
UNIT 8 APPLICATIONS OF GANDHIAN APPROACH TO PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION (CASE STUDIES)

Structure

8.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

8.2 The Chipko Movement

8.3 SEWA

8.4 The First Intifada

8.5 Petra Kelly and the German Greens

8.6 Summary

8.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's main aim in life was to give people an alternative way. He not only expounded the details of his alternative way but also practised it in his personal and political life. His approach to conflict resolution was not only rooted in Indian traditions but was also informed by the best of Western thought. Post-Gandhi several individuals, groups and societies have tried to apply his alternative way to various kinds of situations – environment, self-determination, women's oppression, economic sphere, nuclear disarmament, political arena, human rights, anti-war, opposition to the military etc. – at various levels such as intra-personal, inter-personal, small group, community, organisation, society, nation, state and international. This Unit gives an account of case studies where the Gandhian approach to conflict resolution was applied – some were successful experiments, one was partially successful and another one was eluded by success.

Aims and Objectives

After going through this unit you will understand

- The application of the Gandhian approach to conflict resolution to environmental issues
- The Gandhian approach to conflict resolution to check economic exploitation
- The Gandhian approach to conflict resolution in the international arena in cases of occupation of a territory;
- The complexities of application of Gandhian approach to conflict resolution by a German political party and its leader.

8.2 THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

The Uttaranchal division of Uttar Pradesh, a mountainous region in India was thickly forested. With the laying of roads in the 1960s, the region was widely accessed. It also witnessed massive deforestation with timber-felling inspite of people's protest. The region had had a history of protest against government forest policy since the early 20th century, which in the 1920s started being linked up with the Gandhian Congress. The timber-felling contracts were awarded to industrialists and contractors at concessional rates. Locals tried to resist this by forming their own forest cooperatives with the help of local Sarvodaya workers but they had neither money nor political clout, which was necessary to get the contracts for timber-felling.

In late 1972, voices were raised to end the contract system of timber-felling and to ensure that the locals got forest produce at cheap rates. Several demonstrations were held towards this end. In the meanwhile, the region started facing the consequences of unabated timber-felling – fuel-wood for cooking was becoming hard to obtain, springs were drying up as rainwater was running off the hills unchecked resulting in underground springs not being replenished, the running off of the rainwater was also causing floods and landslides – causing severe hardship to the population in general but women in particular as they were the ones responsible for cooking, cleaning and gathering water. Local Sarvodaya workers learnt of all this from the local women with whom they had been actively working on the anti-liquor campaign since the late 1960s.

In late 1972, the government awarded a contract to fell a large number of trees from a forest in Gopeshwar in Chamoli district, to a sports goods factory based in Allahabad. Earlier the same government had refused permission to a small local concern that specialised in processing of forest produce to take a few trees from the same forest. The small local concern, Dasauli Gram Swarajya Mandal, was run along Gandhian lines by a Sarvodaya worker named Chandi Prasad Bhatt. Initially the villagers requested the contractors not to fell trees but when the contractors persisted, the villagers decided to hug the trees and prevent it from being felled physically. This act of 'clinging' to the trees, gave the movement its name, *chipko*. Clinging to the trees saved them from being felled and forced the contractors to go back. The same contractors then shifted to the neighbouring forest of Rampur Phata to carry on with the operation of felling trees but the villagers under the leadership of Chandi Prasad Bhatt organised *chipko* protests there as well.

One year later, the women entered the movement in the village of Reni. It so happened that the forest neighbouring Reni was being auctioned. Chandi Prasad Bhatt talked to the villagers about the success of the Chipko Movement in Gopeshwar. The men decided to protest the auction to the authorities in town. In the meanwhile, the contractors started felling trees. The women of Reni decided to act and were led by Gaura Devi, a fifty-one year old widow. The women barred the path to the forest singing

