

Forgiveness and its Role in Transformation of Conflicts: An Exploration of the Gandhian Approach

Udita Kundu^{1*} and Neha Gupta²

¹Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan, India

²Department of Commerce, N.B.G.S.M. College, Sohna, Haryana, India

*Corresponding author: uditakundu25@gmail.com

Received: 10 Apr., 2023

Revised: 22 May, 2023

Accepted: 02 Jun., 2023

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi, the legendary leader of India's freedom campaign, is venerated for his nonviolent philosophy and profound knowledge of forgiveness as a transformational force in conflict resolution. Gandhi's forgiveness teachings continue to influence individuals and cultures all across the world. This article investigates Gandhi's philosophy of forgiveness, its relevance, its ability to promote peace, harmony and does it help in transforming conflicts into a mutual agreement or generates some sort of harmony among people in modern-day societies. Present study explores the relevance of Gandhi's ideas of forgiveness and its role in transformation of conflicts. In a society filled with disputes, polarization, and division, Mahatma Gandhi's forgiving philosophy stands out as a timeless beacon of hope and healing. Gandhi, known for his nonviolent resistance and unshakable dedication to justice, recognized the transforming potential of forgiveness in settling disputes and creating peace. Gandhi's concept of forgiveness is profoundly relevant and extremely useful even in today's complicated and linked society.

Keywords: Forgiveness, Transformation, Conflicts, Gandhi

"Only the strong can forgive"

— Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

In this section, we will understand about Gandhian approach of Forgiveness. For him, the only way to establish real *swaraj*, or self-rule, by methods of *satyagraha*; the key to his conception of *satyagraha* was *ahimsa* (positive non-violence); and at the center of this perspective on the world was the importance and practice of forgiveness, as he stated in 1925, "Nonviolence implies love, compassion, and forgiveness." Gandhiji held that since wars start in people's brains, peace must be created there. Ideologies, religious extremism, nationalism, economic injustice, and inequality all contribute to

conflicts in the modern world. Gandhi understood the necessity for nonviolent conflict resolution and the possibilities for conflict settlement. He created his philosophy of peace, which attempted to accomplish both the conflict resolution's negative and peace establishment's positive goals. Gandhian pacifism is essential for resolving disputes and preventing bloodshed. Gandhi put out several

How to cite this article: Kundu, U. and Gupta, N. (2023). Forgiveness and its Role in Transformation of Conflicts: An Exploration of the Gandhian Approach. *Int. J. Peace, Edu. Dev.*, 11(01): 25-30.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



theories, including *Satyagraha*, *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, *Buniyadi Talim*, decentralisation of power, wealth, Trusteeship, social harmony, economic equality, *Sarva Dharma Sambhava*, and democracy of the enlightened majority, to stop structural violence. Gandhi's holistic view of human existence is characterised by a multifaceted approach that takes into account social, religious, and political facets of life. He offers answers for moral crises, religious fanaticism, educational reform, social unrest, political unrest, and economic issues in his philosophy of peace. He places a strong emphasis on the abolition of untouchability, prohibition, the advancement of women, community cohesion, and assistance to the underprivileged, village cleanliness, national language, elementary and secondary education, and village industries. Gandhi also emphasized the significance of collective acts, such the creation of an Ashram where people may be inspired to swear allegiance.

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an increase in Western hemisphere collaboration between governments and peoples as well as an increase in global apologies and acts of forgiveness. Due to this, conflict resolution scholars are now focusing more on ideas like reconciliation and forgiveness, which more accurately capture the spirit and practise of the new era. In particular, *wars* that have been marked by genocidal atrocities affecting communities, forgiveness and associated ideas like apology are essential to conflict settlement. Apologies and forgiveness are more crucial than ever for addressing past wrongs and resolving disputes as the globe increasingly resembles a global community. Early post-World War II peace models were more frequently based on bold plans that avoided reviving unpleasant memories of the past. Instead, they began in the here and now and then projected into the future. With equal connections to the past and the present, forgiveness places equal emphasis on the future. Since no action indicates regret, an apology, a request for forgiveness or the challenge of moral reform, forgiveness recognizes the distinction between doers and actions. It recognizes this division and functions in accordance with the fundamental ideas of conflict

resolution theory and Gandhian nonviolence. It is highlighted that forgiveness requires more bravery, which gives the victims more agency and creates a dynamic resembling that of nonviolent action. It also gives the offender a chance to get over their guilt. According to Hannah Arendt, the only reaction that doesn't just respond but acts fresh and unexpectedly, unaffected by the event that sparked it, is forgiveness.

