

GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Though presently conflict resolution and peace building is a complex phenomenon especially when it comes to the issues of international crisis or social conflicts. Gandhian concept of conflict resolution, which is based on non-violent *Satyagraha*, is more relevant than any other approach in the area of peace research.

Johan Galtung clarifies that peace research is based on the assumption that peace is as consensual a value as health. He further states that interdisciplinary and multilevel approaches are needed for peace research besides adoption of symmetry. Peace research needs to draw from all corners of the world and in order to understand an issue researcher needs to see it from either side but the solution should not be based on the assumptions of one party alone. No party should be allowed to prevail over the other. Solutions should be found from which both parties might benefit. Findings should be symmetrically available. Peace research should be open in all its phases, never clandestine, never classified. Galtung also opines that for peace research most modern techniques of empirical study should be used. Data should be collected, processed, analyzed and systematized into theories so as to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of conflict and that of peace. Last but not the least is the relevance of the research. Research should help in realization of peace. A researcher should not stop by ending a research project with policy implication but should get involved into concrete action by making propaganda among intellectuals and public; persuading establishment into action and challenging the monopoly of decision makers.¹

Conflict Resolution is a social situation where the armed conflicting parties in a voluntary agreement resolve to peacefully live with- and/ or dissolve their basic incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another. Thus conflict is transformed from violent to non- violent behaviour by parties. In theory there are seven distinct ways in which the parties can live with or dissolve their incompatibility. First, a party may change its goal i.e. its priorities. Second way is when parties stick to their goals but find a point at which resources can be divided.

¹ J. Galtung, 'Peace Research: Past Experiences and Future Perspectives' in Radhakrishna (edit.), *Peace Research for Peace Action*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, Indian Council of Peace Research, Sahitya Kendra, New Delhi, 1972, p.13-31.

Third way is horse trading in which one side has all of its demands met on one issue while the other has all of its goals met on another issue. Forth way is shared control. Fifth way is to leave control to somebody else and sixth way is resorting to arbitration or other legal procedure that the parties can accept. Seventh way is that the issue can be left to later or even to oblivion.²

In west, peace studies have taken a very different path to that of Gandhi. Probably the reason was that Gandhian peace demands a great deal of sacrifice from the practitioner. He calls it *Satyagraha* i.e. ‘adherence to truth’ and truth and non violence are the main planks of *Satyagraha*. A person who resolves to adhere to truth cannot remain silent at the sight of violence which is negative of truth. Truth functions in form of non violence or love. While the lover of truth ought to oppose violence such an opposition would mean ‘fight the evil’ while ‘love the evil doer’. It is a dynamic soul force based on the concept of self- suffering. As there are many forms of injustices there are many forms of *Satyagraha* too such as- non cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, *hartal*, picketing, boycott, and renunciation of titles, honours and positions.

Gandhian *Satyagraha* is the effective weapon for preventing violence and tackling the conflict. *Satyagraha* is Gandhi’s technique of nonviolent action. The ultimate aim of Gandhian *Satyagraha* is to reach the higher level of truth in a nonviolent manner. *Satyagraha* does not encourage any violence. Violence leads to the destruction or injuring the opponent but it does not convert or reform him/her. The *Satyagrahi* should try to avoid all intentional injury to the opponent in thought, word and deed. Thus he/she should not harbour anger, hatred, ill-will, suspicion, vindictiveness or other similar feelings. As regards speech, he/she should avoid all abusive, insulting, or needless offensive language. In his/her actions he/she should not rely on brute force, for to do so is to cooperate with the evil doer and lend him/her support. In spite of all provocation the *Satyagrahi* should not be vindictive, and should not frighten the opponent. If assaulted, he/she should not prosecute his/her

² Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution*, Sage Publication, London, 2007, p. 3- 51.

assailant, and should not call in outsiders to assist him/her, for either course would mean that he/she is depending on physical force.

