

Gandhi's conception of international society

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The conceptual, theoretical and philosophical framework developed and explored by Mohandhas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was revolutionary and unconventional for the early twentieth century. Gandhi's theories were largely influenced by his life experiences, wherein he encountered various forms of bigotry, racism, discrimination, conflict, and other forms of violence which inspired Gandhi to be a strong advocate for peaceful and non-violent settlement of disputes. Mohandhas K. Gandhi, commonly referred to as Mahatma Gandhi, is widely recognized for his theology and his conceptions of war and peace. For Gandhi, human beings could overcome brutish tendencies within human nature by neglecting selfish ambitions and yielding to the influence of love. He identified and firmly believed that armed conflict was a result of flaws in the structure of the modern state system. His proposal to overcome war and establish grounds for perpetual peace was founded on his principle of non-violent resistance. The optimistic theories and philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi condemned the use of violence in conflict resolution while advocating the establishment of peace through non-violent measures.

Historical Context

In order to accurately comprehend the beliefs and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, one must take into consideration the various experiences and influences that contributed to the formation of his philosophies. Gandhi's upbringing largely shaped his view of the world, as well as his optimistic ideas of nonviolence. Born in Porbandar, India - today part of the Indian state of Gujarat- Gandhi was subjected to a wide range of religious beliefs. As a child, he was raised in the Hindu cult of Vishnu, where he was exposed to a combination of Muslim and Hindu beliefs. In addition, he listened to the teachings of non violence and self discipline from the Jains, his father's friends. During his childhood, he also had brief encounters with Christian missionaries however their teachings influenced him later in life. (Parekh, 1) As a result of his vast religious experiences, Gandhi has been highly acclaimed as "a deeply religious thinker," whose beliefs were largely shaped by his extensive exposure to the overlapping and conflicting doctrines of various religions. (Ibid, 26)

Gandhi's journey of discovery and self-realization began outside his Indian homeland. This journey was pivotal in the formation of his theories and philosophies. In 1888, he traveled to England where he studied law and politics and was increasingly exposed to the truths of Christianity. In 1893, he traveled to South Africa in search of work at a law firm; there he experienced racism, prejudice, bigotry, abuse, and other forms of injustice and discrimination. (Leathem, 8) These events served as a turning point in Gandhi's life, encouraging him to take a stand against injustices through acts of non-violent resistance. He was disconcerted by the state of conflict in India and in the midst of religious strife he was compelled to actively make a difference in his homeland. During a religious war between Muslims and Hindus, he advocated the extreme need for unity, independence, and peace amongst the people of India. His intentions to create a movement that would foster lasting social change resulted in the establishment of the Independence Movement in India, wherein he sought to promote unity and cooperation across religious barriers through various forms of non-violent protest. (Parekh, 11) Gandhi began a

personal fast in order to non-violently protest Indian prejudices by Hindus against the untouchables' caste (Gandhi, 241). He recognized the necessity of promoting justice and the importance of nonviolent resistance. On 30 January 1948, he was assassinated by a devout Hindu who opposed his beliefs and teachings. (Bates, 37) Gandhi exemplified true passion and determination for justice through non-violent resistance in life and death.

Gandhi's conception of Man

Before one can address Gandhi's views on war and the violent nature surrounding it, his outlook on human nature must be explored in detail. Gandhi believed that although man naturally derived from the animal world, man could overcome his brute nature through a spiritual journey of self-realization, where goodness is developed, strengthened, and perfected. (Roy, 41) His theories of human nature are largely connected with, and inspired by, a combination of his religious beliefs. Fundamentally, he believed that human nature was based on three underlying facts: firstly, humans are an integral part of the cosmos; secondly, they are interdependent on one another for development; and thirdly, they are four dimensional beings made up of the body, the *manas* (mind), the *atman* (soul or cosmic spirit), and the *swabhava* (psychological and moral constitution), which together create behavioural patterns and form morality. (Parekh, 38)

