
UNIT 15 GANDHI ON PACIFISM

Structure

15.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

15.2 Theoretical Aspects

15.2.1 Pacifism Leads to One World

15.2.2 Techniques of Eliminating War

15.2.3 Satyagraha: Substitute for Military Action

15.2.4 Moralistic Approach to World Affairs

15.3 The Bhagvad Gita and Pacifism

15.3.1 Forgive the Opponents

15.3.2 Rejection of Materialism

15.4 Gandhi as a Qualified Pacifist

15.4.1 Gandhi as an Absolute Pacifist

15.4.2 Gandhi's Rigorous Pacifism

15.4.3 Change in Gandhi's Pacifism

15.4.4 Nature of Pacifism

15.4.5 Flexible Adjustment of Idealism to Nationalism

15.5 Gandhi on Conflict Resolution

15.6 Nonviolent Action for Defensive, Interstate Struggle

15.7 Summary

15.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

15.1 INTRODUCTION

“Pacifism” is derived from the word “pacific,” which means “peace making” in Latin, paci- (from pax) meaning “peace” and -ficus meaning “making”. Pacifism covers a spectrum of views, including the belief that disputes can and should be peacefully resolved, calls for the abolition of the institutions of the military and war, opposition to any organisation of society through governmental force, rejection of the use of physical violence to obtain political, economic or social goals, the obliteration of force except in cases where it is absolutely necessary to advance the cause of peace, and opposition to violence under any circumstance, even defence of self and others. Pacifism is the broad commitment to making peace.

Pacifism is often construed more broadly as a general nonviolent stance both inwardly, in the sense of seeking inner peace, as well as outwardly, toward the world and its inhabitants. Although pacifist teachings have been found in virtually every society with a recorded history, pacifism as a philosophy or a movement has grown mainly from religion. Adherents of pacifism disagree about what it actually is. Some would say that any sanction of violence or force negates a pacifist identity, while others would argue that pacifism is not absolute in its definition, nor need it be applied to all situations.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- Gandhi's concept and meaning of pacifism
- Gandhi's role as a qualified pacifist
- Gandhi's pacifist methods as a means of conflict resolution.

15.2 THEORETICAL ASPECTS

Leo Tolstoy was an advocate of pacifism. In one of his latter works, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy provides a detailed history, account and defence of pacifism. The book was a major early influence on Gandhi. In his book, *The End of Faith*, Sam Harris argues that pacifism is a fallacy, combining hesitance with cowardice, in that the social context in which a pacifist can protest was created by the actions of direct activists. Kant maintains that the first principle of perpetual peace is that states should not make "secret reservation of the material for future war". Michael Doyle has claimed that democracies do not go to war with one another. John Rawls has explained the stability of well-ordered democratic states as follows: "There is true peace among them because all societies are satisfied with the status quo for the right reasons". In contrast to the just war tradition, pacifism rejects war as an acceptable means for obtaining peace. Pacifism can also be used to describe a commitment to nonviolence in one's personal life that might include the attempt to cultivate pacific virtues such as tolerance, patience, mercy, forgiveness and love.

The basic theory and strategy of nonviolent action were worked out by Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Gene Sharp and others who were engaged in nonviolent social protest in the 20th Century. Although the roots of this approach can be found in the long history of pacifism from Jesus onward, the Gandhi-King approach clarified the basic principles of nonviolent resistance and successfully put these principles into action in the Indian struggle for self-determination and in the American civil rights movement. One of the important ideas of this approach is that there should be coordination between means and ends. Peaceful means should be employed in pursuit of the end of peace and justice. "Velvet revolutions" that occurred in Eastern Europe in the late 1980's and early 1990s, and Lithuania in 1990-91, when unarmed civilians succeeded in turning back Soviet troops are good examples of pacifist movements. Proponents of nonviolent action argue further, that nonviolence could be even more effective if society focused its resources on training citizens for nonviolent resistance and on coordinating nonviolent action.

15.2.1 Pacifism Leads to One World

Gandhi was an advocate of interstate fellowship and goodwill. The more important of these are his beliefs in the dharmic law which imposes a moral obligation on states as well as individuals; his desire to settle disputes at the level of the parties concerned; and his assent to the idea of 'one world' provided it incorporates his concept of 'truth' and 'nonviolence'.

