our age of space vehicles and guided ballistic missiles, the choice is either non-violence or non existence." In recent years, Gandhian influence can be easily seen in Aung San Sun Kyi's struggle for democracy and human rights against the military government in Burma. As a consequence in 1989, she was placed under house arrest and then she started a 12 day hunger strike. On August 1989, the London Time carried an article describing her hunger strike as "the most serious challenge the Burmese government had faced."<sup>17</sup> Two days later, it printed another article, referring her as "Burma's Gandhi." Likewise, when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, the Norwegian Nobel Committee

traced her peaceful struggle to Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. Within India, Aung San Suu Kyi argued that Gandhi was the only voice in announcing its origination in self-regulating village communities. This led Philip Kreager to comment that she was the first to transport Gandhi to Burma. In Kreager's word, Aung San Suu Kyi notes... that Gandhi's thinking inspired a wider literature espousing the wisdom and strength of village government, so in Burma national consciousness was rooted in a literature espousing the moral and economic autonomy of the traditional village. "<sup>18</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. AICC File, G-7/1739-40, N.M.M. Library.
2. M.K. Gandhi From Yeravada Mandir, Ahmadabad, 1935, p.65
3. Young India, August 12, 1926
4. Quoted in Iyer Raghavan, The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 156.
5. Harijan, September 21, 1934
6. Ibid
7. J. Bondurant, Conquest of Violence, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, pp. 16-17
8. Harijan, February 11, 1939
9. M. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p. 306
10. See E. Eriksson, Autobiography, p. 317-320
11. K.L. Shridharani, War Without Violence, Bombay, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1962, pp. 49-50
12. Collected Works, Vol. 38 pp. 160-61
13. Harijan, Vo. 11, p. 453
14. Collected Works Vol. 48, p. 393
15. Harijan, Vol. 6, p. 395
16. A. Einstein, "On Peace and Gandhi, "in Richard B. Gregg, Profiles in Gandhi, New York, IBC, 1960, p. 100
17. M. Aris, ed, Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom From Fear and Other Writings, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 317
18. Ibid, p. 294

\*\*\*\*\*