Gandhi's view of human nature was primarily based on the cosmic spirit, or soul, which he believed existed in the universe, as well as in each individual. He believed that every living being possessed the same spirit and within that spirit was the ability to overcome savage desires and operate in love and harmony with others. This view of innate goodness, within human nature, encouraged Gandhi's philosophies of peace through non-violent means. Gandhi believed that all human beings were equal, that the universe was the common inheritance of all people given by God and that there should be mutual accommodation of all things. Although, he believed that human beings were considered superior to animals since all living beings possessed a divine spiritual nature. However, Gandhi believed that killing animals was considered violent and evil and described the body, which encompassed brutish tendencies of violence and hate, as

“the ‘house of slaughter’ and [he] was deeply anguished by the violence it demanded. Since violence was built into the human condition and thus unavoidable, he thought the only moral course of action was to minimize it by reducing one's wants and to compensate for it by both taking tender care of nature and leading a moral life”. (Ibid, 39)

He believed that this could be achieved through a simple life yielded to the cosmic spirit.

Gandhi viewed all humans in a relationship of interdependence with one another. This belief was based on the notion that every human being owed their existence to others and was indebted to them for survival. Moreover, he believed that one individual's actions towards another directly affected them, thus, “human beings could not degrade or brutalize others without also degrading or brutalizing themselves, or inflict psychic and moral damage on others without inflicting it on themselves as well”. (Ibid, 39-41) Therefore, Gandhi believed that every person should be responsible for ensuring the well being of others in order to ensure security for themselves.

As previously mentioned, Gandhi's view of four-dimensionality of the human being comprises the body, the *manas*, the *atman*, and the *swabhava*. Beyond his traditional views of the body and mind, he focused heavily on the *atman* and the *swabhava*. He believed that those who identified themselves with the *atman*, or spirit within them, tapped into a source of universal love and service, as well as a spiritual power that could control inter-communal violence. This force of love could drive individuals to sacrifice for their fellow man and serve others while refraining from violence and oppression. As for the *swabhava*, it was constructed as a product of a person's previous life:

"Like many Indian philosophers, Gandhi subsumed freedom under truth. Since each individual had his own unique ontological truth and constitution, he needed freedom to discover himself and develop at his own pace. Freedom was the necessary basis and precondition of his ability to be true to himself. To deny a person freedom was to force him to be untrue to himself, to live by someone else's truth, to plant a lie at the very centre of his being. For Gandhi, the case for freedom was simple, and the same as that for truthfulness. Respect for truth implied respect for human beings as they were constituted at a given point in time, and for their need to live by truth. Love of truth involved love of one's fellow human beings as they were constituted, not as one would like them to be, and ruled out all attempts to "force them to be free" or sacrifice them at the altar of an abstract and impersonal ideal." (Parekh, 47)

Each individual was free to discover their own inner constitution and live their life in accordance with it. Overall, he thought that all human beings had an intense disposition towards good, however, it did not mean that human beings would always choose the path that would lead to good. In some circumstances, one may be inclined to commit evil acts as a result of a lack of self-realization or resulting from the inclination of their *swabhava*. (Ibid, 42-7, 49) Although the presence of evil was evident in Gandhi's view of human nature, he believed that it could be overcome through self-realization of the good and moral tendencies within the cosmic spirit found in each individual.

Gandhi believed that morality and spirituality went hand in hand since spirituality involved a union with the cosmic spirit and genuine love of all beings; therefore, requiring morality. He felt that if every human being devoted themselves to the spirit of service and harmony, they would ultimately promote the communal well-being of all people: "Gandhi thought that by bringing to his every activity the 'sweet smell of humanity', every person could in his own small way help transform the quality of human relationships and contribute to the creation of a better world". (Ibid, 47-49) He professed his thoughts publicly, stating: "Our desires and motives may be divided into two classes - selfish and unselfish. All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral. The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind". (Gandhi, 187) He strongly believed that evil and hatred could always be overcome by good, if human beings decided to refrain from being beastly and brutal and instead function in the spirit of love, harmony and service. (Parekh, 30; Gandhi, 289, 293, 294) Gandhi's view of human nature is essential in understanding his conceptions of the nature of the state, war and international relations.

