
UNIT 13 NOAKHALI

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

When the national movement was reaching a crescendo in 1946-47, there were tremendous expectations of the impending freedom all round. At the same time the idea of having a free Pakistan, which the Muslim League had been demanding and mobilising for, had also been agitating human emotions. Communalism, which had attacked a composite Indian nationalism, was coming to the centre stage and there were violent overtones of the communal mobilisation that could be seen from across the country. On 16 August 1946, Calcutta, the capital of the Bengal Presidency witnessed one of the worst communal riots, which consumed the life of many a people in a span of four days. Seven weeks later the easternmost districts of Bengal bordering Burma, Noakhali and Tippera, burst into violence. There were attacks on people of different communities and violence overtook the humanitarian outlook. It was in such a situation that Gandhi decided to come to Noakhali.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The context of dilemmas prior to the Partition
- Gandhi's peace mission in the riot-affected areas
- The moral and courageous stand of Gandhi in a critical phase.

13.2 WHY NOAKHALI? GANDHI'S MISSION

Gandhi, it seems, had already seen in the Calcutta riots of August 1946 the potential for greater, escalated violence probably on the scale of a civil war: 'We are not yet in the midst of a civil war', he said, 'but we are nearing it. At present we are playing at it.'

It was, however, the news of violence in Noakhali and Tippera that prompted him to come to Bengal. In the meantime violence erupted in Bihar in an unprecedented manner and a very large number of minority population was either killed or rendered homeless. 'Why and why only Noakhali whereas rioting had been taking place in Ahmedabad, Bombay or for that matter in the neighbouring Bihar', was the question repeatedly asked of him. 'Why do you want to go to Noakhali? You did not go to Bombay, Ahmedabad or Chapra, where things have happened that are infinitely worse than Noakhali. Would not your going there only add to the existing tension? Was it because in these places the sufferers were Hindus?' Gandhi's answer to this question was that 'he would certainly have gone to any of the places mentioned (not Bihar) by the friend if anything approaching what had happened at Noakhali had happened there and if he had felt that he could do nothing without being on the spot'. Thus, it seems, he attached greater significance to the happenings in Noakhali despite the fact that the number of people killed either in Calcutta or Bihar far outnumbered those killed in Noakhali.

The Noakhali riot was qualitatively different from the earlier communal riots including the Calcutta killings of August 1946, which immediately preceded it. It may be that Gandhi could sense that the difference lay in the transformation of a communal discourse, as a politics based on religion, to one in which violence was sanctified by religion. It was evident from the pattern of violence that a total rupture of an essentially peasant society had occurred and that communal ideology could entrench itself in that social milieu and could legitimise itself as a source of valid and just political action. It was not difficult for Gandhi, being an astute reader of the peasant psyche as he was, to understand the impact of such a rupture. Noakhali, therefore, became important not only because it demonstrated an intensity of violence, but also the power of an ideology, i.e., Communalism.

At the end of the elections of 1945-46, it was quite clear that the League had achieved some sort of a mandate of being the representative agency fighting for the partition of the country based on Two-nation theory and sought people's support. Neither the Muslim League nor its leader Jinnah had ever espoused a critique of colonialism, so that the movement for achieving Pakistan could be galvanised by critiquing the Colonial power. Instead it was the Congress, which the League argued, was the representative of the Hindu population that was attacked. By the forties, it was not only the Hindu Congress but also the general Hindu population that was depicted as opposing the creation of Pakistan.

Gandhi, it seems, was practical enough to see the writing on the wall. In September 1944 itself, he sensed the increased hold of Jinnah on the Muslim masses, and therefore, while writing to Jinnah he acknowledged the latter's hold over them. His meeting with Jinnah was basically an acceptance of this realisation. Aware of the significance of 'symbols', he wanted to attack the idea of 'two-nations' by attacking communalism. He was prepared to accept any kind of partition as long as it was not based on this theory. He forewarned Jinnah regarding the dangers of its operation.

