

## Enhancing Nonviolent Footprints for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence

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### ABSTRACT

At a time when societies across the world are facing conflicts at different level like societal, individual etc there is an emergent need to nurture techniques and approaches which would promote nonviolent resolution of conflicts. Coercive methods of resolving conflicts result in win-lose situations. This results in disenchantment and continuation of discontentment. In this context, resolution of conflicts through nonviolent means offers important approach to conflict resolution so that the result outcome is more often a win-win situation. Building and sustaining cultures of peace does not mean eliminating violence. Humans cannot deny their role in the uprising of global violence. They also cannot blame it on only several people- the spread of violence shows that we all have played a role in contributing to the gruesome state of the world today. The challenge for building a culture of peace, therefore, becomes how such debate is expressed and managed. In order to help people to measure their *Nonviolent Footprints*, the need of the hour is to propel a *NONVIOLENT LITERACY MISSION*. The Mission should be to incessantly work to explore the goodness in people and be a catalyst to become part of a nonviolent action force. Nonviolent Literacy entails critical understanding and learning of the art and science of nonviolence, imbibe the spirit of nonviolence and exhibit nonviolent practices in our daily lives.

**Keywords:** Nonviolence, culture of peace, nonviolent literacy mission, conflict resolution

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*Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being*

— Mahatma Gandhi

As the world prepares to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in 2019, his idea of nonviolence must flow naturally and consistently. His belief in nonviolence is based on the assumption that human nature in its essence is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love. If one does not practice nonviolence in one's personal relations with others and hopes to use it in bigger affairs, one is vastly mistaken. An important component of Gandhi's conflict resolution approach was his philosophy of nonviolent footprints. On the criticality of nonviolence in footprints, Gandhi

writes, "My mission is to teach by example and precept under severe restraint the use of the matchless weapon of Satyagraha which is direct corollary of non-violence and truth. I am anxious, indeed I am impatient, and to demonstrate that there is no remedy for the many ills of life save that of nonviolence. It is a solvent strong enough to melt the stoniest heart. To be true to my faith, therefore, I may not write in anger or malice. I may not write idly. I may not write merely to excite passion. The reader can have no idea of the restraint I have to exercise from week to week in the choice of topics

and my vocabulary. It is training for me. It enables me to peep into myself and make discoveries of my weaknesses. Often my vanity dictates a smart expression or my anger a harsh adjective. It is a terrible ordeal but a fine exercise to remove these weeds.”<sup>1</sup>

Daisaku Ikeda (2004), a contemporary peace scholar, suggests (2004) three principles and guidelines for footprints: (1) exchange among civilizations as a source of value creation; (2) a spirit of open dialogue; and (3) the creation of a culture of peace through education, which are essential parameters for the nonviolent resolution of conflict.

Approaches of nonviolent footprints like empathy, spirit of open dialogue, openness, flexibility, maintenance of relationships and deep understanding of each other's culture are important ingredients which could contribute to resolution of conflicts. To delve on these concerns and the conflicts that arise due to these endeavour to acquire material possessions or achieve glory through short-cuts, His Holiness The Dalai Lama talks of four ideas to counter such tendencies: a) Universal humanitarianism is essential to solve global problems; b) Compassion is the pillar of world peace; c) All world religions are already for world peace in this way, as are all humanitarians of whatever ideology; d) Each individual has a universal responsibility to shape institutions to serve human needs.

Peace Scholar Howard W Hunter arguing on the need for a peaceful world says, “We need a more peaceful world, growing out of more peaceful families and neighbourhoods and communities. To secure and cultivate such peace, we must love others, even our enemies as well as our friends.” Worldwide large numbers of peace practitioners, scholars and groups have been contributing to menace of violence, coercion and intolerance. Using the work of peace apostles like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dalai Lama and Daisaku Ikeda, this chapter aims to develop the concept of nonviolent footprints for individuals to gauge and measure their own efforts towards nonviolent action in their daily lives.

## Culture of Peace and Nonviolence through the lens of Peace Apostle

Building and sustaining cultures of peace does not mean eliminating violence. Humans cannot deny their role in the uprising of global violence. They also cannot blame it on only several people- the spread of violence shows that we all have played a role in contributing to the gruesome state of the world today. The challenge for building a culture of peace, therefore, becomes how such debate is expressed and managed. As written in UNESCO (1995), “In practice, the key to a culture of peace is the transformation of violent competition into cooperation for shared goals...It may be understood as the managing of conflict through the sharing processes of development” (p. 16). Spring (2009, p 218) points out this type of peace culture is not a static process that can be permanently achieved. It requires continual dynamic negotiation among groups and interests, and over time, the focus and priorities will change. All these unstable conditions oblige humans to continually renegotiate, and it is this process of struggling for agreement that is a culture of peace.