Conception of the State

Gandhi's thoughts on war and violence were largely influenced by his perception of the nature of the state. He viewed the individual as the primary actor in society due to the inherent possession of a soul, or cosmic spirit, which he proposed was lacking in the state. (Burrowes, 105) He believed that the good in each individual was largely corrupted by the nature of the state of modern civilization. Gandhi viewed the state as a corruptible force which represented violence in a fixed and structured form (Dhiman, 89). He considered the modern state to be "fundamentally flawed" resulting from aggression, imperialism, violence, exploitation, brutality, unhappiness, restlessness, as well as a lack of direction and purpose. (Parekh, 63) He believed this to be true since modern society neglected the soul or cosmic spirit, focused heavily on the body, ignored natural limitations, and lacked appreciation for the individual *swabhava*. (Ibid, 64) Thus, modern civilization misunderstood the inherent balance and hierarchy of human nature, since the nature of the state infringed on the freedoms of the individual as the central actor.

Gandhi heavily criticized the capitalist economy based on its tendency to maximize production and profit at the expense of individuals. He believed that through this system, human beings were subjected to a new form of slavery proving to be problematic since any involuntary action could not be deemed moral. O.P. Dhiman quotes Gandhi saying, "no action which is involuntary can be called moral... .. So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral it should have been done consciously, and as a matter of duty." (Dhiman, 89) Evidently, Gandhi argued that modern civilization lacked the morality necessary for the betterment of all people in society. He saw it as promoting the selfish and impure desires of personal gain and ignoring the importance of communal benefits. Thus, recognizing the negative aspects of modern civilization, connected to capitalism, such as oppression and exploitation, as immoral and unjust, disregarding the sacred freedom of human nature. (Parekh, 64-6) He believed that, in addition to capitalism, socialism was another force corrupting society arguing that these forces needed to be rejected and eliminated in order to maintain peace and love, while avoiding hatred and violence. As mentioned above, he rejected the conception of selfish gain as well as the notions of the competitive market and private property connected to capitalism. Resulting from Gandhi's belief that the earth was given to individuals by God for mutual accommodation, he thought that goods, resources, and property should be communally owned and distributed. In regards to socialism, he rejected its conception of conflict between classes, material gain, and violent action. (Burrowes 102-3) Gandhi criticized the nature of the state, mainly in its capitalist and socialist forms, because he believed that they gave rise to oppression and exploitation resulting in conditions of hatred and armed conflict.

Conception of International Society

Gandhi's view of the nature of the modern state, as a source of corruption and destruction, serves as a basis for interpreting his thoughts on international relations between states. As previously discussed, he believed that interdependence among human beings was an essential part of their nature. This is evident in his acknowledgment of the interdependence among nations, individuals, and international actors. He witnessed the negative interactions in international relations resulting from unequal power relations, discrimination, prejudice, exploitation, and other forms of oppression existing between states. His conceptions of

interactions between international actors resulted from his experiences and perceptions of the corruption and violence in the world around him. Gandhi made it abundantly clear that:

“[His] concept of indivisible humanity formed the basis of his critique of systems of oppression and exploitation. Such dominant groups as the whites in South Africa, the colonial governments in India and elsewhere, and the rich and the powerful in every society believed that their exploitation and degradation of their respective victims did not in any way damage them as well. In fact it degraded and dehumanized them as much as their victims, and sometimes even more. White South Africans could not deprive blacks of their livelihood and dignity without damaging their own capacity for critical self-reflection and impartial self-assessment, and falling victim to moral conceit, morbid fears, and irrational obsessions. In brutalizing blacks they also brutalized themselves, and were only prevented by their arrogance from noticing how sad and shallow their lives had become.... Colonial rulers met the same fate.” (Parekh 41-42)

As long as individuals and international actors acted selfishly, neglecting the well being of others, violence and armed conflict would continue to be the primary means of conflict resolution.