15.2.2 Techniques of Eliminating War

To eliminate war and to establish world peace, Gandhi looked to statesmen and nations to use or develop certain methods and institutions. The chief of these are third party settlement, world government, disarmament and an international police force. He argued that because the individual can be pacific, states possess an equal potential since they are equal to the sum of their citizens.

15.2.3 Satyagraha: Substitute for Military Action

Gandhi recommended satyagraha as a substitute for military action. He denied that his technique of struggle is a method of war rather than of peace and said that it has a spiritual quality which is not found in ordinary warfare. As to its interstate employment, he claimed satyagraha as a law of universal application. Beginning with the family its use can be extended to every other circle.

15.2.4 Moralistic Approach to World Affairs

Gandhi expected a sovereign India to carry out a pacifying function in the world which would be a projection of the country's heritage and its nonviolent struggle against the British Empire. Gandhi's notions implicitly deny those ancient Hindu ideas emphasising stratagems, guile and the balance of power as the basis for India's external relations, especially those associated with Kautilya and Kamandaka. Nonetheless Gandhi left to Indian policy makers some practical advice as well as a moralistic approach to world affairs. Adroitness and idealism are also evident in his views.

15.3 THE BHAGVAD GITA AND PACIFISM

Gandhi drew two lessons from the Bhagavad Gita: to base action on unselfishness and to be detached from worldly benefits. He did not believe that seeking Indian freedom by war-time service had been selfish or to be detached means to ignore or shun the profits of action. Gandhi's moral was to avoid asking for something, it was not a refusal to accept something good from evil.

15.3.1 Forgive the Opponents

As causes of war, Gandhi named western imperialism and fascism. He also cited communism as a threat to world peace. His criticism of the three ideologies is qualified by an ability to forgive opponents and his faith in their reformation. Behind these political forces he saw man's economic greed and recourse to violence as deeper sources of aggression. As remedies he called for economic justice, sovereign equality and peaceful cooperation among states as requisites for international harmony.

15.3.2 Rejection of Materialism

Gandhi's solution for a peaceful world received support from his views on economic grievances, western colonialism and his own philosophy of non-materialism. His insistence upon the equality of all states as a precondition to peace gained strength from his backing of the self-determination of the people.

15.4 GANDHI AS A QUALIFIED PACIFIST

Gandhi's qualified pacifism is consistent with his system of belief in which dynamic nonviolence is his dialectical method to find the ultimate truth without being the end itself. When this position is understood, it is evident that Gandhi does not offer an ethic of love divorced from justice as realists. Gandhi's pacifism is well illustrated in some of his answers to criticism of his wartime service and by general remarks. They also illumine the differences between him and those who believe that war has no relation to justice. Gandhi held that as a member of a disarmed, subject nation which needed the spirit of resistance, he would vote for military training in a free India. Taking the initiative, he argued that Western pacifists aid war capacities by paying taxes for military purposes.

Gandhi pointed out that he opposed alien rule while they dealt with states to which they felt some loyalty. He made it clear to the peace movement everywhere that intellectual neutrality is indefensible during war-time. Gandhi told pacifists that they must decide which the just side is in a military contest. Applying his conviction to particular events, he considered righteous the Spanish Republicans fighting Franco, the Chinese struggling against Japan, and the Poles resisting Germany, although he deplored the violent defence methods involved.

Gandhi identified the victims of aggression, he continued to pass moral judgments against the course of Jews, he said: "if there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war". Gandhi found that justice rests with one party to a conflict and that some good is possible from war despite its wrong means. Evidence of this position is seen in his support of the Japanese in their war with Russia in 1904-1905, in debates with Western pacifists, and in a number of his comments during the 1930's when he endorsed the cause of the victims of fascism.

15.4.1 Gandhi as an Absolute Pacifist

Gandhi's ideas about war cut across unqualified pacifism, conditional pacifism and patriotic realism. As an unqualified pacifist, Gandhi believed that nothing of value is produced from military conflict. This view can be found in his idea during the period 1909-1914, in his comments about Western democracies immediately after World War I and during the early years of World War II. It is seen also in his condemnation of nuclear war. As an absolute pacifist, he is more utopian than his general premises suggest.