This forest is our mother's home

We will protect it with all our might

This forced the contractors to go back. Gaura Devi was however socially boycotted by the village, and even received death threats; the reason being the vested interests of some of some of the men folk of the village, who were in favour of tree-felling as it provided them the opportunity to make some money by renting their house to the contractors and

the workers and also provided them with the job of cutting trees. However, Chandi Prasad Bhatt rallied behind Gaura Devi and other women of Dongri Paitoli village, who too were subjected to threats by their men folk but managed to stand up against it. The Chipko Movement spread to the whole of Chamoli district and parts of Tehri Garhwal and essentially became a women-centered movement (although it was initiated by men) because the women of the region were at the forefront fighting actively to preserve the forest around their villages. They evolved innovative methods of showcasing their protest. In Henwal Ghati, the women dressed the 'wounds' of the trees with mud and sacking to protest the indiscriminate tapping of pine trees. Radha Kumar says, "Each protest, whether it was to embrace trees, or to bandage them, reinforced the women's closeness to nature and their belief that natural resources were theirs to protect and conserve, not to exploit and destroy." The women now felt the need to organise themselves and formed Mahila Mangal Dals with the help of Chandi Prasad Bhatt and his organisation.

The movement continued throughout the 1970s under the able leadership of Sarvodaya workers like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna. Bahuguna was in fact convinced of the far-reaching impact of the Chipko Movement. He stated:

"I am waiting for the day when the non-violent movement of the hill woman will help turn upside down the centres of power in this country."

In order to force the government to stop giving contracts for felling trees, Sunderlal Bahuguna launched a fast in 1979. He was arrested on the thirteenth day of his fast and was jailed, where he continued with his fast but he withdrew when the authorities agreed to discuss the issue. In 1980, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi invited the leaders of the Chipko Movement for talks in Delhi. Earlier in 1972, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had spoken in favour of environmental protection at the First International Environmental Conference held in Stockholm. The Chipko leaders appealed to her to consider their requests on the basis of the stance taken by her in the 1972 Stockholm Conference. Mrs. Gandhi conceded. As a result, the following decisions were reached: commercial forestry at a height above a thousand metres in the Himalayas was banned for the next fifteen years; food, fodder and fuel-bearing trees were to be planted close to the villages; and village people were given the right to take dry twigs and leaves from the government forests.

The salient features of the Chipko Movement need to be highlighted: it was led by respected Sarvodaya leaders; these leaders enjoyed good relations with many Gandhian politicians and top government officials; the leaders ensured that it progressed along Gandhian lines and ideals; the movement rigidly adhered to the principle of non-violence; the movement "was driven by a sense of moral outrage against a corrupt and rapacious regime that was impoverishing the people and their environment"; and lastly the movement managed to convince the Prime Minister to heed to their just demands.

Besides these, the active involvement of women in the movement has also added several noteworthy features. First, the protest by women against commercial timber-felling was done generally jointly with men but in several instances in opposition to the men. Secondly, women continue to be actively involved in protecting trees, stopping auctions and keeping a vigil against illegal tree-felling. Third, replanting trees is another notable feature of the movement; however, here the men and women have different choices – men choose to plant commercially profitable trees while the women prefer trees that provide fuel and fodder and fulfill other daily needs. Further, Chipko is no longer just an ecology movement in Uttarakhand; it has given rise to other movements – movement for safe environment such as anti-mining as well as movement against gender inequalities such as

anti-alcohol. And finally, to quote Bina Agarwal, “implicit in the movement is a holistic understanding of the environment in general and forests in particular...women recognize that forests cannot be reduced merely to trees and the trees to wood for commercial use, that vegetation, soil, water form part of a complex and interrelated ecosystem. This recognition of the interrelatedness and interdependence between the various material components of nature, and between nature and human sustenance, is critical for evolving a strategy of sustainable environmental protection and regeneration.”

David Hardiman opines that the Chipko Movement had a far-reaching impact elsewhere too. He says, “Chipko became well known throughout the world as an example of Gandhian environmental action, with the image of women embracing trees becoming an icon of the environmental movement as a whole. Chipko gave rise to a series of protests since that time in which activists have embraced trees or established tree houses, so as to prevent commercial felling operations.”

