

Mahatma Gandhi's Perspective on Pacifism

Umang Kanwat

Student, Gujarat National Law University

Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold. To begin, we try to understand what pacifism is and to examine Mahatma Gandhi's view on Pacifism. Secondly, to inspect the world's review on Mahatma Gandhi's theory of pacifism. In the second half of the paper, we also talk about the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its relation to pacifism.

Gandhi, a self-proclaimed pacifist, thought that military confrontation produces nothing of value. This viewpoint may be seen in his ideas from 1909 to 1914, as well as his remarks regarding Western democracies following World War I and in the early years of World War II.

Gandhi was perceived by American pacifists through the lens of their own culture, which was frequently twisted by Orientalist beliefs about him. There are two types of pacifist behaviour and aspirations: broad and specific. One is based on pacifism and a full rejection of war as a policy that a country should pursue. The other derives from individuals' and groups' ethical convictions that participating in any act of war, and maybe any act of violence, is immoral.

On the other hand, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine approached its fourth week, there were whispers of a possible agreement between the two sides on the parameters of a diplomatic settlement, starting with Kyiv's decision to withdraw from NATO membership.

Despite Moscow's persistent shelling of Ukrainian towns and maximalist demands that Kyiv recognise its rights to Crimea and the eastern territories and shrink its military, bilateral discussions between Russia and Ukraine continued.

As the war escalates, time is of the essence to restore peace before it is too late.

Keywords: pacifism, Mahatma Gandhi, Russian-Ukrainian, war, civilization

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I. Introduction

Pacifism

In simple words the fundamental aversion to war and violence as a means of resolving disagreements is known as pacifism. Pacifism can be defined as the view that conducting war by a state or participating in war by an individual is always wrong, regardless of the circumstances

The dedication to peace and opposition to war is known as pacifism. Our everyday language allows us to group a wide range of beliefs and commitments under the umbrella of pacifism. The word "pacifism" comes from the Latin word "paci-" (from pax) meaning "peace" and "-ficus" meaning "making." The phrase's modern meaning can be traced back to Émile Artaud's use of the French term pacifisme in 1901. However, the fundamental dedication to peace is an old concept. Pacifist sentiment can be found in early Christianity in the West, for example. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) contains perhaps the most famous use of the word pacifism, in which Jesus declares that "peacemakers" are blessed. The Greek word eirenopoios is translated into Latin as pacifici in this text, which denotes peacemakers. The Greek word eirenopoios derives from the words eirênê [peace] and poiesis [to make].

Philosophical debates on pacifism have refined the idea by distinguishing between a broad commitment to nonviolence and a more specific anti-war perspective. Holmes coined the term "nonviolent" to characterise a perspective that goes beyond anti-war pacifism in its rejection to violence in all of its forms. Pacifism is sometimes described dialectically in regard to the Western just war tradition's concept of justified violence. Pacifism is frequently placed on a continuum that encompasses realism, just war theory, and pacifism when considering the morality of war. Indeed, there is a raging dispute concerning the correct relationship between just war theory and pacifism, with the focus on whether just war theory should begin with a pacifist anti-war premise.

Some authors have developed a form of pacifism known as "contingent pacifism" or "just war pacifism" based on the just war theory (Sterba 1998). Authors like Cheyney Ryan and Robert Holmes are more adamant about the flaws in the just war paradigm. According to Holmes, the just war tradition frequently overlooks the essential moral question in war, which is the probable immorality of war's "massive, systematic, and deliberate killing of human beings" (Holmes 2017a: xvii). Although the just war tradition and pacifism grew through "mutual critique," pacifism has been stigmatised as a "outcast tradition," according to Ryan (Ryan 2017: 125).

Some have attempted to differentiate "pacific-ism" from "pacifism," claiming that pacific-ism is a commitment to peace and peacefulness that is not necessarily opposed to war, whereas pacifism is a more principled or absolute rejection of violence. However, this distinction is not frequently recognised (although Dower 2009 employed it). In 1910, William James used the phrase "pacific-ism" to define his opposition to militarism (James 1910). The shortened term "pacifism" has become increasingly often used in English to express a variety of anti-war viewpoints.