Gandhi on War

For Gandhi, war was a result of selfish ambitions and brutish tendencies within human beings, which flowed into international relations. He recognized the vast amount of violence and aggression against individuals, nations, and groups, as well as the exploitation of natural resources that were rampant in modern civilization. “In Gandhi’s view, violence ‘oozed from every pore’ of modern society, and had so much become a way of life that human beings today were in danger of losing the capacity to notice its pervasive presence, let alone find ways of dealing with it”. (Ibid, 67) He saw war and violence as inevitable if human beings refused to yield to the good found in their cosmic spirits in order to promote and serve the well being of their neighbours. In sum, Gandhi stated:

“{w}ar with all its glorification of brute force is essentially a degrading thing. It demoralizes those who are trained for it. It brutalizes men of naturally gentle character. It outrages every beautiful canon of morality. Its path of glory is foul with passions of lust, and red with the blood of murder. This is not the pathway to our goal. The grandest aid to development of strong, pure, beautiful character which is our aim, is the endurance of suffering. Self-restraint, unselfishness, patience, gentleness, these are the flowers which spring beneath the feet of those who accept but refuse to impose suffering...”. (Gandhi 284-5)

Ideally, Gandhi had a vision for peace in the world that would require all people to contribute to acts of resistance through non-violence.

Theory of non-violence a proposal for peace

Gandhi believed that his path to peace, governed by non-violence, was essential for the prosperity of humankind. In order for peace to prevail throughout the world, violence and armed conflict needed to be abolished and overcome by love and service:

“If war cannot be abolished, there is absolutely no hope for the future of the human race, as sooner or later society is bound to annihilate itself... If war is not sooner avoided or abolished, a conflict will arise in which entire nations and races will be completely blotted out of existence and even vast continents will be reduced to impotency and dissolution. One thing is clear, therefore; war must be abolished at all costs if civilization is to survive. (Nojeim, 105)

Gandhi saw a hope for the future that was grounded in all that was good, namely love, service, cooperation, self-realization, and non-violence. For Gandhi, a person's greatest and most fundamental need is for self-realization that can only be obtained in an environment that fosters self-respect and inner security. Thus, violence “is anything that impedes individual self-realization”. (Burrowes, 106) In order to promote self-realization and perpetual peace amongst international actors, Gandhi believed they should disarm themselves by refusing to exploit one another and refraining from regarding each another as enemies: “It is not non-violence if we love merely those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those that hate us. I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of love. But are not all great and good things difficult to do? ...”. (Gandhi, 289) His proposal for peace is founded on his principle of non-violence and the belief that every individual should possess sincere love for all living beings and should never harbour hatred or violence towards them.

Gandhi was convinced that peace could be achieved through acts of non-violence founded on two essential principles: *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*. The first principle, *satyagraha* is often translated as “non-violent resistance” and is known as the soul force or truth force, mainly strength that comes from adhering to truth. (Parekh, 105), but its real meaning is “the Force which is born of Truth and Love” (Nojeim, 91, 94). Gandhi saw truth as fundamental to non-violence because he believed that if an individual was walking in truth, they could not remain violent. Believing that God and truth were one and the same thing and so if an individual was seeking truth they were drawing closer to God he argued that a person who was violent was living in lies, deceit, and falsehood, and therefore, cannot become closer to God. According to Gandhi, *satyagraha* goes beyond resistance, it is a means to resolve conflict and overcome it with love and uncompromising adherence to truth. It does not simply seek to end violence; it desires to achieve complete resolution, reconciliation, and restoration. (Ibid, 91-2, 94-6) Gandhi believed that this principle, along with *ahimsa* could create an atmosphere for peace around the world.