8.3 SEWA

Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) was a first of its kind women’s trade union formed by Gandhian socialists attached to the Textile Labour Association (TLA) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in 1972. The TLA was originally founded by Gandhi. The SEWA initiative was led by Ela Bhatt, who was attached to the women’s wing of the TLA. Radha Kumar says, “In keeping with their Gandhian views, SEWA preferred the term ‘association’ to ‘union’ though it is possible that the acronym’s oral similarity to *seva*, the devoted care of other people, played a part in this choice as well.”

SEWA “was an organization of women who worked in different trades in the informal section but shared a common experience of extremely low earnings, very poor working conditions, harassment from those in authority, and lack of recognition of their work as socially useful labour.” The women members of SEWA were generally employed in activities such as manufacturing goods at home, selling products on the street, pulling carts, and working in the building industry. Initially, SEWA had a difficult time getting registered as a trade union because as per the Indian Trade Union Act it was neither a union of workers in a particular factory nor was it a group of employees of a particular employer. However, SEWA argued that a trade union could be based on the ‘development’ of its worker members, defining development as the “freedom from exploitation, assurance of regular work, and access to opportunities for advancement.”

SEWA aimed to improve the working conditions of its members through training, technical aid, and collective bargaining. To this end, Ela Bhatt established a co-operative bank, funded by self-employed women. The bank provided loans at low rates of interest. This was a good strategy as middlemen exploited women by advancing loans at high rates of interest. The initiative proved to be very successful in empowering the poor and “by 1993 there were 54,000 members of SEWA, with sixty co-operatives in nine districts of Gujarat.” SEWA members usually belong to the marginalised and minority sections of the population.

SEWA introduced “the members to the values of honesty, dignity and simplicity of life goals reflecting the Gandhian ideals to which TLS and SEWA leaders subscribe.” It emphasises solidarity through self-reliance and strictly non-violent campaigns. Besides, it also works to build communal harmony in Gujarat. Thus, it best exemplifies “the best of Gandhian constructive values.”

8.4 THE FIRST INTIFADA

The State of Israel was created in 1948. In the Six-Day War of June 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and extended its control over the occupied West Bank and Gaza, now referred to as Occupied Territories. Since then the Palestinian people have been resisting the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964. Yasser Arafat became the leader of PLO in 1969.

Since the Six-Day War, there was a general sense of frustration among the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. In 1982, the PLO had been driven out in an invasion of Lebanon by Israel. It was forced to move to Tunis, thousands of miles away from Palestine. In 1985, Israel reaffirmed its 'Iron Fist' policy and authorised the military administration to use roadblocks, searches, arrests, deportations, and refusals of family reunification permits. Moreover, Israel continued to settle Jews in the Occupied Territories especially the West Bank, which was "a creeping de facto annexation that embittered Palestinians."

The word Intifada connoted 'shaking off one's laziness'. The First Intifada was an uprising of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. It began in December 1987 and continued till 1993. The uprising started in the Jabalya refugee camp after a traffic collision in which an Israeli army tank transporter ran into a group of Palestinians, killing four and injuring seven. The crowd returning from the funerals hurled stones at the local army compound. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were unable to restore order and riots broke out. People threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the IDF. Soon word spread and protests broke out everywhere. In the early days of the uprising, it was an improvised protest as there was no real strategy and the campaign was steered by an unstructured group of leaders. The Intifada's leaders soon set rules that violence from the Palestinian side should be confined to throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. They did so for strategic reasons – few Palestinians owned weapons like guns; secondly, usage of firearms would give an excuse to the IDF to use heavy weapons like tanks and lastly, nonviolent action could turn world opinion against the Israelis and in favour of the Palestinians. Early in January 1988, an organisation was set up - United National Command for the Escalation of the Uprising in the Occupied Territories – the public face of the Intifada now had a name. At the heart of the Intifada was self-determination. The period was marked by a revival of traditional Palestinian mores – there was a renewed interest in Palestinian theatre, poetry, clothing, insignia etc.