After World War I, Gandhi alleged that the Allies had been as deceitful, cruel and selfish as Germany, and that they had been a menace to the world because of their secret treaties and military record. With the outbreak of World War II, he looked back and criticised the peace makers at Versailles for having denied justice to Germany and took to task Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points for depending on arms rather than nonviolence for their ultimate sanction. Expressing his standpoint, in April 1939, when the British and French guaranteed Poland's security against German aggression, he wrote: "After all, what is the gain if the so-called democracies win? War certainly will not end. Democracy will have adopted all the tactics of the Fascists and the Nazis, including conscription and all other forcible methods to compel and exact obedience. All that may be gained at the end of the victory is the possibility of a comparative protection of individual liberty."

The 'Royden Affair' gives an excellent illustration of Gandhi's unconditional pacifism during World War II. Mude Royden, a British pacifist, decided late in 1941 that her capacity for nonviolence was not sufficient for the circumstances in which she found herself. Following her interpretation of Christ's idea, she decided to support the war which she could not effectively diminish. When Gandhi learned of her decision, he criticised her new position and asked her to repent and to return to her former unqualified nonviolence. It does not seem that Gandhi understood that her personal incapacity to observe strict pacifism was a condition to which he himself confessed in the 1920s as one of his explanations for supporting the British cause in World War I.

15.4.2 Gandhi's Rigorous Pacifism

Gandhi's rigorous pacifism during World War II was intensified by nationalist India's negotiations with the British Government for immediate freedom. From 1939 to the spring

of 1942 he generally found no righteousness in the Allied cause. Sometimes he became indifferent to any issues that were not Indian. Privately, Gandhi wrote to a friend in May 1940, that though Europe was destroying itself, he would not permit his sympathies to be involved.

15.4.3 Change in Gandhi's Pacifism

The change in Gandhi's pacifism came about during the World War II when he gave his permission for an immediately liberated India to become a defence theatre for operations against Japan under the terms of a treaty with the democracies. He saw himself as a witness for non-violence, allowing the Western powers and those Indians who were not pacifist to defend the India-Burma frontier, and thereby Mother India. Asked if India itself would declare war, Gandhi replied: Free India need not do so. It simply becomes the ally of the allied powers simply out of gratefulness for the payment of a debt, however overdue. Human nature thanks the debtor when he discharges the debt. During a time of crisis in the Indian nationalist efforts to oust British power, the dictates of politics overcame his idealism. Nehru considers India as a unique change involving suffering in Gandhi's mind and soul. It is clear that a precedent existed in Gandhi's past for the shift in his outlook on war in 1942, namely, his support of the British imperialism in World War I following earlier pacifist declarations.

Gandhi resumed an unconditionally ironic attitude when the Second World War ended. Speaking about free India's defence, he said that military forces would be incompatible with the ideal state and with democracy. The mention of war criminals brought forth the response that they 'are not confined to the Axis Powers alone'. He felt that Roosevelt and Churchill are no less responsible for war than Hitler and Mussolini. In fact, at the time of Roosevelt's death, Gandhi said that World War II had no positive achievement and that the future outlook for peace was dim. He was spared the humiliating spectacle of being party to a peace which threatens to be prelude to war, bloodier still if possible.

15.4.4 Nature of Pacifism

The patterns that emerge from Gandhi's views of the nature of pacifism are those of absolute pacifism, qualified pacifism and patriotic realism. The first is a viewpoint familiar to international relations: war is unjust as to its methods, participants and results. On the other hand, his qualified pacifism is exceptional in that it stresses the responsibility of nonviolent men – and of states since he drew no distinction between individual and collective nonviolence – to decide who the aggressor is and to do so without abdicating the quest for peace. It is because of Gandhi's assertive, conditional pacifism that Reginald Reynolds credited Gandhi with rescuing Christian pacifism from overemphasis on passive resistance and non-resistance. As to his realistic position on war, this points to the difficulty of combining demands for self-determination with pacifism. Those men or nations wishing to be free and to be pacific are likely to discover some utility in violence.

15.4.5 Flexible Adjustment of Idealism to Nationalism

Gandhian approach to pacifism represents the flexible adjustment of his idealism to the demands of his nationalism. Examples are found in comments during World War I, in subsequent explanations for aiding the British Empire, and in his suggestions for the defence of India during the 1920's. He was flexible when he permitted the United Nations and non-pacifist Indians to defend India in 1942 if the country were free.