Pacifism is generally understood to be a principled rejection of violence and killing. Surprisingly, pacifist rhetoric has been employed to convey a realistic commitment to utilising conflict to bring about peace. As a result, a military phrase like "pacification" can be used to represent a violent process of suppressing violence, such as when an enemy region is "pacified" by killing or incapacitating the enemy. While George Orwell (2002) objected to such euphemistic depictions of violence, the just war tradition maintains that war can be a useful tool for achieving peace. Despite these complexities, pacifism generally refers to a commitment to peace that excludes the use of violent means to achieve it.

Pacifism, as it is often understood today, encompasses a range of convictions ranging from complete nonviolence in all actions to a more concentrated or limited kind of anti-war activism. Pacifism, in contrast to the just war tradition, rejects conflict as a viable means of achieving peace.

Many pacifists refuse to serve in the military. Some people refuse to support governmental and social structures that promote war by withholding taxes, for example. Pacifists have been linked to a peaceful retreat from politics and even outright anarchy. However, pacifists do not have to be "passive"; many devoted pacifists have participated in nonviolent social protest. Pacifism is a term that describes a personal commitment to nonviolence, which may include the pursuit of pacific virtues such as tolerance, patience, kindness, forgiveness, and love. It could also be expanded to include nonviolence toward all sentient beings, leading to vegetarianism and "reverence for life," as Albert Schweitzer (1967) put it. Gandhi's devotion to ahimsa, or nonviolence, can be linked to pacifism as part of a greater spiritual transformation mission. In addition, as the author of this post has argued, pacifism can be viewed as providing a comprehensive normative framework (Fiala 2018).

Pacifist Principles and Practices

Gandhi's thought is heavily influenced by religion, ethics, and philosophy. Along with famous writers like Leo Tolstoy. Because they both despised violence and emphasised the significance of being a pacifist, Gandhi considered himself as a pupil of his work. Other influences include:

- **Shrimad Rajchandra.** A poet and Jain philosopher, Rajchandra served as another counsellor for Gandhi. Their correspondence was a "refuge in moments of spiritual crisis". Rajchandra advised patience and the studying of Hinduism.
- **Religious texts.** During his stay in South Africa, Gandhi read translated texts of Christianity and Islam. This studying, and additional discussion with scholars, led him to respect all religions. What's more, he had concerns about the imperfections and frequent misinterpretations of them.

On Wars and Being a Pacifist

Surprisingly, Gandhi supported wars despite his pacifist attitude. In 1899, while serving on the British side in the South African War, he founded the Indian Ambulance Corps. His logic was that if he wanted to demand rights as a British citizen, he had to defend the British Empire.

In both WWI and WWII, Gandhi continued to show his support for war by rousing Indian troops. In his essays on the subject, he says:

"Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence."

The Bhagavad Gita taught Gandhi two things: to act with unselfishness and to be unattached to material gains. He didn't feel that achieving Indian independence through combat service was selfish, or that being detached meant ignoring or avoiding the benefits of action. Gandhi's moral was not to refuse to take something good from evil; it was to avoid asking for something.

He would later add that being a pacifist requires the power to punish in order to be successful and sincere in forgiveness. This is not the situation when a person decides not to do anything because they are powerless. Nonviolence has a long history in Indian religious thought, and it is considered the highest dharma (ethical value virtue). Gandhi, on the other hand, was the first to apply it to politics on a larger scale. This method appealed to those who did not want an uncontrolled and violent societal upheaval that could result in losses.

Forgive the Opponents as causes of war:

Gandhi mentioned Western imperialism and fascism. He also described communism as a threat to world peace. He qualifies his rejection of the three ideologies by his ability to forgive opponents and his trust in their salvation. He identified the basic reasons of enmity beneath these political drives as man's economic ambition and proclivity for violence. As answers for international harmony, economic fairness, sovereign equality, and peaceful partnership among states have been offered.

Rejection of Materialism Gandhi's solution for a peaceful world

Gandhi's views on economic complaints, colonialism, and his own non-materialist philosophy all contributed to his popularity. His commitment to the equality of all states as a precondition for peace was enhanced by his support for people's right to self-determination.

Gandhi as a Qualified Pacifist

Gandhi's qualified pacifism is consistent with his beliefs, in which dynamic nonviolence is his dialectical approach to seeking the ultimate truth without being an end in itself. When this viewpoint is understood, it is evident that Gandhi does not preach a love ethic separate from justice, as realists do.