In mid-January, Hanna Siniora, a respected Palestinian intellectual and editor of the Jerusalem newspaper *al-Fajr*, laid out a systematic plan for nonviolent action in two press conferences. The plan had four stages and was devised by Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian American clinical psychologist: first, giving up Israeli cigarettes; two weeks later cease the purchase of Israeli soft drinks; withhold tax payments to all Israeli authorities and finally, Palestinian workers would stop going to their jobs in Israel. Comparing the Intifada to other nonviolent movements, Siniora hoped that it could achieve what "the Gandhi movement did in India and the black civil rights movement did in the US." Non-cooperation became all-pervasive and by mid-March mass resignations followed. On the other hand, Israel intensified its campaign to break the Intifada. As the crackdown started, Israeli groups like Peace Now and 21st Year protested against the use of violent force on the Palestinians. Cracks started appearing in the IDF as some sections refused to

serve in the Occupied Territories. World public opinion was critical of Israel but that could not sway it. However, a lot of damage had been done on the economic front. Dissent within Israel grew as the scale of the crackdown expanded. In the summer of 1988, the Civil Administration ordered wholesale deportations of suspected Intifada leaders and agitators. The campaign started faltering as leaders were either deported or jailed and there was nobody to sustain it.

The Intifada may have resulted in more gains and successes for the Palestinians, if violence had not been mixed with nonviolent sanctions. When Palestinians lashed out with violence against the IDF, in the words of Gene Sharp, they fell into “the trap of shifting to fight with the opponents’ chosen weaponry.” Palestinians may not have achieved freedom with the First Intifada but it had two positive effects. First, “For the average Israeli... the Intifada brought about the realization that the status quo—continued occupation—was untenable; the Palestinians were not going to sit quietly and accept indefinite Israeli rule over them.” Secondly, “For many Israelis, the Intifada instilled the beginning of an awareness of the Palestinians as people. Everyday, one saw on television a civilian uprising. This was not a war being fought by armies with tanks and planes but, rather, women and children throwing rocks and stones and occasionally Molotov cocktails.” Thus the Intifada did meet with partial success.

8.5 PETRA KELLY AND THE GERMAN GREENS

A prominent European figure who was inspired by Gandhi and his tradition of nonviolent moral activism was Petra Kelly. She was the leader of the German Green Party (*Die Grunen*).

Kelly was born in Bavaria in 1947 into a devout family of Roman Catholics. Her family moved to southern USA in 1960. While in the US she was inspired by the civil rights movement as well as the anti-Vietnam war movement. Martin Luther King was one of her earliest political heroes. Kelly studied political science at university in Washington, where she was introduced to Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience Theory. King’s acknowledgement of Gandhi and Thoreau as inspirational examples had impressed her. Sara Parkin, Kelly’s biographer says, “Petra’s gods were Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Her bibles were Thoreau and Gene Sharp...”

Kelly returned to Europe in 1972 wherein she got actively involved in the anti-nuclear movement. In 1980, she co-founded and became the first leader of the German Green Party. The Green Party had tried to bring together a wide variety of ecological action groups. Kelly, along with twenty-six other Greens, was elected to the *Bundestag* (Parliament) in 1983 and remained there till 1990 when the Greens suffered electoral loss. During the days of her Bundestag membership, she led a series of nonviolent protests against nuclear installations and military bases, including protests in East Germany and Moscow. Kelly also took part in an occupation of the German embassy in Pretoria against German economic ties with the apartheid regime in South Africa. She went on to protest human rights violations by the Chinese in Tibet. Kelly thus engaged with several issues at the global level – human rights, women’s oppression, environment, structured violence of the military, nuclear issues, and the divide between the rich and the poor. Her main concern was the poor and the oppressed and to this end she said, “To my mind, the purpose of politics and of political parties is to stand up for the weak, for those who have no lobby or other means of exerting influence.”

Like Gandhi, Kelly was committed to active non-violence and her politics was based on truth. Non-violence for Kelly entailed “seeking opportunities for dialogue or taking actions which would liberate people from the violent system (of thinking) which prevented them from seeing the power of rightness of non-violence.”

