

Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts have been prevalent in West Asia for decades now, with no end in sight for many regions. Any attempt at peacekeeping has not remained completely successful and people have continued to suffer at the hands of each other. Even with UN interventions, the end has been barely visible. This brings about the question of what is needed to resolve the dispute. The Gandhian philosophy is an integral part of any conflict resolution process and the possibility of it being used to curb the conflict in West Asia must be determined. This is done in a three-fold method, first, understanding the conflict in West Asia; Second, understanding what Gandhian Philosophy is and; Third, attempting to integrate them into conflict resolution. Attempting to integrate them into conflict resolution would also involve understanding if it has already been done previously. This would provide a structured analysis of whether the Gandhian Model of Peace Resolution would be useful in the context of the conflict in West Asia, or whether there is scope for improvements if it has already been applied.

Keywords: *Gandhian model, peaceful resolution, Palestine, Conflict, West Asia*

The region, West Asia comprises the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Georgia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. These were founded by treaties, settlements, and declarations, as well as, in certain cases, uprisings. Contrary to common opinion, the issue in the region or at least some of the most severe problems began, during World War I as a result of British and French strategic objectives in the Mediterranean Sea (Parnikha & Shuktiz)ⁱ. It is noted, that the primary reasons for the conflict include the Sykes-Picot agreement signed by the United Kingdom and France to have individual control over various parts of West Asia; the Balfour Declaration of 1914, which resulted in the establishment of Israel; and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which resulted in a change in Iranian political structure. Since then, the area has suffered political, social, and security issues as a result of the states' disputes. Protracted hostilities, most notably the Palestinian-Israel conflict, as well as civil wars in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, as well as sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Islam, plague the West Asian area (Parnikha & Shuktiz)ⁱⁱ.

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Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

It all began at a time when the Mediterranean Sea was an important commerce route, and whoever controlled it controlled trade with India, which was well known for its various resources. However, the colonial fleets had to transit via the Suez Channel, which was made harder by the presence of the Ottoman navy. To contain this 'threat,' conquerors chose to partition the Middle East into smaller groups and countries, making it virtually difficult for the Ottomans to exert effective authority over the region (Parnikha & Shuktiz)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Ottoman Syria, which included the current states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, was partitioned between the French north and the British south by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement. Syria was further partitioned, resulting in the creation of the country of Lebanon for Maronite Christians (Parnikha & Shuktiz)^{iv}. They have never had their nation, and their primary national identities continue to be ethnic identification and religious demography. At the same time, the British formed a variety of agreements with Arab tribes, making contradictory pledges to each. The Hashemites, rulers of the Arabian Peninsula's Hejaz area, were their principal allies in the region. Instead of keeping their pledges, the British pitted the lesser players against each other (Parnikha & Shuktiz)^v.

Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, popularised the notion of a Jewish state in Palestine in the nineteenth century. This philosophy became known as Zionism, and it gained many believers among Jews in Europe, where Jews faced prejudice and even pogroms. To garner Jewish support for World War I, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which pledged "the creation in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People." This was difficult since the British had secretly reached an agreement with the French in 1916 under which the Arab lands would be partitioned and Palestine would be under British authority after the war. Furthermore, the British had promised the Sultan of Mecca, Sharief Hussain, in 1915 that if he organised an Arab revolt against the Ottomans, he would govern over the region, including Palestine, which he accomplished.

The Arabs in Palestine were passionately opposed to the proclamation, thinking that a Jewish country in the region would imply Palestinian servitude. Following World War I, the British created a colony in Palestine, promising to rule until the Palestinians were ready to govern themselves. This was known as Mandatory Palestine because it was mandated by the League of Nations. Even before this, there was a tremendous inflow of Jews from Europe into Palestine with the intention of re-establishing their country after centuries of exile. Meanwhile, the Jewish population in Palestine expanded by hundreds of thousands in the 1920s and 1930s, thanks to British assistance (who were honouring the Balfour Declaration). Tensions between the burgeoning Jewish populations and the Arabs were rising at this time. The Palestinian Arabs rose against the British in 1936 as a result of the Palestinian Arabs increasingly considering themselves as a nation. The British put down the insurrection with the support of Jewish militias.