The aim of Gandhian concept of conflict resolution is to convert the opponent, to change his/her understanding and the sense of values so that he/she will join whole heartedly with the nonviolent resister in seeking a settlement truly amicable and truly satisfying to both the parties. The nonviolent resister seeks a solution under which both sides can have complete self-respect and mutual respect, a settlement that will implement the new desires and full energies of both parties. Misunderstandings, coercive tactics, poor communication, suspicion, perception of basic difference in values, increasing the power differences are the main reasons in behind the conflict. Conflict is resolved in a constructive or destructive way. Gandhian concept of conflict resolution is based in constructive way of problem solving. Gandhian *Satyagraha* is considered the weapon of the strongest person's and it excludes in every form of violence and hatred behaviour. A *Satyagrahi* exhausts all other means before he resorts to *Satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* implies that the opponent realizes his/her mistakes, repents and there takes place a peaceful adjustment of differences. A *Satyagrahi* will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, *himsā* by *ahimsā*. Thomas Weber³ elaborated some conflict resolution norms. First norm is that party identifies real issue of the conflict. Party states his/her goal and tries to understand opponent's intention and his/her own position. It is the positive approaches of conflict resolution.

The next step is party seeks negotiation and not resort to use any type of violence. Opponents should see conflict positively, as an opportunity for personal and social transformation and act in a nonviolent manner. The purpose of conflict resolution should not be coercion but conversion. In this section party should define their conflict well and not to cooperate evil. Not to polarize the situation and should distinguish between antagonism and antagonists. If the opponent gives any indication of changing his position and altering his behaviour in any direction, this indication

³ Thomas Weber., Gandhian Philosophy: Conflict Resolution Theory and Practical Approaches to Negotiation, *Journal of Peace Research*, Sage Publication, London, 2001, p.494

must be given full recognition. In this stage, party moves towards the position of conflict resolution.

Weber states the third norm as the resolution of the conflict. In this stage opponent must understand his/her mistakes and should be open to admit their errors. Finally both parties agree to conflict resolution. Conflicts cannot be resolved through mere decision making process and that, being an essential element for bringing change in society. We should not attempt to suppress the conflict. Gandhian concept of conflict resolution aims to build conflict free society. He simply claimed that we should target the roots of conflict and aim at solving its underlying causes. Conflict resolution aims at the elimination of the source of conflict.

Gandhian *Satyagraha* is similar to the win-win approach of conflict resolution. There are various techniques of conflict resolution namely Forcing, Collaborating (win-win approach), Compromising, Withdrawing, Smoothing or Accommodating. Regarding the first technique, namely Forcing also known as *competing*, an individual firmly pursues his or her own concerns despite the resistance of the other person. This may involve pushing one viewpoint at the expense of another or maintaining firm resistance to another person's actions. *Compromising* looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. Withdrawing also known as *avoiding* means- when a person does not pursue her/his own concerns or those of the opponent. He/she does not address the conflict, sidesteps, postpones or simply withdraws. Smoothing is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than one's own concerns. In a win-win approach of conflict resolution neither party wins nor loose. Also known as *problem confronting* or *problem solving*, Collaboration involves an attempt to work with the other person to find a win-win solution to the problem in hand - the one that most satisfies the concerns of both parties. The win-win approach sees conflict resolution as an opportunity to come to a mutually beneficial result. It includes identifying the underlying concerns of the opponents and finding an alternative which meets each party's concerns. *Satyagraha* is the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self. The ultimate goal of *Satyagrahi* is not victory over the adversary, but the victory of each side.

Thus, it may be said that among the various techniques of conflict resolution, the win-win approach is the most viable one and Gandhian *Satyagraha* can be said to

have similarities with the approach. There are some basic factors of *Satyagraha* like Truth, nonviolence, ends and means, faith in God, ethics or moral force, brotherhood of man. Gandhi used the method of *Satyagraha* to resolve all conflicts such as personal as well as international conflict. The main objective of Gandhian *Satyagraha* is to convert the opponent. He did not consider any one as his enemy. The *Satyagrahi's* main intention is not to annihilate or humiliate the opponent, but to convert through love. Gandhi's real objective is the disharming the opponent through love. Misunderstandings, coercive tactics, poor communication, suspicion, perception of basic difference in values, increasing the power differences are the main reasons in behind the conflict. Conflict can be resolved in a constructive or destructive way. Gandhian concept of conflict resolution is based in constructive way of problem solving.

Gandhian *Satyagraha* is considered the weapon of the strongest and it excludes every form of violence and hatred behaviour. A *Satyagrahi* exhausts all other means before he resorts to *Satyagraha*. The *Satyagrahi* loves the opponent as human beings and aims at rousing him to a sense of equity by an appeal to the best in him. *Satyagraha* implies that the opponent realizes his mistakes, repents and there takes place a peaceful adjustment of differences.

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