

Palestine–Israel conflict: the path to a Gandhian solution

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A lot of advocacy and analysis work has been done in the last 75 years regarding the nearly century-old Palestine-Israel conflict. Now its permanent solution is a need of the hour. This will be possible only when all stakeholders involved in this perhaps the most complex problem in modern world history make efforts towards solving it with seriousness, sincerity and mutual trust. If work is done in this direction with the true inspiration of a solution, taking lessons from the bloodiest chapter of the Palestine-Israel conflict that has been going on for the last two months, then a permanent solution can be expected in the near future. Needless to say, true inspiration can pave the way forward only by freeing itself from the captivity of hatred-borne or/and vested interest-borne stimuli.

However, it should be well known that it would not be easy to get rid of the stimuli flowing in the veins of modern civilization running on the combined driving force of the market and weapons. Modern civilization can also be read as an unbroken chain of human stimuli, where true inspirations are doomed to become victims of stimuli just as infants are killed in direct or retaliatory violence! Israel and its supporting countries/intellectuals and Palestine and its supporting countries/intellectuals are all more or less in the possession of the “evil spirit” in the form of stimuli. Even a large section of civil society, which is not directly associated with the ruling establishments, appears to be in a state of possession to stimuli. The situation of people motivated by the true inspiration for a peaceful resolution of the conflict is like that of the author of the Mahabharata – “I am shouting with both my hands raised, but no one listens to me!”

The Palestine-Israel conflict has grown up in the lap of modern civilization based on violence. Hence, it is not easy to find a non-violent/peaceful permanent solution to the conflict. However, if there are continuous efforts in that direction with true inspiration, a path can be made. In this effort, help can be taken from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a strong critic of modern civilization, who, while standing in the middle of this violent civilization, has said – “I have no enemy”. And who has given the world a non-violent mode of protest against injustice.

Some authors writing on the current phase of the Palestine–Israel conflict have quoted Gandhi citing mainly his three articles: "The Jews" ('Harijan', 26 November 1938), "The Jewish Question" ('Harijan', 27 May 1939), "Jews and Palestine" ('Harijan', 21 July 1946) in order to give a reference of Gandhi's understanding of the Palestine–Israel problem and his perception of Jews and Arabs. In this context, Jews like Hermann Kallenbach, Sonja Schlesin and HJH Pollock, who were close associates of Gandhi in the Satyagraha movement of South Africa, have also been mentioned.

Some scholars have done special studies on Gandhi's views and stand on the Palestine-Israel problem. Some have also considered the possibilities of resolving the Palestine–Israel conflict in the light of Gandhism. PR Kumaraswamy, a teacher of Modern Middle East at Jawaharlal University (JNU), has questioned Gandhi's views and stance on this subject. In his article on the current phase of Palestine-Israel conflict, "On Palestine and Israel, Gandhi's double speak on non-violence" ('The Indian Express', 24 October 2013), he has made a sharp attack on Gandhi's commitment to non-violence. It seems that this article has been written with an intention to forestall any possibility of the Gandhian resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Gandhi-experts have to clarify whether Gandhi preached non-violence only to the Jews while keeping silent on the violence of Arabs in Palestine-Israel issue? Further, has he slipped from the seat of "Mahatma" while dealing with the issue of the Muslim-Jewish dispute? Gandhi's views on the Palestine–Israel conflict may have been influenced by the immediate contexts of the "caliphate", the "fears of partition" of India on the basis of religious identity, and "colonialism". It should not be wrong, rather should be obvious. Because most thoughts happen to be relative. However, those who question Gandhi's understanding of the Palestine-Israel conflict should also question the actions and statements of Israel, Britain and America so far, which cannot be called anything other than barbaric.

