

# Gandhi's Concept of Satyagraha-As a Method of Conflict Resolution in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## ABSTRACT

At the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the modern globalized world is full of multidimensional and multidisciplinary conflicts ranging from inter-personal to inter-national conflicts (Mishra, 2019; Kumar 2017). The quest for peace is an eternal pursuit for human existence and fulfilment. Gandhi expounded the philosophy of Satyagraha hundred years back which is based upon non-violent technique of conflict resolution (Devi, 2012). Gandhi firmly believed that peace in the world was possible only through non-violence. Gandhi advocated Satyagraha not as a new religion but as a superior means for attaining social harmony and human advancement for peace (Saroja, 2015). The need of the hour is to understand his philosophy of Satyagraha so that we can resolve conflict and manage our life in a peaceful and effective way. This article is intended to explore Gandhi's concept Satyagraha as the most effective method of conflict resolution. Attempt has also been made in the study to understand Gandhian concept of violence, concept of conflict, its various forms, their causes and Satyagraha as a means to resolve this conflict.

**KEYWORDS:** Satyagraha, Conflict, Conflict Resolution

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural fact of life. Whether we focus on interactions between individuals, groups, organizations, or nations—conflicts are omnipresent (Devi, 2012). The conflict in the society is as old as the society itself. In any society or nation-state, the resolutions of conflict, and restoration of normalcy is a cyclic process, which can be controlled by instructing the values of existence among the citizens (Jaspreet, 2012). A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur. A conflict can be small as disagreement or as large as a war. It can be originated in one person, between two or more people or between two or more groups (Devi 2012). Violence occurs when conflict is not regulated, resolved, managed or transformed. It means; all violence contains conflict but not necessarily all conflicts will turn into violence. It is also suggests that violence can be prevented by timely intervention in a conflict situation (Mishra, 2019). Thus conflict from interpersonal level to international level, is one of the natural process of society occurs in all kinds of social relationships.

## 2. Conflict Resolution

There are many methods to resolve like surrendering, running away, overpowering opponent with violence, filing a lawsuit, etc. In the modern world, violence is understood as one of the common means to resolve conflict (Mishra, 2019). Allen (2006) argues that "Our normal world view is violent in nature and we are socialized and educated in such a way that we never grasp how violently we relate to ourselves, to

others, and to natures." Besides violence, conflicts are also resolved in a variety of methods that includes coercion, lumping it, avoidance, mediation, adjudication, arbitration and negotiation (Weber, 1991). Managing and analysing the conflict in the forms of conflict settlement, conflict resolution, conflict transformation and conflict prevention as a way to reach the state of cooperation (Devi, 2012). Conflict resolution can be conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. Conflict resolution otherwise known as reconciliation may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution ( Haq & Dar, 2015). It may be defined as the situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solve their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other (Devi, 2012).

## 3. Gandhian approach to conflict resolution

The Gandhian method of direct nonviolent action, known as Satyagraha, primarily rests on the belief of conversion and considers it as the most effective nonviolent method of resolving conflict. It is based on the premise that a committed individual is capable of resolving conflicts in a creative and fruitful way but for this to happen s/he needs to put maximum effort into it. It further assumes that on a continuum conflicts can move from the competitive to the cooperative. The Gandhian technique of conflict resolution consists of principle of struggle without arms, a fight with

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the help of truth, self suffering, love and moral powers, which is known as the 'principle of non-violent resistance' (Devi, 2012).

#### 4. Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha

Satyagraha, popularly known as a "technique of non-violent public protest", is one of the greatest contributions Gandhi made to the modern world. The word satyagraha is a compound of two Sanskrit nouns, Satya which means "truth" and Agraaha which means "grasp". (Bondurant, p. 11) Satya is derived from Sat which means "being". Gandhi believed that "nothing is or exists in reality except Truth." Therefore, Gandhi said "it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth." (Gandhi, 1931, p. 196)

Gandhi used satyagraha for two goals – one was personal and the other was social or political. For Gandhi the ultimate goal in life was the realization of the Truth – seeing God face to face. The second goal was social and political change for which he used satyagraha as a means to that end (Weber 2001).