However, following the rebellion, the British produced a white paper restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine and calling for the formation of a combined Jewish-Arab state in Palestine within ten years. During World War II, Jewish organisations moved many Jews fleeing the Holocaust in Europe to Palestine illegally (due to the immigration limit). Tensions rose, and the British passed the subject over to the newly formed United Nations. The United Nations agreed

Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

in 1947 to create separate Palestinian and Jewish nations in the territory dividing Palestine. The Arabs rejected this proposal. Israel was declared an independent state in May 1948, with David Ben Gurion as Prime Minister. Following this proclamation, the Arab-Israeli War erupted in 1948, with five Arab governments attacking Israel: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. The dispute has only continued since then.

Back then, the political and social reform of the region was in its early phases, with little progress made. Despite this, post-Arab Spring countries have recognised the importance of addressing domestic concerns and, more crucially, reorienting state-civilian relations. However, little progress had been accomplished between the start and conclusion of the popular movement, and other countries, such as Syria and Yemen, are still at war, with long-term recovery projected. Even though it has lessened to some extent, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict does not look to be resolved, with Iran emerging as a potential and conceivable threat to both Arabs and Israelis. The divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia is growing wider, and numerous proxy battles are being waged along Shia-Sunni lines. Iran has been accused of utilising Arabs as a proxy against Israel in Lebanon and Syria, in addition to Hezbollah.

The Persian state is suspected of providing arms and ammunition to the Houthi rebels against Yemen's Hadi-led government. With interests in Syria and Iraq, Turkey is developing as a vital actor in the area. West Asia has traditionally been a place of great power intervention, in addition to regional powers. Significant contributions have been made by European, American, Russian, and, most recently, Asian countries. However, the United States has been the dominating power since World War II, with naval and military bases in the majority of Arab countries, as well as good relations with Israel. Despite some nations' criticism for its conduct during the Iraq war, in Syria, and elsewhere, the United States has played an important role in bringing peace and stability to the area. However, although enjoying the status of a unipolar state for a long time, it has worked to limit Iranian influence in West Asia by imposing sanctions, allying with the opposition and demonstrators in overthrowing the governments, and moderating Arab anti-Israeli sentiment. The conflict still prevails in various forms.

GANDHIAN MODEL OF PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

Gandhi is recognised for his Satyagraha, or peaceful dispute settlement approach (Manas)^{vi}. Many scholars and individuals have described nonviolent conflict resolution before and after Gandhi, however, he remained one of the few individuals who also practised what he preached. Satyagraha, or nonviolent protest, is the Gandhian method of dealing with conflicts. It is based on the premise that individuals can peacefully resolve disputes amongst themselves without physically harming each other (Manas)^{vii}. While this would not be easy, it is still better than the alternative. It also means that disputes might progress from competitive to cooperative in nature. This can occur not only between people with private relationships but also includes relationships between authorities, States, etc (Manas)^{viii}.

The Gandhian method emphasises the necessity of obtaining the truth; triumph or loss is irrelevant here; the satisfaction of all conflict participants with the conclusion is considerably more significant (Manas)^{ix}. This is only possible when there is something mutually beneficial involved. Truth, nonviolence, and methods and objectives are all applicable in the international arena. These

Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

ideas should also apply to international dealings (Manas)^x. To overcome international disputes, Gandhi advocated for the use of civic defence rather than warfare. Civilian defence aims to protect society as a whole, rather than merely borders or critical infrastructure (Manas)^{xi}. Some of his principles have also been expressed in the form of:

MEDIATION

Gandhi thought that courts should be avoided whenever possible because neither party can be pleased by the defeat of the other (Daksh)^{xii}. He was a firm believer in decentralised dispute resolution. The panchayat system and the Lok Adalat idea are both based on Gandhi's principles. It has changed the emphasis of dispute resolution away from a formal legal settlement and toward more localised options (Daksh)^{xiii}. The mediator's function is to assist the parties in achieving the resolution of their issue. If the parties have a close relationship, mediators may intervene. The Gandhian mediators would work as Satyagraha catalysts, supporting the parties in reaching a mutually satisfying compromise to resolve the underlying dispute, obtaining more truth, and effecting transformation in both the opponents and their broader societal setting (Daksh)^{xiv}. Gandhi has long been a proponent of the modern concept of ADR. It refers to avoiding legal judgement or legal establishment. It is the system's third party's job to assist the parties in obtaining the resolution of their disputes. Alternative dispute resolution entails parties working together and finally reaching an agreement with the help of third parties. In many aspects, the ADR movement mirrors Gandhi's Satyagraha (Daksh)^{xv}. It consists of panchayat-level mediation by panchayat members and conciliation activities at the mediation centre.

ARBITRATION

Even though the notion of ADR was not technically formed at the time, Gandhi's life demonstrates that he emphasised the principles of ADR. Today, whether deliberately or unintentionally, most ADR techniques mirror Gandhian values. Furthermore, several academics and academicians have done extensive studies proving a relationship between Gandhian nonviolence, or "Ahimsa," and other conflict resolution methodologies (Daksh)^{xvi}. Gandhi considered attorneys as more social than professional and instead saw them as mediators. Lawyers, according to his proposals, should not just help with legal justice, but also with social, economic, and political justice. Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated for civil conflicts to be handled via a compromise between the parties, whether with or without the intervention of outsiders, also supported alternative conflict resolution techniques (Daksh)^{xvii}. Many times, throughout his life, he tried to urge his clients to resolve their differences discreetly rather than going to court. He was involved in one such incident during his early days of litigation in South Africa. While in Durban, he battled and won his client, Sheth Abdulla's, case. According to the ruling, the other party should have made a large lump sum payment to Sheth. However, understanding that doing so would destroy the other party's company as well as his connection with Sheth Abdulla, Gandhi persuaded his client to accept the money in instalments instead (Daksh)^{xviii}. This taught Gandhi that the ultimate purpose of a lawyer is to develop amicable relationships between the parties, not only to win the case. In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi describes his attempts in South Africa to settle a legal case through arbitration. Following this incident, Gandhi went on to intercede in several other cases (Daksh)^{xix}.

Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS

India's motion at the United States General Assembly in 1945 cleared the ground for the compilation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which established the ideals of universality and equality of all nations - a key premise of multilateralism (Miloon)^{xx}. Mahatma Gandhi also had a big effect on our officials who worked on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Hansa Mehta, Begum Hamid Ali, Lakshmi Menon, M.R. Masani). Apart from these, his principles of non-violence form the basis for all peacekeeping operations. The goal is to resolve disputes peacefully, through alternative means such as mediation, arbitration, etc. These have been attempted by the United Nations in many conflicts and the Gandhian principles of non-violence has become increasingly important in recent times. The Gandhian technique emphasises the importance of finding the truth; victory or defeat is immaterial here; the satisfaction of all conflict participants with the outcome is far more important. This is only conceivable when there is something in it for both parties. In the international arena, truth, nonviolence, and techniques and aims are all applicable. These concepts so already apply to foreign transactions. Gandhi advocated for the use of civic defence rather than violence to resolve international problems. Civilian defence is concerned with protecting society as a whole, rather than just borders or essential infrastructure. This is what the United Nations seeks at the moment, rather than conflict, they seek peace.