Gandhi's pacifism may be observed in both his reactions to criticism of his military service and his broader remarks. They also emphasise the differences between him and those who feel that war is unrelated to justice. Gandhi thought that if India were free, he would vote for military training since he was a member of an unarmed, subjugated nation that needed the spirit of resistance. Taking the initiative, he argued that Western pacifists aid war capabilities by paying taxes for military purposes.

Gandhi claimed that while dealing with states to which he felt a sense of commitment, he opposed alien rule. In times of war, he made it clear to the global peace movement that intellectual neutrality is unacceptable. Gandhi exhorted pacifists to take the right side in a military fight.

When he applied his beliefs to specific events, he considered the Spanish Republicans fighting Franco, the Chinese fighting Japan, and the Poles fighting Germany as righteous, while he detested the use of brutal defence tactics. "If there ever could be a reasonable war in the name of and for mankind," Gandhi said, "a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of an entire race, would be absolutely acceptable." But I'm not a war supporter." Gandhi learned that in a struggle, one party is responsible for justice, and that war, despite its ineffectiveness, can create some good. Corroborate for the Japanese in their war with Russia in 1904-1905, disputes with Western pacifists, and a variety of remarks made during the 1930s when he championed the cause of fascist victims all support this position.

Gandhi on Conflict Resolution

Gandhi used a variety of methods for resolving disagreements. Gandhi believed that passive opposition needed to be accompanied by an active effort to understand and appreciate opponents. People might discover calm, creative solutions in a respectful environment. Gandhi urged his followers to utilise nonviolent activities to strike at the heart of their oppressors, in the hopes of receiving the sympathy and respect they deserved.

Gandhi based much of his peaceful beliefs on Hindu traditions, citing the Bhagavad Gita as a source. He found passages in this religious scripture that supported pacifist thoughts on avoiding violence. There is no justification to advocate pacifism based on relativism. However, contingent pacifism is a sort of pacifism that is not absolute. While absolute pacifism makes no exceptions to the rejection of war and violence, contingent pacifism is more commonly understood as a principled opposition to a specific war.

War: A Brutalising Method of Change

According to Gandhi, the British Raj is a battle between the Modern Civilisation, which is Satan's kingdom, and the Ancient Civilisation, which is God's kingdom. One is a God of War, while the other is a God of Love. He spoke out against war, seeing it as a humiliating and brutalising technique of transformation that is inferior to suffering. While doing so, he maintained that peace is always preferable to conflict. Gandhi used civil disobedience to fight British empire. Despite the fact that his struggle was peaceful, he limited the application of his pacifism to the defence of free India's military, presumably because he expected his country's independence at the time.

In the event of an invasion of India, will there be nonviolence? Gandhi advised non-pacifists to exhibit their principles if independent India was attacked, warning against excessive pacifist criticism of defending a free India with armaments. He argued that nonviolence was only a temporary ideal for protecting Indian sovereignty, and that it would be irrelevant in the event of an invasion.

Despite his pacifist inclinations, Gandhi's position altered when the First World War came out, and he once again supported Britain in war, seeing a potential good in armed triumph. Gandhi went on to say that he was and still is a pacifist in his core. However, man's existence necessitates some violence. A follower of ahimsa should always endeavour to put a stop to a conflict.

There is no wish to replace British rule with any other foreign rule. During World War II, Gandhi's pacifism was put to the test when he was asked whether he would endorse a national liberation war in which Japanese military

intervention would aid India's attainment of statehood. If India gained instant independence, Nehru pledged national Indian aid to the British war effort. Gandhi, on the other hand, would not allow his desire for Indian independence to lead him to condone violent intrusion from outside his nation, as this would have resulted in India being subjected to more severe control than it had been under the British Empire.

He wrote:

"I would not be guilty of inviting any power to invade India for the purpose of expelling the English. For one thing, it would be contrary to my creed of non-violence. I have too great respect for English bravery and arms to think that an invasion of India can be successful without a strong combination of different powers. In any case, I have no desire to substitute British rule with any other foreign rule. I want unadulterated home rule, however inferior in quality it may be".

Atomic Warfare

There is no connection to justice. The development of atomic weapons provided Gandhi with a new opportunity to assert that war has no bearing on justice. 'As far as I can tell, the atomic bomb has killed the noblest sensation that has nourished mankind for aeons,' he wrote. It used to be that there were so-called laws of war that made it bearable. There is no law in war but the law of might. The atomic bomb gave the allied arms an empty victory, but it did, for the time being, destroy Japan's soul. It is still too early to tell what has happened to the destroying nation's soul. Nature's forces work in strange ways.