Whatever be the case, Gandhi's immediate views on the Palestine-Israel conflict should not come in the way of the relevance and significance of Gandhi's non-violent mode of protest against injustice i.e. Satyagraha, civil disobedience, fasting. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, describing Gandhi's "nonviolent mode of action as the most revolutionary core of his teachings," writes: "The greatest revolution of our time is, therefore, a procedural revolution, removal of injustice through a mode of action characterized by justice. The question here is not so much the contents of justice as the mode to achieve it. Constitutional and orderly processes are often not enough. They are then transgressed by the use of weapons. In order that this should not happen and that man should not ever get thrown around between ballet and bullet, this procedural revolution of civil disobedience has emerged. At the head of all revolutions of our time stands this revolution of *satyagraha* against weapons although it has in actual effect made only a faltering appearance to date." ('Marx Gandhi and Socialism', page xxxi-ii)

Lohia has also captured the essence of Gandhi's doctrine of "change of heart" while understanding non-violent mode of action. In an episode from his life involving Gandhi he writes: "And there with hangs the whole story of change of heart, which is a phrase that has very often been abused not only by critics of Mahatma Gandhi but also by his admirers and followers. If some have looked upon it as an instrument to deny the revolution, others have actually used it so that it has checkmated the revolution. In both cases, admirers as well as critics have reduced the phrase "change of heart" to such mimic proportions that it bears no relationship whatsoever to Mahatma Gandhi's own conception of life.... Gandhiji spent just about a year of his life changing the hearts of Smuts, Irvin and Birla, while he devoted over forty years to putting courage into and thereby changing the hearts of tens of millions of people all over the world. ...What stands out in all this is Gandhiji's assumption that man can be good, even though he is almost certain to be bad in some situations." ('Marx Gandhi and Socialism', pages 156-57)

The Gandhian solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict should be seriously considered and worked on with these two doctrines of Gandhi's – the non-violent action of resistance to injustice and the acceptance of the possibility of human beings being good. Of course, the effort for a Gandhian solution should be parallel to other efforts made by concerned forums. Anyway, it is believed that after the fatigue of the Gaza war, the truce or agreement will be fragile and short-lived.

The Gandhian solution can – and should – begin with the Palestinian side. But according to available studies, whatever the reasons, more than half of Palestinians favor violence as a solution to the problem. (At present, the supporters of violence are in majority in Israel too.) In such a situation, it would be better if the world society takes this initiative prior to the Palestinian society. If there is seriousness and continuity in the initiative, it will have an impact on the joint Palestinian-Israeli society. It is true that the people of Palestine and Israel have deeply rooted beliefs about each other's religion and religious places. Gandhi's view that "Having reverently studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them." ("About Conversion", 'Harijan', 28 September 1935) can create tolerance/goodwill towards each other in the minds of both. The powerful countries that run the world order of the day and all the global organizations including the United Nations will also have to take a serious view of that non-violent movement.

But this should be all together a new initiative. This work cannot be done through institutions/groups/individuals dependent on the funding under the present system which creates the safety-valves in the form of NGOs. For example, some rights groups working in Middle Eastern countries complain that Western countries have stopped funding them after the October 7 Hamas attack. Gandhi's great grandson Arun Gandhi, who runs the US-based 'MK Gandhi Institute of Non-Violence', had come to Ramallah in August 2004 on the invitation of some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In a meeting there, he called upon the Palestinians to follow Gandhi's non-violent path for their rights and freedom. In the winter of 2010-11, a group of about 125 citizens from India also visited Gaza. Such NGO-oriented retail efforts remain mere performing "events". Citizen efforts should be funded by citizen contributions. Even if, as Gandhi said, one step is taken towards the goal.

In fact, under the pretext of a Gandhian solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, a new global peace and disarmament movement can be created by transformative and creative thinking citizens. This will restore the process of building a new man and society, which has been blocked by neoliberal declarations of "the end of ideologies and the end of history"; And has remained trapped in religious, racial, casteist etc. conflicts. It will also provide an opportunity for the new and upcoming

generations to have the progressive humanist ideas/concepts/doctrines/ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries interpreted/developed again in the new contexts.

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Noah Feldman, a professor of law at Harvard University, has written the article “Imagine a Palestinian Movement Led by Gandhi” (‘Bloomberg.com’, December 27, 2017). This article offers and anticipates a Gandhian solution to the Palestine–Israel conflict, addressing almost all the concerned parties. The author has put the first responsibility of running a non-violent resistance movement on the shoulders of Palestine. With the hope that if Palestine sticks to the non-violent path, the left, moderates, and eventually the right/Zionists in Israel will also come along on the non-violent path. And finally America and Arab nations also.