Like Gandhi, Kelly’s politics flowed from a deep inner spirituality. She believed that “we cannot solve. ...political problems without addressing our spiritual ones.” In fact, Kelly “was drawn to Martin Luther King in part by his strong Christian faith.” Later, she was drawn to Catholic liberation theology, which gave way to a more eclectic and humanistic faith, a new “holy trinity of non-violence, personal responsibility and truth.” Kelly said, “The spiritual dimensions of non-violence as lived by Gandhi are to me most important.” She claimed that her ecological values flowed from Gandhi:

“In one particular area of our political work we have been greatly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. That is in our belief that a lifestyle and method of production which rely on an endless supply of raw materials and which use those raw materials lavishly, also furnish the motive for the violent appropriation of raw material from other countries. In contrast, a responsible use of raw materials, as part of an ecologically-oriented lifestyle and economy, reduced the risk that policies of violence will be pursued in our name. The pursuit of ecologically responsible policies within a society provides preconditions for a reduction of tensions and increases our ability to achieve peace in the world.”

David Hardiman says, “She saw her work as being informed above all by a respect for all life forms and an understanding of their interconnectedness.”

However, unlike Gandhi, Kelly fought elections and represented her party in the Parliament. She referred to *Die Grunen* as an ‘anti-party party’. Kelly believed that party work in the parliament will have to be supplemented with action on the streets. This meant that her party “remain a perpetual opposition, the assumption being that any holding of office would lead to inevitable compromises with power and the violent apparatus of oppression controlled by the state.”

Kelly tried to create a culture of Gandhian-style civil disobedience permeating all levels of the polity. She wrote in her book *Nonviolence Speaks to Power* in 1992:

“All of us in Germany would benefit if we were to learn at last the liberating and constructive art of civil disobedience- not just in the extraparliamentary movement, but also within parliament and political parties. Civil disobedience has to be practiced in parliament or even within our own party if we become too dogmatic, powerful, or arrogant.”

There were several issues of tension and contradiction within the German Party as well as within the professional and personal life of Petra Kelly. She and her party had been unable to resolve and reconcile these tensions and contradictions in a satisfactory manner. The first one concerned her party. There was one faction within the Green Party, known as *Realos*, who wanted to become a partner in the governing coalition and push green policies. Joschka Fisher was the leader of this group. The other faction, *Fundis*, rejected the idea of the *Realos*. Kelly projected herself to be above the two factions, however, “she was in practice more in tune with the *Fundis* than the *Realos*.”

Another issue was the role of the leader within the Green Party. Kelly had wanted to create a party where people were committed to non-violence in thought, word and deed.

In her words, her party was “based on human solidarity and democracy among its members and on the rejection of a performance and hierarchy-oriented approach governed by rivalry hostile to life.” The members of the Green Party were supposed to relinquish their position within the Parliament after two years, which would then be filled by another party member. The idea was that activism within civil society was as important as parliamentary work. Members who relinquish their position would go on to do activism related work. Moreover, power within the party was to flow from the bottom up rather than from top down. However, when it was Kelly’s turn to resign, she refused partly because of personal reasons (she had resigned from her job to serve as a member of parliament and also moved her base to the capital, Bonn). Besides, she felt that the membership of the *Bundestag* provided her a good platform for her political and other social causes; people took her much more seriously – giving up her position would make all that work counterproductive for her as well as for the party. Moreover, Kelly observed that the process of rotation did not prevent the concentration of power in a few hands and it generated dangerous rivalry between the party members. Nonetheless, Kelly was criticised for giving up her principles for her political ambitions. By 1986, she was isolated within her own party and there was a lot of confusion within the party as there were no clear structures of power and means of delegating authority.