15.5 GANDHI ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Gandhi experimented with various means of resolving conflicts. Passive resistance, according to Gandhi, had to be supplemented by an active effort to understand and respect adversaries. In an atmosphere of respect, people could find peaceful, creative solutions. Gandhi influenced his followers to use their non-violent actions to attack the heart of their oppressors, and in turn they would receive the sympathy and respect that they so greatly deserved. Gandhi based much of his pacifist teachings on the Hindu traditions while using the religious text, the Bhagavad Gita. In this sacred text he found excerpts to support the pacifist views on avoiding violence.

Relativism can provide no reason to support pacifism. But there is a type of pacifism that is not absolute, known as contingent pacifism. While absolute pacifism admits no exceptions to the rejection of war and violence, contingent pacifism is usually understood as a principled rejection of a particular war.

War: A Brutalising Method of Change

Gandhi said that British Raj constitutes a struggle between the Modern Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of Satan, and the Ancient Civilisation, which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War; the other is the God of Love. He spoke out against war as a degrading and brutalising method of change inferior to the way of suffering. He did so while maintaining that the peace is always superior to war. Gandhi countered British imperialism with civil disobedience. Though his struggle was pacific, he limited the application of his pacifism to free India's military defence, apparently because he momentarily expected his country's independence.

Non-violence in the Event of an Invasion of India?

Gandhi cautioned against excessive pacifist criticism of defending a free India by arms and urged non-pacifists to demonstrate their beliefs if independent India were attacked. He declared nonviolence to be a temporary ideal for securing Indian sovereignty and not pertinent in the event of an invasion of India. Despite pacifist sentiments, when the First World War broke out, Gandhi's stand changed and once again he supported Britain in war and found a potential good in armed victory. Gandhi added that fundamentally he had been and he still was a pacifist. For man to exist, however, involves some violence. A believer in ahimsa should always try to end a war.

No Desire to Substitute British Rule with any other Foreign Rule

A test of Gandhi's pacifism came during World War II when he was confronted with the question of whether he would approve a war of a national liberation by which Japanese military intervention would help to achieve Indian statehood. Nehru offered national Indian aid to the British war effort if India secured immediate independence. But Gandhi did not permit his aspiration for Indian freedom to lead him to condone violent interference from outside his country, since this would have given India a more severe rule than it had under the British Empire. He wrote: "I would not be guilty of inviting any power to invade India for the purpose of expelling the English. For one thing, it would be contrary to my creed of non-violence. I have too great respect for English bravery and arms to think that an invasion of India can be successful without a strong combination of different powers. In any case, I have no desire to substitute British rule with any other foreign rule. I want unadulterated home rule, however inferior in quality it may be".

War: No Relation to Justice

Atomic warfare gave Gandhi a fresh opportunity to claim that war has no relation to justice. 'So far as I can see', he wrote, 'the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages'. There used to be the so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. War knows no law except that of might. The atom bomb brought an empty victory to the allied arms but it resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan. What has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see. Forces of nature act in a mysterious manner.

Imperialism: Forceful Control of a Nation by Foreign State

To Gandhi 'imperialism' meant the overseas control of non-Western areas and people by Western powers. He employed 'colonialism' as a substitute, and he seldom used the term 'imperialism' to describe the forceful control, east or west, of a nation by any foreign state. His thinking about imperialism for the most part of the British type, evolved from belief in its progressive character to criticism of its motives and rejection of its results.

Arbitration: Method of Resolving Interstate Questions

Of the many ways of pacific settlement, Gandhi singled out what he called 'arbitration' as his preferred method of resolving interstate questions, meaning any informal effort by a third party to mediate, conciliate or use good offices. In particular he appreciated the attempt of President Roosevelt, in April 1939, to settle differences between the West European democracies and Germany.

Within Gandhi's belief in the higher law of dharma, applicable to states as well as to men, there are ideas of justice and order comparable to those of the natural law tradition which does so much to encourage positive international law. Man's moral responsibility is Gandhi's avenue for enforcing the higher code in the world. He drew no distinction between interpersonal and interstate duty.

Federation of Friendly Interdependent States

Gandhi believed that the world should be organised to maintain justice and peace and these appear in his ideas about world government. His views on this topic must be understood in connection with his efforts to grope beyond notions about the British Commonwealth and to envisage a larger association of states. For instance, Gandhi told a Congress party audience in December 1924, when he assumed the party chief's office: "The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states warring one against another, but a federation of friendly interdependent states. I want to make no grand claim for our country. But, I see nothing grand or impossible about our expressing readiness for universal interdependence rather than independence. Gandhi's 'league' for 'fully independent' states suggests less cohesion and more attention to sovereign equality than the 'federation of friendly interdependent states' as suggested in his 1924 statement. In addition to equality, he made it clear he foresaw a universal membership in any new world organisation, and not limited to those states in the British Commonwealth or those who were victorious in World War II.