Imperialism

Forceful Control of a Nation by a Foreign State To Gandhi, "imperialism" represented Western countries' control over non-Western lands and people on the other side of the globe. He used the term 'colonialism' as a substitute for 'imperialism,' and he rarely used the phrase 'imperialism,' to characterise a foreign state's coercive rule of a nation, whether east or west. His views on imperialism, largely of the British variety, progressed from conviction in its progressive nature to criticism of its intentions and rejection of its outcomes.

Arbitration

Methodology for Resolving Interstate Issues Gandhi chose 'arbitration,' which he defined as any informal endeavour by a third party to immediately, conciliate, or use good offices, as his preferred method of settling interstate disputes, out of the many possibilities of amicable settlement. He admired President Franklin D. Roosevelt's initiative in April 1939 to resolve conflicts between the West European democracies and Germany. There are conceptions of justice and order analogous to those of the natural law tradition, which contributes so much to support positive international law, within Gandhi's belief in the higher law of dharma, which applies to nations as well as men. Gandhi's Avenue for implementing the higher morality in the world is man's moral responsibility. He drew no distinction between interpersonal and interstate duty.

A Saint and A Politician

Gandhi was born into an orthodox Hindu family; thus, he was familiar with the religion's philosophical origins. In his own actions, he faithfully followed these ideas. As a mass leader, though, he had to temper his principles for the sake of his supporters. Although he was dubbed "a saint and a politician," his main political ethics were neither scriptural nor extraterrestrial. He acquired this primarily through his father Karamchand Uttamchand Gandhi's role as Diwan of Porbandar, Rajkot, and Wankaner, rather than from religion. Munshi Premchand, a well-known Indian writer, is strikingly similar to Mahatma Gandhi, particularly in terms of humanism.

In their lives, both Gandhi and Premchand shared great ideals. Their precepts of love for truth and simple living, returning to villages, cooperating instead of competing, communal harmony, sympathy for the Dalit, gender equality, bravery, morality, and nonviolent non-cooperation are all similar. Both are opposed to the notion "Art for the sake of art." Gandhi and Premchand attempted to do so from the perspective of the common man, thinking as he did, sharing his feelings, and being in tune with his hopes, fears, desires, and aspirations. Their identification, their oneness with the common man, was perfect in all of their ideas and emotions. Both Gandhi and Premchand were role models for India's populace. Perhaps this is the key of their immense appeal.

Henry David Thoreau's sermons on nonviolent resistance impacted Mahatma Gandhi greatly. The Gandhian way, based on Thoreau's worldview, was to resist things that were wrong, to resist immoral government action by simply refusing to cooperate. Gandhi utilised Thoreau's ideas in formulating his notion of Satyagraha (non-cooperation), or Truth Force.

Martin Luther King Jr. applied Gandhi's concept of civil disobedience to the civil rights struggle in the United States. Martin Luther King was inspired by Gandhi's nonviolence message. The Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and ideology inspired King. Mahatma Gandhi is commemorated in the United States via a variety of statues, busts, and memorials. Mahatma Gandhi, according to Martin Luther King, was the first person in the world to elevate Jesus' love ethic beyond individual interactions to a vast social force. While describing his interpretation of nonviolence, which aims to bring an adversary to friendship rather than degrade or vanquish

him. According to King, he devised a mechanism for social reform based on Gandhian ideals. King says when he visited India in 1959 that he might go other countries as a tourist but to India he goes as a pilgrim.

Political philosophy of Gandhi and Imperialism

Gandhi's political theory appears to be the only solution to the interwar period's imperialism and imperialist aggressiveness in both East and West. He honestly believes that the democratic and conciliatory methods of combat were better suited to the Soviet model. As a result, he promotes nonviolence as the only option to free oneself from imperialism's iron grip. The Gandhian path is one of cooperation, redressing the agonies of colonized nations and facilitating a dialogue to meet the imperialist powers' and countries seeking liberation's common demands. Rolland appears to have failed on every level to persuade him that armed resistance is the only way to change the situation.