Michelle Cromwell and William B. Vogeley (2009, p. 231) has very nicely pointed about nonviolent action which is actually a method of making contention, makes three important contributions to building and sustaining a culture of peace. First, nonviolent means of struggle promote social norms that eschew violence, even without any kind of overarching commitment to pacifism. Second, nonviolent struggle helps to build trust among individuals and groups, even when they find themselves in contention. Third, the structural requirements for effective nonviolent action diffuse power throughout society— effectively empowering groups who might otherwise be excluded, broadening democratic participation, and valuing inter-group footprints. As written in UNESCO (1995), “In practice, the key to a culture of peace is the transformation of violent competition into cooperation for shared goals... It may be understood as the managing of conflict through the sharing processes of development” (p. 16). Johan Galtung (1996, p.9) defines peace as *the*

*absence of violence in every form* by which means that violence occurs in three manners. The first manner is *direct violence*. Direct violence is evident in various forms of intentional bodily harm, including killing, maiming, siege, and any other form of force to the body that causes harm and poses an affront to basic human needs. The second manner of violence is *structural violence*. Galtung (1996, p.196) refers to this as a third form of violence: *cultural violence*, which “makes direct and structural violence appear and feel right—or at least not wrong.”

The idea of the nonviolent footprints is ingenious as it will enable us to see the impact we can make. Often we think that an action has minimal value and thus refrain from doing it but nonviolent footprints stresses on how even the smallest of actions can lead to a bigger action. It reminds us of our responsibility and accountability to Mother Earth and to other humans because we live in a shared space and each of us has equal ownership in resources. In our earnest journey in the search of nonviolence, no one is more powerful than the other. As we think of nonviolent footprints, we think of the Earth as a gigantic sheet of white fabric laid out and children, adults and senior citizens walk all over it, leaving their colorful footprints so colorful that the black spots can be seen no more.

Mahatma Gandhi had pertinently said, “The very first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.” The foundation of the philosophy of Nonviolent Footprints can be grounded in this idea on the need to cultivate nonviolence in our daily lives.

The concept of *Nonviolent Footprints* is also be grounded on the essence of nonviolence as articulated by Martin Luther King who had said, “Nonviolence says that within human nature there are amazing potentialities of goodness.... I think we all must realize that there is within human nature a sort of dualism, something within all of us which justified Plato in saying that the human personality like a charioteer with two strong horses each wants to go in different directions.... There is this tension and this struggle within human nature between the high and the low.... we must recognize that just as there is a capacity for evil, there

*is a capacity for goodness just as a Hitler can lead man to the darkest and lowest depths a Gandhi can lead, men to the highest heights of nonviolence and goodness. We must always see these possibilities within human nature; the nonviolent discipline goes on with this belief that even the most difficult person, even the person who is committed to the old order with all his might, can be transformed.....”*

*Nonviolent Footprints* is a measure of nonviolent action in one’s daily lives which will have to be an individual effort. It cannot be mechanical but has to evolve from within. It cannot be measured by others. In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi had pointed out, “It is not for us to sit in judgment over anyone, so long as we notice a single fault in ourselves and wish our friends not to forsake us in spite of such fault. Being myself full of blemishes, and therefore in need of charity of fellow beings, I have learnt not to judge anyone harshly, and to make allowance for defects that I might detect”. (Harijan, 11-3-1939, p. 47)

To achieve peace within a person, the Buddha taught that “You should carefully guard your mind/ Maintaining the mindfulness all the time/ In order to cease conflicts” (The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Taisho 1: 26). Lord Buddha ideas to live in peace depends not so much on what happens to people, but on what attitude, comprehension, and response they give to the happenings this is his insightful reflection as the practice of intra-personal peace. Whereas Buddha enlightens us with five precepts (pañcha sila) as practice of interpersonal peace as the minimum moral obligations for living a harmonious life in the secular society, such as (a) to abstain from taking life, (b) to abstain from taking what is not given, (c) to abstain from sensuous misconduct, (d) to abstain from false speech, (e) to abstain from toxicants as tending to cloud the mind (Buddhaghosa’s Papancasudani Sutta, in Buddhist Scriptures, 1959: 70).