The doctrine of Satyagraha was meant to show how the man of conscience could engage in heroic action in the vindication of truth and freedom from all tyranny, in his appeal to justice against every social abuse and sectional interest. Gandhi challenged the conventional notions of authority, law and obligation by appealing to his conception of natural law and self-suffering. Satya and ahimsa alone could secure an unending basis for social consensus and political loyalty.

#### 5. Satyagraha as the Gandhian Approach to Conflict Resolution

Gandhi's Satyagraha proposes new norms or action plans or set of directive to deal with conflict. The main objective of Satyagraha is vindication and validation of truth through nonviolence.

The basic principles of satyagraha as a conflict norms can be systematized in the following points:-

- A. Identification of Conflict:- Satyagraha as a conflict norms do not avoid or escape conflict but identify and expose it. It is also inherent in Gandhi's conflict norms that those are the victim of the situation must be made aware about it and invited to join in the conflict as a group. Further the group should act with conviction and solidarity.
- B. Clear Objective and goal of Conflict:- Gandhi's conflict norms call for focusing on a specific and particular issue with clear objective and goal of conflict as clear as possible. With this process, Gandhi's conflict norms honestly and seriously try to understand the goal of the opponent on the issue at hand and emphasize on compatible goals.
- C. Nonviolent action:- Gandhi's conflict norms employ nonviolent action as a tool but it is not confined only to deeds but in word and thought also, which can be known through his Ahmedabad Labour Satyagraha in which satyagraha pledge was repeated daily at the meeting that stated "not to indulge in mischief, quarrelling, robbing, plundering or abusive language or cause damage to mill owners property, but to have peacefully during the period of the lockout.

- D. Constructive Action:- Gandhi's conflict norms employ positive actions or constructive action for the group. In Champaran Satyagraha, 1917 health, sanitation, and education of children were given importance. Gandhi's conflict norms demand self reliance at all times during the conflict situation.
- E. Noncooperation action:- Gandhi's conflict norms require non-cooperation with unjust structure and unjust action. Moreover, it also asks for noncooperation with those who cooperate with evils.
- F. Refraining from humiliating the opponent:- Gandhi's conflict norms suggest prevention of escalation of conflict through not to provoke the opponents and to be provoked by them. It insists also not to humiliate or to be humiliated by opponents.
- G. Compromise on non essential elements:- In resolving the conflict Gandhi's satyagraha makes a difference between the essentials and non-essentials of conflict. He insists that one must be willing to compromise on non essential elements of conflict but never negotiate with essentials. Thus Gandhis conflict norms exclude all settlements which affects basic principles or essentials portions of the valid objective.
- H. Maintaining personal contact with the opponent. Such contact may help keep personal relations friendly despite the conflict and achieve maximum accurate understanding of the other's views, motivations and intentions.
- I. Demonstrating trust of the opponent. As per Gandhian thought, when the non-violent group has high expectations of the opponent's intentions and future behaviour, those expectations, it is believed, may encourage him to live up to them and may lead to successful conflict resolution.
- J. Making visible sacrifices for one's own cause. Only if suffering is offered by people directly involved in the grievances it will be perceived as sincerity and therefore influence conversion.

#### 6. Conclusion

Conflicts had always been and will always be part and parcel of human lives. Every one of us engages in different kinds of conflicts in our daily lives. Gandhi advocated Satyagraha not as a new religion but as a superior means for attaining social harmony and human advancement for peace. Gandhi's Satyagraha as a conflict norms prescribes a new method to engage in conflict. Instead of avoiding or escaping conflicts, his satyagraha as a conflict norms views conflict as an opportunity which presupposes training in nonviolence before engaging in Satyagraha.

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