Through his communication with Gandhi in the book, Rolland appears to be neither convinced of communism nor fully opposed to Gandhi's nonviolence. Finally, Rolland concludes that Gandhi's views and philosophy have been carefully considered and time proven, and that they will not be changed by anything since Gandhi demonstrates a strong belief in achieving economic equality through nonviolence.

Pacifism in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

As of February 24, 2022, the history of Eastern Europe, and maybe the rest of the globe, is altering in the same way that it did after the fall of communism in the late 1980s. The demise of communism ushered in a profound shift in geopolitics. It is too early to predict the consequences of Vladimir Putin's attempt to reverse that shift. Several Eastern European countries faced fragmentation after 1990. Yugoslavia was split into seven entities throughout the 1990s, resulting in a wave of war that included genocides. Two other countries were partitioned as well, although unlike Yugoslavia, they did it in a seemingly peaceful manner. Czechoslovakia was peacefully divided into the Czech and Slovak Republics.

For many years, Eastern policy has been a contentious and emotionally charged issue in Polish-German ties. The notion that the two countries are once again separated in their viewpoints is frequently voiced in public debates on this topic. However, according to the findings of a study conducted concurrently in Poland and Germany by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Poles and Germans have essentially similar opinions on problems related to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Despite their obvious contrasts, the two countries are more similar in their views on Russia than many Polish and German pundits believe. Poles and Germans both have a poor view of their respective countries' relations with Russia.

Furthermore, both publics are in favour of EU sanctions. Furthermore, they are eager to provide economic assistance to Ukraine but do not want to see relations with Russia deteriorate further. Russians consider their country's relations with Poland and Germany to be poor. Despite the fact that they have a very different viewpoint on the crisis than Poles and Germans, a large majority of Russians oppose any military intervention on the side of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The largest country in the world, the U.S.S.R., collapsed in a seemingly orderly manner, much to the relief of an apprehensive people and the rest of the globe. Many people were ecstatic that the breakup of these federal states had moved them closer to their dream of independence. Others lost out on the benefits of being part of a larger country.

The fall of communism was especially freeing for religious persons and communities because it signalled a shift away from persecution and repression and toward possibilities for renewal and restoration. Disintegration is not an instantaneous process, but one that can take several years. While the split of the Soviet Union occurred legally and peacefully at first, as part of consensual processes, unrest and disagreements eventually led to violence.

There were military clashes in Georgia, a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, ethnic confrontations in Moldavia, and major protests in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, among other places. Within the Russian Federation's boundaries, a violent years-long war raged in Chechnya and neighbouring regions. Russia annexed Crimea and backed a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces were allegedly involved in putting down the revolts or acting as peacekeepers or protectors. Former Soviet Bloc countries, including three former USSR federal units (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), understood from experience that Russia, both under Tsarism and under Bolshevism, had distinct colonial impulses that caused immense misery in the occupied countries.

Civil religion, defined as the beliefs, symbols, and rituals associated with civic life's public religious dimension, can, at its best, create a space for religion and transcendence in public life, allowing religious grounding of fundamental social commitments and encouraging the development of individual conscience, reverence, and the search for the transcendent, all of which enrich and strengthen the body politic.

At its worst, however, authoritarian regimes can abuse civil religion, making it severely repressive by co-opting convenient majority beliefs while discriminating against and removing followers of minority beliefs from public life. Times of war, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which heighten

manifestations of civil religion by increasing their need to invoke the transcendent, also raise the stakes for civil religion's impact on religious freedom by increasing opposition to minority religions, particularly pacifist religions, and challenges to state commitments to pluralism.

These risks to religious freedom posed by revived civic religion are most visible in Russia and the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine, but Ukraine is also at a crossroads in terms of how its greater emphasis on civil religion will influence its religious freedom obligations.

Both countries' politicians should not overlook engagement with their own masses in order for them to comprehend and accept the conflict's political stance. The subject of visa waivers for Ukrainians is one such example. This process is well underway, and easing visa restrictions would send a strong message to Ukrainians that the EU values their European aspirations and dedication. However, a sizable section of the Polish population, as well as an even larger number of Germans, must be persuaded on this topic.

This is a strong rejection of the Kremlin's aggressive attitude, even if only indirectly (officially, the Russian government denies that Russian armed forces are involved in the conflict in the Donbas region). This reality presents the assumption that Putin's policies are supported by the vast majority of Russians in a new light, and hence may offer optimism that Russia and the West are not on an inexorable collision course.

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