The Noakhali riot presented for Gandhi the first field demonstration of the ruin that he had already envisaged in 1944. In Noakhali, it came in a form most intense and most frightening. And it is here that one finds a very serious effort at conflict resolution tried at a societal level. 'In any war', he said, 'brutalities were bound to take place; war is a brutal thing'. Once Gandhi accepted this, he started looking beyond the violence and the violations taking place there. He told his audience at Dattapara, 'Whether you believe it or not, I want to assure you that I am a servant of both the Hindus and the

Mussalmans. I have not come here to fight Pakistan. If India is destined to be partitioned, I cannot prevent it.' Instead he concentrated on 'discovering the political intentions working behind the move and the way of combating them successfully'.

While it was 'the cry of outraged womanhood' which brought him to Bengal, (*Harijan*, 10 Nov. 1946, p. 396. 'It was the cry of outraged womanhood that had peremptorily called him to Noakhali', *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p.65) he was equally aghast at the religious intolerance shown by the local populace. He took it upon himself to combat the operation of the 'two-nation theory', while also delegitimising the violence of its apparent religious sanctions.

This attitude of combating the war brought out a novel form of experience in its train significantly entitled Gandhi's Noakhali experiment. In this experiment, Gandhi's principles were at stake. 'My own doctrine', Gandhi said to N. C. Chatterjee, 'was failing. I don't want to die a failure'. But what was his doctrine that was failing? Throughout his sojourn he would mention about this failing doctrine but one does not come across any specific instance where he is explicit about his doctrine. It raises a very serious question. The Noakhali riot was no different from other communal riots as such. Then, why was it that only in the case of Noakhali, Gandhi would talk about the failing of his doctrine? It seems to us that it was phenomena like forced conversions and the way that religion was made to legitimise violence, which shook Gandhi's previous understanding of communalism.

13.3 BIHAR RIOTS AND CRITICAL DILEMMA

While he was fighting this uncertainty vis-à-vis the Noakhali situation, there erupted in the neighbouring province of Bihar ghastly communal riots. Many were slaughtered in the process of taking revenge of the rumoured massacre of people of their respective communities in Noakhali. In Bengal, however, this made Gandhi's mission in Noakhali very delicate. The number of casualties in the Bihar riots was much more than those in the latter. Though there were conflicting reports about the casualties, the Bihar Government had given the figure of 5,246, which is suggestive of the intensity of the violence that swept across the area. Therefore, the Muslim League Ministry in Bengal, which from the very beginning had been trying to minimise its own responsibility in the Noakhali riots, now found some justification for asking Gandhi to shift his attention to Bihar instead of Noakhali. The details of the Bihar riots were exaggerated and made the centre of projection. The Bihar riots were presented as another stage of the vicious campaign led by the Congress Ministers, which, according to the Muslim League, wanted to annihilate their culture and religion.

The League workers opposed Gandhi's visit to Noakhali for they felt that the world attention would get focused, projecting to be in connivance with rioters. It, therefore, exerted pressure through propaganda and personal insinuation against Gandhi. Even those holding responsible positions attacked Gandhi and asked him to leave Noakhali, and attend to the Bihar situation. Gandhi and the relief workers were put to tremendous pressure so that they would perforce leave the place. Members of the Feni sub division of the Muslim League sent Gandhi a post card, containing a copy of the resolution passed by that body, which read:

It is appreciated that Mr. Gandhi's presence in Bihar is much more useful than at Noakhali where the situation is normal. He is therefore requested to leave for Bihar.

Gandhi remained undeterred by these attacks. His reply to the Feni sub division was direct. He wrote that he was unable to follow their advice as it was based on ignorance of the facts. 'In the first place, I know that the situation is not normal here and that so far as I can contribute to the Bihar problem, I have to inform you that such influence as I have on Bihar can be and is being efficiently exercised from Srirampur.'

Gandhi was well aware of the magnitude of the Bihar riots and could see the logic of communalism and the relationship between the Noakhali and Bihar riots. He perceived that Noakhali was the disease, while Bihar was just an outgrowth or casualty of the former. Gandhi's reply to the statement of Hamiduddin Choudhury bears out this understanding. He wrote:

It will not serve the cause of peace if I went to Bihar and found the Bihar Muslims League's report to be largely imaginary and the Bihar Government's conduct substantially honourable, humane and just. I am not anxious to give them a certificate of good conduct as I am to give you, much though you may not want it. My spare diet and contemplated fast, you know well, were against the Bihar misdoings. I could not take such a step in the matter of Noakhali misdoings. It pains me to think that you, a seasoned lawyer should not see the obvious.

