



Introducing Nonviolent Communication amongst Youth of Yemen: An Exploration of the Impact of the Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Even as the strife in Yemen continues, a large number of citizens continue to have humanitarian problems. There are instances of health-related problems including cholera, measles, other vaccine-preventable diseases, medicine shortage and conditions of famine. A large number of people are facing problems of food insecurity. In this backdrop, there is serious need to explore nonviolent alternatives to bring a pause to the violence and its deleterious impact on the whole population. This chapter explores the impact of a small yet significant intervention to introduce nonviolent communication amongst the youth of Yemen. The aim is to capture how nonviolent communication as espoused by Mahatma Gandhi can be a powerful strategic alternative in places where there are disputes across the world.

Keywords: Nonviolent communication, Gandhi's nonviolence, structural nonviolence, conflict de-escalation, peaceship

In the backdrop of the disputes in Yemen, there are large numbers of people in Yemen who cannot meet their basic needs. In fact the crisis has led to serious problems faced by children and women in the country.

In fact, the UNICEF pointing out on the impact of the conflict on children and women notes, "Thousands of children have been killed or maimed since the beginning of the conflict, and thousands more have been recruited into the fighting. The ongoing humanitarian crisis has increased the vulnerability of children and women to exploitation, violence and abuse, child labour, killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict as combatants and in various support roles, domestic and gender-based violence, child marriage and psychosocial distress. More than 8.8 million children need protection services" (<https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>).

Meanwhile according to the United Nations Development Programme, 370,000 people have died as a result of the war with indirect causes like lack of water, food and proper health services the cause of almost 60 per cent of the deaths (Robinson, 2022).

The challenge in this backdrop is to develop frameworks and strategies for enduring peace in Yemen. Efforts at all level needs to be initiated for sustaining peace in the real sense which can bring succor in the lives of the people of the country. The population needs to be introduced to nonviolent alternatives so that it helps in bringing peace not only within an individual, but in families, institutions, and communities and in the entire country at large.

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For instance, Egel *et al.* (2021) points out how, “Yemen’s rich tradition of local, informal mediation has persisted throughout the conflict, with informal mediators both substituting for and complementing state authorities.” While they argue that ‘neither informal (via local actors) nor formal (via state authorities) mediation is sufficient on its own to sustain a peace agreement’, they stress on the need to double down on the current focus on national reconciliation.

In the backdrop of the focus on the need to promote national reconciliation, an important contribution to this is to promote nonviolent alternatives and instilling the significance of practicing nonviolence in all aspects of lives. An important dimension to the promotion of nonviolent alternatives for a culture of peace is introduction and assimilation of nonviolent communication and its different elements.

This chapter will explore the impact of introduction of nonviolent communication and a systematic training programme covering over three months to a group of 20 youth in Yemen. As part of this nascent experiment, the group of 20 youth who were interested to take the training in nonviolent communication as espoused by Mahatma Gandhi were selected through convenience sampling method. The young people were given small lessons on nonviolent communication every week and provided opportunities to reflect and act subsequently. The intervention was initiated in August 2022.

Nonviolent Communication in Conflict Zones

Kundu (2022) explains the holistic nature of nonviolent communication. He points out how the philosophy of human interconnectedness is intertwined in nonviolent communication. Kundu talks about how ‘nonviolent communication encompasses our intrapersonal communication, communication with others, communication in the society at large, communication with nature and communication with other living beings’.

Discussing how the Gandhian approach to nonviolent communication can be used in the ongoing crisis in

Tigray, Ethiopia, Obuyi (2020) notes, “Nonviolent communication entails a communication ecosystem that facilitates constructive conflict transformation, a win-win solution, and meaningful engagement with the conflicting parties.” Obuyi (2020) discusses at length on how Mahatma Gandhi’s five basic pillars of nonviolence- respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation and compassion- can be the starting point and important to be adopted to address the situation in Ethiopia. Each of these pillars, Obuyi points out contributes to greater understanding of each other’s views and respect for human dignity. She argues that these pillars of Gandhian nonviolence are significant bedrocks for the peace process and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

Obuyi (2020) further underscores in the context of the Ethiopian crisis, “The pillars of Gandhian nonviolence would be better accompanied by interweaving the key elements of nonviolent communication for the constructive transformation of the conflict.”

