
UNIT 13 THE GANDHIAN APPROACH

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) has been acknowledged as one of the greatest figures of human history. An indefatigable fighter for India's independence, an outstanding mass leader, social reformer, pacifist and, above all, a prophet of **non-violence** and truth – **there**

are several facets of Gandhi's personality and contributions. He lived, fought and died for the ideals of non-violence, peace, brotherhood and tolerance. He employed the innovative techniques of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, strikes etc. against the British rulers in India and added new dimensions to the theory of political mobilization.

Although Gandhi's ideas on society and politics are well-known, his views on peace and other international issues are not known as widely. It is believed that he did not take much interest in world affairs, preoccupied as he was with the conduct of the Indian national movement and resolution of the problems of Indian society and villages. However, this is a mistaken view. Gandhi never ignored world affairs and reflected frequently on the contemporary international events and expressed his vision of the new world order clearly and keenly. Indeed, he conceived of and carried out India's struggle for freedom in the larger international context.

However, as he was not a theoretician or a systematic writer, he did not explain his thoughts on international relations at length or provide any specific theory of peace. His ideas on war and peace are scattered in his writings and in his comments made to various individuals. Due to the thematic inconsistency of these writings, it is difficult to structure an organised theory out of it. Nevertheless, the totality of his views on international relations does constitute a distinctive approach to the understanding and resolution of the problem of Inter-state violence. The Gandhian vision of peace is eclectic in nature, derived from multiple sources and traditions. It was influenced as much by the pacifist and anarchist writings, especially of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and the American anarchist Henry Thoreau, as by the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Jainism and Christianity. The following sections explain the key ideas of the Gandhian approach to peace.

13.2 THE BASIS OF GANDHIAN APPROACH TO PEACE

In order to understand Gandhian approach to peace, we must comprehend the core of Gandhi's general social and political thought. He had an integral philosophy of life and society applicable to domestic and international situations alike. This philosophy stemmed from his actions as well as his thought. His conceptions about man, society and the state provide the basis for his approach to peace and world affairs.

Implicitly, Gandhi enunciates both the epistemology of peace as well as the sociology of peace. In the Gandhian thought, metaphysics and social principles, religious values and political strategy are woven together. The primacy of the moral over the political and of the spiritual over the temporal is fundamental to Gandhi's thinking. He considered absolute truth as the ultimate goal and non-violence as the best method of achieving it. Absolute truth is omnipotent and all encompassing. It is equivalent to divinity. There could be no beauty and no art apart from truth. Gandhi subtly altered the dictum "God is Truth" to "Truth is God. Purity of means to achieve any end is also fundamental to the Gandhian approach. Rejecting the Machiavellian approach that end justifies means, Gandhi said that ends and means are inseparable. Good begets good and evil begets evil. In fact, 'ends' grows out of the 'means'. In Gandhi's view, the way you fight and the goal for which you are fighting are the same. Thus, in the Gandhian scheme, the solution of any problem is incorporated into the way one struggles against it.