The second principle, *ahimsa*, is often translated as non-violence, or “the absence of a desire to harm a living being”. (Parekh, 105) This principle is often associated with the force of love. *Ahimsa* is dependent on the spirit of love, a force that is active in resisting evil and wrongdoing in order to defeat the oppressor's inner demons, reveal truth, and bring about self-realization. Gandhi believed that in order for *ahimsa* to be entirely effective, the individual must be willing to lay down their life, sacrifice, and even suffer in order to achieve the desired goal of

non-violent resistance. (Nojeim, 99-100, 106) This is the main principle of social interaction driven by one's choice to abstain from imposing their selfish ambitions on another individual, and, thus, preserving integrity. (Roy, 42) Gandhi believed that this abstinence would create communal benefits because each person would be able to freely come to self-realization, while in harmony with those around them. However, non-violence could not take place without the presence of love because love is the force which causes humans to refrain from hatred and aggression. (Potter, 100) With the power of love, derived from the cosmic spirit, at work within every individual, violence and armed conflict would cease to exist and peace would prevail.

These two principles, *satygraha* and *ahimsa*, were fundamental to Gandhi's philosophies of non-violence acting together to promote harmonious existence amongst people and nations. Gandhi believed that *satygraha* and *ahimsa* were inseparable from one another. He thought that in order to seek truth (*satygraha*) and find it, love (*ahimsa*) was absolutely necessary. Therefore, Gandhi saw love as the means to the end, truth. He states: “{w}ithout *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find truth. *Ahimsa* and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin... Nevertheless, *ahimsa* is the means, truth is the end”. (Nojeim, 106) Gandhi believed that every individual has the right to self-realization that can only be achieved by discovering truth, through love. Acts of non-violence, for Gandhi, assisted others in discovering truth through the promotion of love.

Gandhi's life, theories, and philosophies exemplified his belief that non-violent action would lead to positive social change. He believed that acts of non-violence must always be in response to violence and the act must anticipate that the result will lead to the betterment of society, or the act would be deemed unjustified. (Potter, 93-5) Richard B. Gregg explains that, “{i}n all instances, the tendency of non-violent resistance is to remove fear, anger, any foreboding or dread of loss or sense of separateness, and to give instead a feeling of security, unity, sympathy, and goodwill”. (Gregg, 26) The central aim of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was to create an atmosphere for peace, love, truth, self-realization, and harmony. He did not deny that conflict would exist; however, believed that when it did arise there was always a means for peaceful settlement. He saw the solution of conflict, resulting from denial of human needs, through non-violent means as the best way to obtain peace and increase harmony. (Burrowes, 107, 109) This view that non-violence is “infinitely superior” to violence is essential to Gandhi's philosophies. (Gandhi, 137) He believed that no matter what the circumstance, violence could be counteracted by acts of non-violent resistance. Non-violence not was an act of passivity but an act of resistance; it was to prevail over violence, people needed to take a firm stand of self-sacrifice and struggle for the betterment of humankind. If an individual was passive and cowardly, he could not be involved in non-violence. Gandhi felt strongly that even violence was better than inaction: “I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence... But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence...”. (Potter, 96) Gandhi was convinced that non-violence was not an act of passivity, but an act of resistance designed to bring about revolutionary change. Gandhi proposed various techniques to put his theories into practice.

Practical Application of Gandhi's principles of non-violence

Gandhi presented and practiced the various ways in which one could apply the theory of non-violence at the personal, communal, and national levels. For individuals and communal groups, Gandhi offered a series of actions that may function both separately and/or collectively to promote revolutionary social reform.