Needless to say, Gandhi's non-violent mode of protest against injustice is an integral part of his philosophy of life. However, it can be used sparingly in any conflict involving modern violent civilization. Many people/groups have done this earlier in many countries. But this is possible only when at least there is unreserved allegiance to the non-violent path. Trying the non-violent path while keeping the option of violence open may not yield the desired results. Given the complex reality of the Palestine-Israel conflict, Noah Feldman himself probably does not believe in the possibility of acceptance of the Gandhian path. Perhaps that is why he has adopted a fantasy style in the article. It is also written that despite trying everything, the Palestinians have still not been able to achieve a solution based on the 'two-nation' theory. In such a situation, there is no harm in trying the Gandhian path to achieve the goal. Whatever the case, this article, written six years ago, opens the doors of possibilities towards the resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

There is no need to limit the non-violent mode to Gandhi's experiences and experiments only. It should be accepted as a flowing idea. In view of today's global scenario, many new innovations can be added with the non-violent mode of action. With a non-violent solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, progress can be made towards resolving other conflicts going on in the world.

A non-violent solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict can only be the result of a long and persistent process. That process can be carried forward only by decisively accepting the authenticity of non-violence. Gandhi ensured women's large-scale participation in creative work and India's independence in a "backward" and colonized society. This was not just one of his mobilization tactics, but a step full of possibilities towards building a non-violent civilization. The global women society can have a bigger and more important role than in Gandhi's time for a non-violent solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Writers/artists are called architects of the human soul. In modern times, it has become a dogma (*roodhi*) to consider writers and their works as the antithesis of inhuman power establishment. This belief commonly prevails in both the socialist and capitalist camps. There is no opportunity here to consider the fundamental question on this subject: by creating their own parallel world in contrast to the pain and suffering of the real world, do the writers spare themselves and the readers from the role of grappling with the complex reality of the day? But it can be said that even in times of deep crisis in humanity, creative minds often remain silent/neutral. Very few writers/artists have raised a decisive and enduring voice against the inhuman power establishment. There is no dearth of distinguished writers/artists in the world, including Palestine and Israel. This important segment of humanity can be an effective voice for a non-violent solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Children have a big world. Both in numbers and in the imagination of every child. They are the most vulnerable and unsecured group in violent conflicts. Modern civilization is, on the one hand, notorious for giving children an "easy death" using chemical weapons and on the other hand, giving children a "horrific death" by making them human-bombs. The history of modern civilization is replete with the injuries, sufferings and deaths of children in civil wars, wars, and terrorist attacks. There are many arguments for killing children – they are human shields, they are children of evil, they are martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the motherland, they are destined for heaven! Even after the killing of more than 7 thousand children in Gaza, efforts are being made not to save the remaining children, but to justify their killings.

America, the seat of modern civilization, which has created the first “gun society” on the earth, says that if the war in Gaza is stopped then there will be more conflicts in the future. Does America want to say that the killings of children will teach a lesson to the children and adults who survived the war? Some people in Palestine and the Middle East say that Hamas is an idea, it cannot be destroyed. So is that idea being destroyed by destroying Palestinian children! But Qatar's Prime Minister has said that the children throughout the Middle East will be radicalized as a result of this war. This has been the level of discourse on the killings of children!

I have written earlier on the indiscriminate killings of children in Gaza. I don't want to pursue this discussion anymore which makes the heart heavy. The point to be made is that sensitive people should have a pause and think seriously about the world of children. The noble people who receive grants, posts and awards from governments and institutions in the name of children cannot do this. If children remain safe from violence, they can play the most meaningful and far-reaching role in building a non-violent civilization. How this would be possible has to be seen by the world society.

Finally, an important question - what conceptual or/and active role would the civil society of Gandhi's own country play in the process of Gandhian solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict? Hope all concerned citizens will give a thought to this pertinent question and will determine their role.

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