With the society showing heightened polarisation and intolerance and when there were attempts to portray Gandhi as a Hindu and the greatest enemy of the Muslims, this seems to be a sound judgment. He was aware of his ability to influence the Ministers and people of Bihar even from a distance. His presence in Noakhali, on the other hand, was a deterrent for any further retaliatory action anywhere else. At another level, he neither had a hold on the Ministers in Bengal, nor did he have any strong influence, as he had witnessed, on the local populace of Noakhali, many of whom had even condemned him as an arch enemy of their faith.

Gandhi, on his part, faced all these charges with the simple statement that he was as much a friend of the Muslims as he was of the Hindus. However, this was increasingly disbelieved by the villagers, and towards the end of his sojourn they not only boycotted his prayer meetings, but also dirtied the roads which he used everyday from village to village. He accepted this as the misdemeanours of those who had failed to understand him and his work. But he, Bose says, resolved not to 'surrender his own love for men even if they were erring'.

Though outwardly unfazed, the situation in Noakhali, the Bihar riots and its reaction, the strong and entrenched opposition from the Muslim League quarters in Bengal, and his own search for a way out, created some intense moments of self doubt, and consequently, Gandhi was not at peace with his inner-self. This forced him to put his 'will' to the test. He not only reduced his food intake and retained but two of his aides, he also experimented with his personal purity. Though it created a stir even among his close aides, this shows the desperation with which Gandhi was fighting the last battle of his life a battle against communal ideology.

13.4 GANDHI'S LONELY JOURNEY

Gandhi was in Noakhali from 6th November 1946 to the end of February 1947. Beginning his tour with the villages of Gopdirbag, he reached Srirampur on 20th November 1946, where he decided to spend the next one and half months. His visits to

these villages on the one hand stirred the entire area with new life, and on the other strengthened his own determination to contest communal politics, with Noakhali as his battleground. In combating communal ideology and the forces that represented it, he sought to heal the societal rupture that had sustained the communal breach. The battle was a difficult one, because the communalisation of the population was complete. This made him more determined to fight it with all his strength.

After a long sojourn in Srirampur, which had soon become the nerve centre of his mission in Noakhali, Gandhi embarked on his journey into the interior of Noakhali and Tippera from 2 January 1947. He repeatedly expressed his desire to be left alone on this journey, and in fact, desired that the military protection provided to him be with-drawn. He felt it prevented him from showing the people that his concern was genuine, and that they could approach him without any fear. He wrote to Suhrawardy on 8th January 1947,

All my attempts at bringing about real friendship between the two communities must fail so long as I go about fully protected by armed police or military.... The fright of the military keeps them from coming to me and asking all sorts of questions for the resolution of their doubts....

13.5 THE IDEA OF FEARLESSNESS AND COURAGE

Gandhi felt that the anger that is being openly expressed would clear avenues for dialogue, rather than continue with the present scenario of sullenness. He wanted both the communities to be brave but, as he wrote, 'Unfortunately both lack this very necessary human quality'.

In almost all the villages he visited and the congregational prayer meetings he addressed, he urged them to be fearless. He was aware of the fear that prevailed, and of the fact that the Hindus were really in danger, without adequate protection. The total social rupture that was demonstrated by the brutality of the communal attacks was soon compounded by instituting false cases against Hindu villages, at times with the active connivance of the local authorities. Even the army found it difficult to tackle the situation.

Therefore, talk of fearlessness in such an atmosphere of all-pervasive tyranny of fear was seen by many as unwise. Leaders of political parties demanded military protection for the Hindus of Noakhali. Contesting this line of argument, Gandhi refuted the claims that he was not practical in advocating military protection for the Hindus. 'I am an idealist', he said to the Hindu Mahasabha delegation, 'but I claim to be a practical idealist'. And as a 'practical idealist', he must have realised that any talk of army protection would make the Muslim villagers more belligerent against the Hindus, as well as hamper the return of a normal social existence in these villages. In the same vein, he contested the idea of the 'segregation of Hindu population in protected pockets'. For him, this 'would be interpreted as preparation of war' by the Muslim League. 'For myself', he declared, 'the path is different.' He wanted one worker in each village 'to steal the heart of the inhabitants'. It did not matter, he added, if there was only one or many Hindus in a village. His prescription was that they should stick to their posts and even face death if necessary with courage and willingness. If they live in clusters it would only mean accepting the 'Two Nation Theory'.