Forgiveness as a Path to Healing: Mahatma Gandhi thought that forgiveness is a daring act of strength and compassion, not a show of weakness. In a world weighed down by the weight of past wrongs, forgiveness offers a way to healing and reconciliation. It frees people and communities from the cycle of violence and anger, making room for communication, understanding, and collaboration. We can overcome the walls that divide us by embracing forgiveness and cultivating a culture of empathy, solidarity, and communal growth.

Nonviolent Conflict Resolution: Gandhi's ideology of nonviolent resistance, which emphasized the power of forgiveness in the face of oppression and injustice, was one of his most important contributions. In today's world, when conflicts abound on all levels, from personal relationships to international crises, Gandhi's approach reminds us that forgiveness may be a powerful weapon for conflict resolution. We may deescalate tensions, develop bridges, and seek long-term solutions that address the core causes of conflict by replacing aggressiveness and vengeance with forgiveness and reconciliation.

Resolving Interpersonal and Intergroup disputes: In today's linked society, interpersonal and intergroup disputes are common. Gandhi's concept of forgiveness gives a practical foundation for peacefully resolving these problems. It emphasizes the value of discussion, empathy, and understanding in establishing common ground and pursuing mutually beneficial solutions. Individuals may transcend their own prejudices and grievances by practising forgiveness, which leads to constructive engagement, collaboration, and the formation of lasting connections. At the intergroup level,

forgiveness can help to reduce tensions, promote discussion, and develop a culture of peace.

Inner Peace and Personal progress: Gandhi's concept of forgiveness is about more than just interpersonal dynamics; it is also about personal progress and inner peace. Individuals can release themselves from the burdens of wrath, resentment, and bitterness by practising forgiveness. It frees the individual from negative emotions that stifle personal development, allowing them to live a more full and purposeful life. Forgiveness promotes emotional well-being, resilience, and a sense of connectivity with others, resulting in a more peaceful community.

Global Relevance and Application: Gandhi's forgiveness-based philosophy is applicable across national boundaries and cultural situations. The principles of forgiveness can offer a framework for collaboratively tackling these problems in a society that is struggling with complex global crises including conflict, climate change, and inequality. By accepting forgiveness, cultures and nations may put the past behind them, promote empathy and collaboration, and strive towards common objectives for the advancement of mankind.

OBJECTIVE

To study the significance and utility of Gandhi's ideals of forgiveness and its function in conflict transformation through review of literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were gathered using a descriptive approach. Secondary information from numerous websites and published sources has been used.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Gandhi and the Virtue of Forgiveness" by Alan Hunter and Andrew Rigby explores that forgiveness is another of Gandhi's guiding principles. The paper's introduction explores several Western traditions' understandings of forgiveness as a concept and a practice. It shows that forgiveness is a central theme in Christianity and that it is also a topic that is important to modern issues since,

since the 1990s, forgiveness has been discussed widely in secular studies, exhibits, websites, and other media. The article shows how Gandhi's understanding of the transformative power of forgiveness was shaped by and founded in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of South Asia, particularly Hinduism, and Jainism. Gandhi's two concerns—the "spiritualization of politics" and the "politicization of spirituality"—includes forgiveness as a key element.

"Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution" by John Moolakkattu offers forgiveness as the way to resolve conflicts. In a nutshell, forgiveness appears to stand for the unique, private, and spiritual. When the parties recognize that the dispute is a relational phenomena and the outcome of a bad interaction, forgiveness can play a role in conflict resolution. Both parties play a part in rebuilding the relationships and, in doing so, their identities, which leads in the restoration of both parties' humanity. Forgiveness is seen as a virtue in interpersonal relationships and has helped couples who are married or in other close relationships to resolve their differences. The discussion of forgiveness involves the concepts of forgiveness and forgetfulness. To be able to forgive, one must have memory and not forget, since those who forget are unable to do so because they are unable to recall. The catchphrase has changed to remember and forgive instead of forgive and forget. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) allowed both sides' victims an opportunity to speak up and share their experiences in the hopes that by doing so, the pain they had long experienced in silence might be lessened. When opposing parties to a disagreement hold comparable beliefs about the worth, significance, format, and substance of forgiveness, they are prepared to start the arduous path towards forgiveness that ends in reconciliation. It is important to consciously incorporate forgiveness into the process of resolving deeply ingrained disputes since it is frequently a sub process of conflict resolution and reconciliation. It contributes to the transformation of conflict-affected societies in transition. In circumstances where conventional conflict resolution theories, which are primarily based on rational choice assumptions,

are insufficient guides to reconciliation, forgiveness remains the sole option.

“Love and Forgiveness in Governance” by Cat Meurn highlights some real life examples of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy had its roots in Buddhism and Jainism, two religions that promote *ahimsa*, or the “absence of the desire to kill or harm.” *Ahimsa*, according to Gandhi, is the manifestation of the greatest love for all people, even one’s adversaries. Therefore, this kind of nonviolence involved not only not physically harming people but also not harbouring any animosity or malice against them. Gandhi oversaw three massive public uprisings that finally weakened the British Empire and paved the way for Indian independence. Gandhi kept preaching and practising *ahimsa* despite the violence that broke out inside each of them. He promoted widespread civil disobedience, called for a boycott of British products and institutions, and was arrested in 1921 as a result. He persisted in his nonviolent campaign for Indian independence despite spending time in jail, being harassed, and the intense strain he was under. Gandhi was killed in the spring of 1948, as is well known. Few people are aware that the same individual made many attempts starting in the middle of the 1930s. There were really six assassination attempts on his life that are known. The would-be assassin was apprehended by several volunteers after one attempt and brought before Gandhi. Few of us now would ever be able to utter what he stated back then: “Forgiveness must always be unconditional.” This is a perfect illustration of how to love and forgive one’s adversaries. He is credited with saying that the weak can never forgive. The strong possess the quality of forgiveness. We could all benefit a lot from his love and forgiveness-related insights and example.

Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution deals with how parties settle their differences, which frequently result from opposing goals. Such conflicts involve not only physical altercations but also lingering unpleasant

feelings. Positive results could come from resolving disputes rationally through techniques like facilitation, mediation, and negotiation. However, resolving conflicts by focusing on their root causes is frequently unable to repair the rift in interpersonal relationships that results. Failure to address this split might make future conflict more likely. Since both sides must play a part in rebuilding the relationships and, in doing so, their identities, forgiveness can play a role in conflict resolution when the parties acknowledge that the dispute is a relational occurrence and the outcome of failed interaction.

We now have several examples to show that forgiveness can play an important role in conflict resolution... when it is placed in the context of individual cultures. When the sides to the conflict share similar attitudes regarding the value, importance, shape, and contents of forgiveness, they are ready to begin the long and difficult journey towards forgiveness that culminates in reconciliation. According to Gopin, the groups’ prospects of achieving this goal decrease as the cultural and theological divide between them widens. Despite these limitations, it can be said that the timing of the act of forgiving or seeking an apology, the intention and will of the parties offering or seeking it, and the degree to which a personal touch has been incorporated into the entire process can all have favorable effects on conflict resolution and reconciliation. Both individuals and collectives are capable of asking for and receiving forgiveness.

Intentionally integrating forgiveness into the process of resolving deeply ingrained disputes is both possible and should be done. Forgiveness is frequently a sub process of conflict resolution and reconciliation. There is more than one step or deed involved. It might be the end of a series of earlier attempts at reconciliation or a step in an ongoing process. In protracted conflicts, the benefits of ending the cycle of hatred, violence, and hopelessness is particularly clear.

The astounding achievement Gandhi’s dedication to struggle for civil freedoms and human rights in

distant South Africa has great relevance when we learn that Gandhi's teachings were later accepted not just by Nelson Mandela, the South African freedom fighter, but also by the former South African president De Klerk, who was later shown to have been heavily inspired by Gandhi's ideas. In truth, Mahatma Gandhi inspired other world leaders, each in their own unique way, including the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela.