Here it would be pertinent to mention the key elements of nonviolent communication. Kundu (2020 & 2021) lists these elements:

- (i) Nonviolent communication means a complete lack of violence in the way we communicate with others.
- (ii) Constructive Intrapersonal Communication - our Self Talk and Inner Dialogue.
- (iii) Nurturing deep faith in principles of humanism.
- (iv) Use of Appropriate and Positive Language.
- (v) Expansion of our emotional vocabulary and managing emotions during our process of communication.
- (vi) Avoiding stereotypes in our communication efforts.
- (vii) Avoid Moralistic Judgments.
- (viii) Avoid Evaluative Language.
- (ix) Role of mutual respect in communication.
- (x) The Power of Empathy.
- (xi) Strong belief in the power of compassion.
- (xii) Connecting with the needs of others.

- (xiii) Importance of flexibility and openness in our communication.
- (xiv) Practicing active and deep listening skills.
- (xv) Expressing gratitude.

Introducing Nonviolent Communication in Yemen

As an experiment to promote nonviolent alternatives, the initiative on nonviolent communication was introduced amongst 20 selected youth in Yemen. The local youth coordinator, Abdualgaleef Khaled Ayish Kodaf, a member of ALBRICS Youth Parliament used the convenience sampling method to identify the youth to take part in the programme. As a reading material, the course material on nonviolent communication, Kundu (2020) offered by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, Ministry of Culture, India was translated into Arabic to be shared with the participating students.

Also an initial questionnaire was shared with the youth. The questionnaire focused on how the youth reacted in situations of dysfunctional or toxic communication, the impact violent communication had on them, how it affected relationships and the need for healthy or harmonious communication ecosystems –whether at the individual level or the societal level.

The youth generally felt toxic communication had a disastrous effect not only on them but the society at large. For a lasting and enduring peace, the communication ecosystem had to be healthy and harmonious. In such a communication ecosystem, the youth felt even in situations of differences and disputes, the conflicts could be resolved without resorting to violent methods. Dignity and deep respect, the youth felt should be part of any communicative efforts for addressing issues of conflicts and in any negotiation or mediation process.

In regular intervals during the lessons on nonviolent communication, the participating youth were motivated to reflect and the impact the lessons had on them. Also as part of the exploratory study expert interviews were conducted with Dr H C Fouad AL Ghaffari, the advisor of the Prime

Minister's Cabinet for BRICS Countries Affairs and the youth coordinator, Abdualgaleef Khaled Ayish Kodaf.

The Findings

Expert Interviews

While arguing on the need to instill the spirit of Gandhi's nonviolence amongst the youth of Yemen, Dr A.L. Ghaffari observed the strategy of nonviolent communication was important for constructive resolution of conflicts and transformation of relationships amongst the conflicting parties. The traditional methods of dispute resolution in the society in Yemen can be strengthened with deep knowledge of the art and science of nonviolent communication, he added.

Dr A.L. Ghaffari stressed that the world was witnessing violent conflicts and its results were there for all to see- devastation, killings and deprivation of the masses. Violent conflicts leads to serious food insecurity and health crisis. So, the only way to resolve disputes were the nonviolent alternatives and nonviolent communication had extremely significant role to play in these, he added. Dr Ghaffari reflected on Gandhi's Dandi March as a significant example of nonviolent action and said young people had a lot to learn from such examples of nonviolence and how to set up opposition through such means.

He felt there was need to 'bring Gandhi's spirit in Yemen's resistance to armed conflicts that the country was facing'. "We have to create a ground stand for Gandhi's mission in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen," he argued. Gandhi's principles of nonviolence should be the guiding spirit for youth across the world to sway them away from specter of violence, he argued.

During the Expert Interview, the local youth coordinator, Abdualgaleel Khaled Ayish Kodaf, who took the lead in facilitating the intervention on nonviolent communication observed that if individuals practice the five-pillars of nonviolence in their daily lives, we can avoid violent resolution of disputes and differences can be handled

amicably. He said how lack of respect leads to misunderstanding and hardening of positions- all providing fertile ground for violent confrontations. Respect for each other enhances human dignity, he stressed.