Kelly, like Gandhi, appreciated the role of a good press and felt that a moral activist like her could gain crucial publicity and support for her cause through the media. She said in an open letter to the party in 1991:

“One of the great weaknesses in both the parliamentary group and in the party has been that of media relations. The party must have the courage to appoint really independent, bright, and audacious media spokespersons who are very experienced and competent in dealing with the national and international media. One thing must change very quickly in the Green’s public presentation. We have to try to brighten up our party’s image because until now we have appeared unremittingly gloomy and intolerant. We are no longer able to laugh or show a bit of enthusiasm and zest for life. This is particularly evident at the national party conferences, and it is very depressing.”

Kelly was a media star but many people in her party had only contempt for the media.

In 1990, when general elections for the parliament were held for the first time, where both East and West Germany voted together, the Green Party decided to run a ‘personality free campaign’ and therefore Kelly’s name was not among the ones contesting the elections. Meanwhile, Die Grunen failed to forge an alliance with the Green Party of East Germany. The Greens of the East performed better in the elections in comparison to the Green Party of the West. If the two Greens had forged an alliance, they would have managed to get around 40 seats in the Parliament. However, that was not to happen and Die Grunen ended up not getting any seats.

On 19 October 1992, police found decomposed bodies of Petra Kelly and her partner, Gert Bastian from a suburb house of Bonn. Kelly had died on October 1 of a single-bullet wound to the head. Forensic evidence concluded that she was shot (It was believed that Bastian shot Kelly and then killed himself); some believe that she was murdered by the “nuclear mafia”. Who killed Kelly remains a mystery; infact, her death pointed out to an irreconcilable contradiction and tension in her private life. In spite of numerous death threats, Kelly- in true Gandhian style- refused to accept police protection (However, she allowed her partner Bastian, a soldier during the Second World War, who turned into a

peace activist later, to keep his guns from his army days. This was perhaps her way of trying to accommodate Bastian). David Hardiman rightly points out, “Kelly’s death represented a profound failure for the principle of non-violence at the most personal of levels.”

8.6 SUMMARY

Several individuals and groups in India as well as in different parts of the world have attempted to resolve issues of conflict via the Gandhian nonviolent approach. The above section has tried to give a glimpse of few of such cases. The Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand was a nonviolent movement concerned with environmental issues that directly affected the lives and habitats of the common folk. Women’s groups were the main actors there. The movement went on to become a success and inspired other social and environmental movements. Another successful Indian initiative based on Gandhian ideals is the Self-Employed Women’s Association of Gujarat. The Association has empowered the poor and managed to cut out the middlemen by coming together to form co-operative banks.

Among the international case studies, the first one is that of the Intifada I, which was largely a nonviolent movement but not strictly nonviolent as per the Gandhian approach. The First Intifada was an uprising of the Palestinians against Israeli rule. There have been several other uprisings post the Intifada I and the Palestinian struggle for freedom from Israel still continues. The last case study is from Europe and deals with the rise and fall of Petra Kelly and her German Green Party. Kelly chose to work in the political arena but her work was not confined to politics alone – she worked on a range of issues such as nuclear disarmament, environment, human rights, women’s oppression, poverty etc. Success however evaded Kelly because she was not able to reconcile her nonviolent beliefs with her professional and private life, finally leading to her violent death.

The two international case studies may not be very good examples of strict application of the Gandhian approach to conflict resolution but the idea here has been to create an understanding of the range of issues, areas and arenas to which the Gandhian approach has been applied within India as well as outside.

8.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Enumerate the circumstances and conditions that led to the beginning of the Chipko Movement.
2. What are some of the interesting and notable features of the Chipko Movement?
3. How did SEWA manage to stop the exploitation of women?
4. What was the nonviolent composition of the First Intifada? Was it successful?
5. Gandhi was a huge source of inspiration for Petra Kelly. Explain at length her non-violent activities.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Hardiman, David., *Gandhi in His Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas*, Hurst & Company, London, 2003.

Saunders, Harold H., *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*, Palgrave Macmillan/St.Martin's Press, New York, 1999

Menon, Nivedita., (ed), *Gender and Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

Ackerman, Peter & Jack Duvall., *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, Palgrave, New York, 2000.

Kumar, Radha., *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993.