Daisaku Ikeda in one of his remarkable quote mentions that “The real struggle of the twenty-first century will not be between civilizations, nor between religions. It will be between violence and nonviolence. It will be between barbarity and civilization in the truest sense of the word.” Peace, Ikeda emphasizes, is not

just the absence of war. He defines a truly peaceful society as one in which everyone can maximize their potential to lead fulfilling lives free from threats to their dignity. Genuine peace can only be established on the basis of respect for the dignity of human life, on recognition of our shared humanity. Ikeda firmly rejects the idea that the different cultural and religious traditions that underlie the great civilizations of our planet are in intrinsic conflict.

He writes, "Since 9/11, much has been made of the role religious belief plays as a factor in terrorism. But the real issue is that of exclusionary ideology and fanatic actions cloaking themselves in the language and symbols of religion. If we fail to appreciate this, and start looking askance at the practitioners of a particular faith, we will only deepen mistrust and aggravate tensions." In Ikeda's view, all cultural and spiritual traditions are expressions of human creativity responding to the challenges of life. He has described culture as growing from people in different historical and geographic circumstances attuning their ears and hearts to the wisdom and compassion inherent in the cosmos itself. Strengthening the bonds of connection and mutual respect among different peoples is the first essential step to building a robust and inclusive culture of peace on a global scale. Ultimately, such a culture of peace represents the only fundamental solution to the challenges of war and terror.

The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (2001) in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech had said, "We have entered the third millennium through a gate of fire... New threats make no distinction between races, nations or regions. A new insecurity has entered every mind, regardless of wealth or status...In the early beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a century already violently disabused of any hopes that progress towards global peace and prosperity is inevitable this new reality can no longer be ignored. It must be confronted...The 20<sup>th</sup> century was perhaps the deadliest in human history, devastated by innumerable conflicts, untold suffering, and unimaginable crimes. Time after time, a group or a nation inflicted extreme violence on another, often driven by irrational hatred and suspicion, or unbounded arrogance and thirst for power and

resources...In this new century, we must start from the understanding that peace belongs not only to states or peoples, but to each and every member of those communities...Annan (2001) further quoted that peace must be made real and tangible in the daily existence of every individual in need. Peace must be sought, above all, because it is the condition for every member of the human family to live a life of dignity and security."

Addressing to the Global Convention on Peace and Non-violence in New Delhi<sup>2</sup> (2004) Former South African President Nelson Mandela said "*Peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference. Religion, ethnicity, language, social and cultural practices are elements which enrich human civilization, adding to the wealth of our diversity. Why should they be allowed to become a cause of division, and violence? We demean our common humanity by allowing that to happen.*" Mandela<sup>3</sup> (2008) further pointed that "*There is still too much discord, hatred, division, conflict and violence in our world here at the beginning of the 21st century. A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of. It is so easy to break down and destroy. The heroes are those who make peace and build.*"

## **Ideas on Nonviolent Footprints**

The author spoke to children, youth and seniors on their conception of nonviolent footprints. Here are some ideas which emerged:

(I) In order to help people to measure their *Nonviolent Footprints*, the need of the hour is to propel a NONVIOLENT LITERACY MISSION. The Mission should be to incessantly work to explore the goodness in people and be a catalyst to become part of a nonviolent action force. Nonviolent Literacy entails critical understanding and learning of the art and science of nonviolence, imbibe the spirit of nonviolence and exhibit nonviolent practices in our daily lives. *Nonviolent Literacy* should be able to encompass *nonviolent behavior, nonviolent communication, nonviolent attitude, nonviolent thoughts*



and nonviolent action.

(II) By being *nonviolent literate*, we will be in a position to start measuring our nonviolent action. It will help our critical faculties to gauge at the end of the day how violent or nonviolent we were.

This should include:

(A) Our *attitude* towards not only our fellow humans but also towards all forms of life. The measure should encapsulate ideas of mutual coexistence and take a cosmocentric view of human beings. Bhikhu Parekh (2001) in his seminal book, *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction* talks about how Gandhi took the cosmocentric view of human beings. He said how 'human beings were an integral part of the cosmos, and were tied to it by the deepest bonds.'