Ayish Kodaf advocated on the inherent need to introduce the five pillars of Gandhian nonviolence and the different elements of nonviolent communication amongst youth across the world, most importantly to those from the conflict zones. The youth in conflict zones are already overstressed due to the extremely toxic communication ecosystem in which they have to sustain, so to reduce the stress level and ensure harmonious relationships, exposure to nonviolent communication was critical, he added. Gandhi's nonviolent communication was a powerful antidote to the phenomenon of hate and violent communication gripping many parts of the world, Ayis Kodaf argued.

On the significance of the Gandhian approach, Ayish Kodaf described the nonviolent methods promoted by Mahatma Gandhi as a '*peaceship*'. Those who can get into this '*peaceship*' will win and live with dignity and enjoy a harmonious coexistence, he noted.

Ayish Kodaf argued that the '*peaceship*' was the only hope for the world and save it from catastrophe because of violent conflicts. He felt that the Gandhian methods of nonviolent conflict resolution was panacea to stop many of the world's violent conflicts.

Reflections of participants

According to Hamdan Hizam, the exposure to different dimensions of nonviolent communication has made him realize on how important it was to educate people on the need of healthy communication ecosystem for sustaining peace. The different elements of nonviolent communication can help in healthy resolution of complex conflicts, he added.

Farooq Anqad felt his learning's on nonviolent communication made him realize on its significance of evolution of nonviolent human consciousness. He described how nonviolent communication was an instrument to shape moral ethics in the society.

The five-pillars of nonviolence can raise ethical standards and greater self-awareness, he pointed out.

Another participant, Yahay Al Gabli, who said the experience of being part of a programme on nonviolent communication was life transforming. When nonviolence becomes basic building block of life, Al Gabli said, peaceful coexistence becomes the norm and the effects are healthy well-being of all. Polemics and chaos in communication contributes to exacerbation of conflicts; this necessitates the assimilation of the principles of nonviolent communication, he stressed.

The participants felt anger management was critical for all. Anger issues are difficult to handle especially if the individual is in an environment of conflict. Patience, perseverance and maintain calm in difficult situations are important attributes that needs to be nurtured, the participants felt. In such circumstances, nurturing skills of nonviolent communication can help in practicing patience and maintaining calm, they observed.

Participants including Anseel Alqubati, Aiman Sameer, Mazen Shamoh, Khaled Yahya, Mohisin Salem, Yagoop Mohisin felt that the introduction of nonviolent communication amongst young people of Yemen was a significant step to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence and could go a long way in bringing an end to the environment of mistrust and animosity. They felt the intervention needs to be widened amongst young people.

CONCLUSION

As the world faces a spate of complex conflicts, both intra-state and inter-state, use of nonviolent strategies needs to be encouraged and practiced at all level for a peaceful world. The nascent experiment of introducing Gandhian nonviolent communication amongst the youth of the Yemen highlighted how his five-pillars of nonviolence was critical to be promoted and nurtured in our daily lives. The pillars- respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation and compassion are universal values which every individual and societies should strive to assimilate for peaceful and nonviolent global

order. The reflections of the youth involved in the experiment and the expert interviews along with the perspectives of Obuyi (2022) underline the significance of introducing the Gandhian model of nonviolent communication in disturbed areas across the world. The reflections gives us guideposts on why nonviolent communication should be important framework for sustaining peace in communities.

In fact nonviolent communication is equally important at the individual level as for contributing to promotion of a culture of peace in the world. Sustaining inner peace is the key for promotion of outer peace and the different elements of nonviolent communication aids in this regard. The intervention of introducing nonviolent communication amongst the group of young people in Yemen suggests that it is central to any peace process and dismantling of rigid walls that come up during conflicts. If the walls are not dismantled and bridges of love and solidarity are not constructed, the deep fissures that may have developed due to the conflict remains which leads to debilitating effects on people, the economy and the society at large. It is here the argument of nurturing the principles of nonviolent communication for furtherance of human solidarity and global well-being becomes the flag post.

For resolution of conflicts in different parts of the world, sincere dialogues and reconciliation are the only way out. When we open a process of dialogue through the instruments of nonviolent communication, we are taking the first baby step to dispel the dark clouds of suspicion and trust deficit that are the backdrop to any conflicts. So, this intervention of introducing nonviolent communication is the first baby step in the efforts to provide nonviolent resolution to any disputes.

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