Here, the idea that the villagers, irrespective of their religious affiliations, should take responsibility for each other was a very fundamental one for Gandhi. It was this idea of responsibility that he attempted to use as an antidote against the atmosphere of violence,

created in order to legitimise their acts of *irresponsibility*. It is on this level that a face-to-face community could be validated against an abstraction, which was proving to be negative and anti emancipatory. Therefore, the path he chose was different. The talk of migration was in the air but in his opinion if it had to take place, 'it must be complete'.

'No police or military would protect those who are cowards' (Ibid.,). Gandhi emphasised the need for Hindus to be courageous and shun their inferiority complex. On 12 November at Dattapara he said that he 'had seen the terror-stricken faces of the sufferers. They had been forcibly converted once and they were afraid the same thing would be repeated. He wanted them to shed that fear.' In fact, he tried to attack the tyrannical hegemony of fear that the communal violence had created in the minds of the people. It was here that he reflected on his idea of an imminent civil war that communalism posed at this stage. Therefore, Gandhi in his talk with Nalini Mitra and Rasomoy Sur of Noakhali, at Srirampur, concluded that 'the present problem was not the question of Noakhali alone; it was a problem for the whole of Bengal and the whole of India' (Srirampur, 22 November, 1946, *ibid.*, p.145). This was why Gandhi was so perturbed about Noakhali. In fact, his determination to go back to Noakhali, even after the Partition, reflects his idea of attacking communal ideology and the 'two nation theory' from here. Thus, unlike his 'search for light', as far as his actions were concerned, he was determined that Noakhali was going to be his testing ground.

Noakhali in his mind was like Champaran or Bardoli the 'model site' for launching his movement. His speech at Nabagram reflected what was going on his mind. He said, 'Noakhali offered an almost ideal situation for testing whether ahimsa could effectively be used by a small number of people against an almost sullen if not hostile majority all round.' He was conscious that 'the problem here was also complicated by the fact of the existence of a popular Government controlling the destinies of the people'. About the contrasting psyche of the two communities in Noakhali, he stated that he had been 'moving amidst a sullen population on the one hand and a frightened one on the other'. Conciliation, he resolved, was to be achieved through one's openness and the other's fearlessness. Gandhi's presence and his attempts at meeting people in 'their home' were itself a symbolic attack on the prevailing atmosphere marked by fear.

Gandhi was very upset by the targeting of violence against women, who were the worst victims. The male population in most of the villages had to run for their lives and the women lived in great fear and danger. Gandhi asked them to be courageous without sounding patronising – he shared their grief. Manubehan Gandhi, his grand daughter, who was there with him, wrote:

As the husbands and sons of some of them had been murdered, they were plunged in grief. With sobs and tears they poured out their stricken hearts to Bapuji. 'The only difference between you and me,' he consoled them, 'is that you cry and I don't. But my heart sorrows for you. Your grief is my grief; that's why I have come here. There is no remedy for our pain except faith in God. Is the one, most efficacious panacea dead? If one imbibes this truth, there will be no cause for such outbursts of grief.'

Later, Gandhi in a sad tone told Manubehan, 'the meeting with those sisters is still vivid, who knows how many more tragic sights like this I am fated to see'.

Speaking at Jagatpur on 10th January 1947, he advised his audience 'about courage and the need of never surrendering one's honour even on pain of death' (Bose, *My Days*, p.126). Gandhi's presence, his prayer meetings, which encouraged women to come out

confidently in the open after a long time, and his constant evocation of courage, fearlessness, honour and death, had a significant impact. Women began to come out and share their tales of woe with him. In Bansa, they put before him their dilemma, 'what is a woman to do when attacked by miscreants – run away or resist with violence'. Gandhi shared their concern and advised them to come out of the trap of violence. He said,

My answer to this question is very simple. For me there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be for non violence if courage of the highest type is to be developed. Violence can only be tolerated as being preferable always to cowardice.... For a non violent person there is no emergency but quiet dignified preparation for death.