Gandhi: A Saint or Not? Gandhi reacted angrily to comments that he was "a saint trying to be a politician." He stated that he preferred to be "a politician making a saintly effort. Gandhi wasn't a holy man. He was an ordinary person, but an ordinary person in the modern world, following in the ways of Buddha and Jesus. I have nothing fresh to teach the world, he declared. Truth and nonviolence have existed for as long as the hills. After the great Buddha and Jesus, Gandhi is considered to have shown that nonviolence may still be a powerful tool for social transformation in the current era. Gandhi was able to convince a world sick of war and the ongoing devastation that following the path of truth and nonviolence is not for individuals.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi's notion of forgiveness is a timeless and priceless principle that has great significance and application in the present. It provides a path towards personal and community reconciliation, healing, and lasting peace. By accepting forgiveness, we may end cycles of conflict, division, and hatred and open the door to a society that is kinder, more accepting, and more peaceful. In conclusion, the centering of a politics of memory, regret, apology, forgiveness, and reparation has deeper implications for conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building. However, forgiveness and acts of contrition can provide an ideal setting in which negotiations can take place devoid of power considerations, bargaining, and the power of reason or compassion. Total disarmament is essential for promoting peace, but it will take some time for people who manufacture and sell weapons

to change their attitudes. Governments and politicians must be pressured to choose peaceful solutions by the public and organizations. Every person should have the education necessary to rise above social constraints, religious allegiances, and regional interests. Education is crucial for avoiding conflict. Through official and informal education, harmonious interpersonal interactions should be formed, and the existing educational system has to be changed to take these difficulties into account. Gandhi's Philosophy of Peace is an important foundation for conflict resolution since it is based on human nature, social reality, and economic and political institutions. A culture of forgiveness or the development of habits of heart should also constitute an essential element of a culture of peace and one of the goals of peace education.

A culture of forgiveness or the formation of heart-centered habits should also be a key component of a culture of peace and one of the aims of peace education and nonviolent training, I would like to emphasise as a conclusion. In that it aims to include forgiveness and apology as essential components of reconciliation, the current shift in emphasis from conflict resolution to conflict transformation is undoubtedly a good development. However, communities cannot be forced to adopt forgiveness and its related principles. Understanding conflict and creating effective models for addressing it must be anchored in, respect, and draw from a people's cultural knowledge, according to Lederach.

REFERENCES

- Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, v. 32, p.273.
Accessible at <http://www.gandhiserve.org/CWMG/>
- Gandhi and The Virtue of Forgiveness: Gandhi Marg, Volume 30 Number 4, January To March 2009 | PDF | Forgiveness | Mahatma Gandhi*. (n.d.). Scribd. <https://www.scribd.com/document/108842203/Gandhi-Forgive>
- Hunter, A. 2007. Forgiveness: Hindu and Western Perspectives. *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 20(1).
- Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution*. (n.d.). Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution. <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/forgiveness-and-conflict-resolution.php>
- Gandhi's role and relevance in Conflict Resolution | Gandhi's views on Peace, Nonviolence and Conflict Resolution*. (n.d.).

- Gandhi's Role and Relevance in Conflict Resolution | Gandhi's Views on Peace, Nonviolence and Conflict Resolution. <https://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/role%20in%20relevance.html>
- Love and Forgiveness in Governance: Exemplars: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.* (2017, January 25). Love and Forgiveness in Governance: Exemplars: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi | Beyond Intractability. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/lfg/exemplars/mgandhi>
- Sabina Cehajic, 2008. *Rupert Brown & Emanuele Castano*, "Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Political Psychology*, **29**(3): 363.
- Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999) [20]. J. P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 10.
- Mazumdar Sukhendu, 2015. *Politico-Economic Ideas of Mahatma Gandhi*, Concept Publishing Co.
- Singh A.K. 2011. *Gandhian thoughts of Economics*, Aadi Publications.
- Marc Gopin, 2001. 'Forgiveness as an Element of Conflict Resolution in Religious Cultures: Walking the Tightrope of Reconciliation and Justice', in Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.) *op. cit.*, 2001, pp. 87-99.
- Trudy Govier, 1999. 'Forgiveness and the Unforgivable', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, **36**(1): 59-75