All of these acts of non-violent resistance entail strict self-discipline and sacrifice in order to perform love and service for others. Gandhi believed that "a truth seeker must: 1. Live a pure life, free from desires and passions; 2. Live a life dedicated to promoting the welfare of all, but especially the neediest; and 3. Live a simple life". (Nojeim, 107) These three requirements would be put into practice as the truth seeker developed rigid discipline by living according to a lifestyle devoid of selfish desire and attachment to material possessions, as well as a controlled palate or diet, and celibacy. He believed that if human beings could overcome their desires and cravings for possessions, food and sexual relations they would be more effective in implementing non-violence. The reasoning is rooted in Gandhi's conviction that individuals who allowed themselves to be controlled by their brutish desires would use whatever means necessary to fulfill their lustful passions, which eventually leading to violence. The proposed disciplined lifestyle allowed people to obtain an almost complete loss of selfish desires and ambitions and devote their lives to the service of others. (Ibid, 107-10) According to Gandhi, if all people developed this kind of a lifestyle, all human beings would live in love and service to one another and join in unity. On the other hand, if some people chose to live selfish, lustful, and materialistic lives, he believed that those who chose to operate in non-violence could influence them to commence the process of self-realization which would lead to change, and ultimately result in acts of peaceful resistance.

When addressing the application of non-violent principles to the nature of the state, Gandhi had an optimistic vision to promote global cooperation and communal benefits. He presented his ideal of the non-violent state as a solution to conflicts within states and international relations. This optimistic construction would eventually lead to a "stateless non-violent society in which there will be no police and military, no law-courts, doctors, heavy transport and centralized production". (Dhiman, 90) Gandhi willingly confessed that this was a lofty ideal that was largely unattainable. He recognized that in order for society to become stateless, all citizens must become well developed in strict self-control and function in an orderly fashion that would promote and lead to peace. Although this is largely unattainable because of human imperfections, he did not dismiss its possibility. (Ibid, 90-1) Gandhi worked with others toward obtaining this ideal of the non-violent state through acts of non-violent resistance. Some of his famous acts of non-violent resistance included: "His Salt March [which] focused on a singular issue also, namely, challenging the British over whether Indians had the right to make their own salt. Similarly, Gandhi's fasts, which were designed to pressure Indians (not the British) into changing their ways." (Nojeim, 123) Gandhi's determination in non-violent resistance to stand against injustices made a significant mark on history and encouraged many others to follow in his teachings.

Conclusion

Gandhi truly believed that non-violence was the most effective means for achieving peaceful settlement of conflict: “{a}ll miracles are due to the silent and effective working of invisible force. Non-violence is the most invisible and the most effective. Belief in non-violence is based on the assumption that human nature is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love...”. (Gandhi, 289) If the entire world truly made every effort to yield to their cosmic spirit and surrendered to and operated in love, service, and truth, then unity and cooperation would bloom and peace would blossom. Gandhi’s ultimate goal was to discourage acts of violence and encourage a just and peaceful society through non-violence. To achieve this, he rooted his thinking firmly in the unity of the means and the end: “{f}or Gandhi, truth is the end, nonviolence the means”. (Burrowes, 109) Gandhi’s philosophies were revolutionary and humanitarian, not only in theory but also in practice.

Mohandas K. Gandhi did not just produce theories and philosophies that were relevant at the time of construction; he left behind a global legacy of ideas that remain applicable today. Both historically and currently, the teachings and workings of Mahatma Gandhi have inspired countless modern humanitarians, and empowered civil society activists. Martin Luther King Jr. was fascinated and inspired by Gandhi's ideas and philosophies. He said, “{a}s I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi ... I came to see ... that the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence, is one of the most potent weapons available to an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom”. (Wolpert, 264) Also theoretically impacted by Gandhi, are many acclaimed individuals who have made revolutionary change in history through social reform, such as, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, and many more. “To millions unborn at the time of his death, Mahatma Gandhi’s name continues to resound with inspirational powers unique to our century”. (Ibid, 266) The theories and philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi have inspired various humanitarian acts of non-violent resistance around the world today. As people take part in protests, petitions, letter writing, aid efforts, and other forms of humanitarian action and assistance, they are partaking in the spirit of non-violent resistance through the promotion of love, truth, service, unity and peace.

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