Gandhi endorsed inspirational resolutions of the Congress party which suggested a federal world state based on self-determination of all people and economic justice. Still he did not entirely agree with practical efforts by others to establish an immediate world organisation, but he offered to compromise on details if respect was shown to his ethic of non-violence.

Atom Bomb is of No Effect before Truth and Non-Violence

Gandhi's abhorrence of an atomic war intensified his faith in non-violence: 'There have been cataclysmic changes in the world. Do I still adhere to my faith of truth and nonviolence? Has not the atomic bomb exploded that faith? Not only has it not done so, but it has clearly demonstrated to me that the twins constitute the mightiest force in the world. Before it the atom bomb is of no effect. The two opposing forces are wholly different in kind, the one moral and spiritual, the other physical and material. The one is infinitely superior to the other which by its very nature has an end. The force of the spirit is ever progressive and endless. Its full expression makes it unconquerable in the world. In saying this I know that I have said nothing new. I merely bear witness to the fact'.

Nuclear Discoveries created a 'Balance of Terror'

Gandhi believed that nuclear discoveries had created a 'balance of terror' forestalling a third world war by fear of mutual destruction. He conceded that there might be a temporary revulsion to atomic war, but the world would return to violence when the feeling had passed. From Gandhi's viewpoint, states using nuclear weapons can never be 'just', and nothing of value results from an atomic war.

15.6 NONVIOLENT ACTION FOR DEFENSIVE, INTERSTATE STRUGGLE

Gandhi believed that his technique of nonviolent, direct action can be employed for defensive, interstate struggle which customarily involves military violence. Illustrations of this belief are especially evident in the last decade of his life and show the confidence with which he would substitute for war a method he had developed and found effective in the colonial circumstances of India.

Impartial World Police Force

Gandhi's ideas do point toward the establishment of an impartial world police force, such as provided for under Article 43 of the United Nations Charter making available on a permanent, stand-by basis, armed units to member states for use by the Security Council to maintain international peace and security. For creating a United Nations army after the fact of aggression, as in the 1950 Korean and 1956 Suez crises, his ideas are very important.

15.7 SUMMARY

Gandhi believed that ultimate peace is in a divine plan which has not been fully revealed to men as they have an obligation to apply what they know in order to establish temporal peace. In particular, he held that disarmament can and should be introduced by one or several states. He doubted that a great power would actually introduce universal disarmament, and he put his faith in India to show the way toward that goal. Still he hoped for some armed state, an apostolate of one, to be a witness for the truth of nonviolence and to dare to disarm itself, whatever the risks, and thereby to serve the world. As western pacifists have often done, he looked to small, neutral Switzerland to give up traditional defence methods.

Gandhi thought that the first condition of peace is trust in an active, interposing deity, which the West had failed to realise. Without this trust man would feel God's punishment. Gandhi

suggested prayer in the event of nuclear War. Potential victims of atomic attack, he explained, should go into the open and pray for the pilot of the airplane bringing atomic weapons so that he might realise through extra-human intervention that those below intended no evil toward him.

Gandhi saw a spiritual unity among all men transcending their temporal differences. It is the application of principles, rather than any demand for political, economic or cultural integration, which characterises his views on pacifism. He opposed aggression whether or not it directly uses military force, receives legal recognition from the parties concerned or the international community. Consistently, Gandhi believed that the actual process of war is unrighteous because it contradicts ahimsa and the higher law of dharma. Gandhi said that “the children of violence will commit suicide and perish unless they turn away from violence”. His views differ on whether belligerents can be just and whether something of value is ever produced from the evil process of war. For Gandhi, truth, was the ultimate good.

15.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Pacifism? Describe the theoretical basis of Pacifism.
2. Discuss the role of Satyagraha in Gandhian Pacifism.
3. Critically examine the different kinds of Gandhian Pacifism.
4. Describe the main elements of Gandhian Pacifism.
5. Do you think that an impartial world police can be effective for the world peace?

SUGGESTED READINGS

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