APPLYING GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY TO CONFLICTS

The above-mentioned, termed the Gandhian philosophy can play an integral part in today's world. These principles can be applied to present-day conflicts and integrated into systems so that we have better outcomes. Apart from that, we can maintain relationships rather than destroy them with warfare. These have been used before. For example, the First Intifada was a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza. It started in December 1987 and lasted until 1993 (IGNOU)^{xxi}. They thought, among other things, that peaceful action might sway international opinion against Israel and in favour of the Palestinians. The United National Command for the Escalation of the Uprising in the Occupied Territories was established in early January 1988, giving the Intifada a name. Self-determination was at the centre of the Intifada (IGNOU)^{xxii}. The time saw a renaissance of traditional Palestinian values, with revived interest in Palestinian theatre, poetry, attire, insignia, and so on. In two press conferences, Hanna Siniora, a noted Palestinian thinker and editor of the Jerusalem weekly al-Fajr, put forth a comprehensive plan for peaceful action. Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian American clinical psychologist, designed the strategy in four stages: first, stop buying Israeli cigarettes; two weeks later, stop buying Israeli soft drinks; withhold tax payments to all Israeli agencies; and ultimately, stop coming to work in Israel (IGNOU)^{xxiii}. When comparing the Intifada to previous nonviolent movements, Siniora expressed hope that it may accomplish what "the Gandhi movement accomplished in India and the black civil rights movement did in the United States." Non-cooperation became rampant, and mass resignations followed by mid-March (IGNOU)^{xxiv}. On the other hand, Israel stepped up its efforts to end the Intifada. Later, violence started being a part of the moments. While this did not turn out successful, it is still useful to note that it can be used to resolve conflicts.

Further, on November 26, 1938, Mahatma Gandhi stated in Harijan that he sympathised with Jews, some of whom he knew from his days in South Africa. As a result, he is aware of the centuries-long persecution of Jews (India Today)^{xxv}. He refers to Jews as Christian untouchables, similar to Hindu untouchables, and feels religion is being used against them, as it was against Jews in

Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

Germany at the time. He does draw a line here, though, stressing that his compassion for Jews should not blind him to the requirements of justice (India Today)^{xxvi}. He claims that Palestine belongs to Arabs in the same way as England belongs to English or France belongs to French and that forcibly imposing Jews on Arabs is wrong and cruel." "The Biblical notion of Palestine is not a geographical area," Mahatma Gandhi declared about Jewish colonisation in Palestinian land (India Today)^{xxvii}. It's in their blood. If they are to accept geographical Palestine as their national home, they must do so under the watchful eye of the British cannon. A religious act cannot be committed with a bayonet or a bomb. Only the Arabs' goodwill would allow them to settle in Palestine." Mahatma Gandhi argues in this 1938 piece, written before the organised killing of Jews in German concentration camps began, that Jews are global citizens and should be regarded as such, with a Jew born in France being considered as French and a Jew born in Germany being treated as German. He instructs German Jews to use peaceful civic resistance to combat German oppression (India Today)^{xxviii}. Though Mahatma Gandhi's subsequent writings on the German persecution of Jews demonstrate a shift in perspective following the German concentration camps' slaughter of millions of Jews, his opinion on Israeli control of Palestinian territory remained constant (India Today)^{xxix}. What we can learn from these, written years ago, are empathy and truthfulness. Gandhi chose to be truthful, revealing the truth he believed in and at the same time being empathetic to the suffering of others. It is what we need in today's world.

CONCLUSION

The Gandhian philosophy should be an integral part of our systems today. It already is, as we can see that there is a focus on peacekeeping missions. However, what is lacking is the truth. Which is the intention of all parties laid bare. In most conflicts, we hear the perspective of two of the major players, but often do not hear the truth from the civilians, especially from various communities among the civilians. Local communities, women, and marginalized communities must be allowed to speak their truth. For the true resolution of conflict, we must hear their side and then attempt to bridge gaps. That is what is lacking at present. If we adopt all of them, we would be able to resolve issues differently. What we must also keep in mind is that there needs to be a shift in the way we deal with conflicts. Warfare has only led to the loss of lives. We need to seek the truth, go on the path of non-violence and seek reparations. Mediation would help countries arrive at a mutual solution that they both seek. We need to break free from existing systems and develop an all-encompassing solution rooted in Gandhian principles and modern-day peacekeeping missions.

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Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

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Understanding the Nature of Major Conflicts in West Asia: An Experimentation of Gandhian Model of Peaceful Resolution

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