(B) Our *behavior*. How we behave with others and even ourselves needs to be included in the gamut of indicators for measuring *Nonviolent Footprints*.

(C) **Our expressions-** both verbal and non-verbal. How we choose to communicate with our fellow beings, the words we choose and the manner we express can be important indicators for measuring *Nonviolent Footprints*. Also equally important is our nonverbal footprints methods- these can be both violent and nonviolent and we need to self-introspect if our body language becomes too aggressive to hurt others.

(D) **Our Thoughts**. There are times we may start thinking negatively about people with whom we have difference of opinion. We may even start hating others without openly confronting them. This is also violence

(E) **Ability to indulge in dialogues**. The space for dialogues and discussions is shrinking as most of us start believing that we cannot be wrong and our views must prevail. As humans we will always have differences of opinions and views. All these differences can be plugged through meaningful dialogues and discussions. Our enhanced ability to indulge in dialogues with our opponents and all others should be an indicator to measure our *Nonviolent Footprints*.

(F) **Anger Management**: In the mad race to achieve big, we tend to get over stressed. Also it contributes to

our getting angry many a times without any specific reasons. Just like Mahatma Gandhi maintained an 'anger journal' to meticulously write down the reasons for getting angry during the course of the day, measuring our *Nonviolent Footprints* would entail maintaining an anger journal.

(G) **Self-acceptance**. An important measure of *Nonviolent Footprints* has to be the idea of self acceptance. Accepting one's flaws could be an important way to nurture compassion and empathy towards others.

To encapsulate the perspectives of children and youth: "*Humans cannot deny their role in the uprising of global violence. They also cannot blame it on only several people- the spread of violence shows that we all have played a role in contributing to the gruesome state of the world today. The idea of the Nonviolent Footprints is ingenious as it will enable us to see the impact we can make. Often we think that an action has minimal value and thus refrain from doing it but Nonviolent Footprints stresses on how even the smallest of actions can lead to a bigger action. It reminds us of our responsibility and accountability to Mother Earth and to other humans because we live in a shared space and each of us has equal ownership in resources. In our earnest journey in the search of nonviolence, no one is more powerful than the other. As we think of Nonviolent Footprints, we think of the Earth as a gigantic sheet of white fabric laid out and children, adults and senior citizens walk all over it, leaving their colorful footprints. So colorful that the black spots can be seen no more.*"

## CONCLUSION

Gene Sharp (1973) outlines three methods of Nonviolent Action that serve to undermine unequal systems of power while encouraging the creation of innovative and alternative solutions:

- ⊙ Nonviolent protest and persuasion are "symbolic acts of peaceful opposition" often used to denounce or show dissent toward a specific issue or policy. These methods are also used to gain publicity for a cause. Parades, vigils, picketing, posters, teach-ins and the other educational forums, mourning, and protest meetings are all considered acts of protest and persuasion.

- ⊙ Noncooperation involves intentionally removing oneself from cooperation or relations with a disagreeable activity or institution. Common methods are strikes, boycotts, divestment of funds, and acts of civil disobedience through peaceful violation of laws or regulations.
- ⊙ Nonviolent intervention encompasses methods that disrupt or deconstruct established institutions, behaviors, or policies that are viewed as undesirable by the nonviolent actor. Nonviolent interventions may also strive to create new patterns and institutions to take their place.

Methods of disruption might include nonviolent occupations, blockades, fasting, and seeking imprisonment, in order to over-fill facilities. Methods of creating new structures might include the construction of alternative schools, media, transport, markets, and other political, economic, and social institutions. At a time when societies across the world are facing conflicts at different level like societal, individual etc there is an emergent need to nurture techniques and approaches which would promote nonviolent resolution of conflicts. Coercive methods of resolving conflicts result in win-lose situations. This results in disenchantment and continuation of discontentment. In this context, resolution of conflicts through nonviolent means offers important approach to conflict resolution so that the result outcome is more often a win-win situation. Hence, it is significant to analyze different techniques of nonviolent action which can be encouraged in conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation and which can help in enhancing our nonviolent footprints.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi; Vol. 32; Young India 2-7-1925).
- 2 Mandela, Nelson.(2004). Address To The Global Convention On Peace And Non-Violence, New Delhi, India, 31 January.
- 3 Mandela, Nelson. (2008). Address To The Sixth Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture, Soweto, South Africa, 12 July.

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