He asked them to be like Sita and Savitri who by their deeds refuted the fact that women were 'weak'. While speaking at Bhatialpur he noted, 'It was often said that women were naturally weak – they were *abalas*'. His advice to women was that they should not believe such things. They could be, he opined, as hard as men.

While advising Hindu women to become courageous and fearless, he at the same time asked them to help the neighbouring Muslim women shed their ignorance and illiteracy, as also in other aspects where they lagged behind the former. As Gandhi's journey progressed, a sense of confidence built up in the Noakhali villages. Women started coming out more often and they even displayed the courage that Gandhi was exhorting them to live with. Bose wrote that after one prayer meeting a girl came up to tell her story without the slightest fear, and on being asked whether she would be able to go back and stay once more in the midst of scenes she could never forget, the girl answered in the affirmative. Bose recorded that she answered in this manner because now she knew that she could save herself by dying. This forced Bose to think about the transformation Gandhi had caused. Though equivocal in his judgement, he could not negate the influence of Gandhi's speeches on that girl. -

When told that the Muslims were willing to receive the refugees back in their villages, provided they withdrew the criminal cases arising out of the disturbances, Gandhi provided the guilty with two alternatives either they could admit the crimes and justify their conduct on the ground that whatever they had done was for supporting in the creation of a separate nation or they should report and submit to penalty of law by way of expiation. But he negated any compromise such as dropping the cases. Hence, personal responsibility was to be accepted, as also the root of those acts, which had forced people to create such a situation.

He rejected the idea of the Hindu Mahasabha that the entire Hindu population should be segregated in pockets. Gandhi's counter argument contained his idea of responsibility. For him, the former was an unworkable proposition. He said to N. C. Chatterjee:

Put yourself in Mr. Suhrawardy's shoes; do you think he would favour it, or even the Muslim residents of Noakhali? For it would be interpreted as a preparation for war.

He could see that by putting forth that demand, they would practically be conceding the logic of Two-nation theory. He opined, and quite forcefully, that if migration had to take place, it must be systematic and complete, and it was not therefore to be thought of so long as there was any hope of co operation. And so long as there was any hope, efforts were to be made for a permanent solution to the communal problem. It is here that he could see the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League actions as complementary to each other. Gandhi, on the other hand, insisted that for a permanent solution responsibility

as well as proximity were absolutely necessary and was against running away in fear giving up their hearths and homes. He said that he ‘ wanted to see every Hindu family settle down in its own village and face the situation fearlessly and with courage’.

13.6 THE IDEA OF RESPONSIBILITY

While Gandhi asked them to seek protection through their inner strength, he also tried through the Peace Committees to create bridges between the communities, to come into physical proximity with one another, which again would bring moral responsibility into the social life of the population.

The enactment of this idea of the sense of responsibility lay in his idea of Peace Committees of the local population. Initially, the idea to have Peace Committees was mooted by the Bengal Muslim League Government while Gandhi was in Srirampur. The plan was to have equal number of Hindu and Muslim members in these Peace Committees, with a government official as Chairman. Gandhi was favourably disposed to the idea because it fulfilled his idea of *responsibility*. This is why he asked the Hindu members to give it a chance to succeed when the latter insisted on first bringing the miscreants to book. Gandhi advised them not to summarily reject the proposal by placing any conditions. Thus, the Hindus had to trust and honour the work of these Committees. The functions of the Peace Committees were defined as:

- a) Undertaking intensive propaganda work to restore confidence;
- b) Helping in constructing shelters for the returning refugees, and in processing and distributing relief, e.g., food, clothing etc.;
- c) Drawing up lists of disturbers of peace, who should be rounded up. These lists would be checked with the First Information Reports already lodged with the police, and arrests would be made on verification. If an innocent person was found to have been arrested, the Peace Committee would recommend to the Magistrate his release on bail, or unconditionally as the case might be;
- d) Preparing a list of houses destroyed or damaged during the disturbances.

Similarly Gandhi asked the people to trust representatives of the Government. When the Government's efforts proved wanting, Gandhi even went to the extent of advocating that ‘one brave man’ in a village could achieve the desired peace, if he was ready to lay down his life when the occasion arose rather than shun responsibility. He felt that a single man could change the entire complexion of societal thought by his acts. He was glad to meet the Maulvi at Muraim who ‘helped in sustaining his theory that one individual can transform the entire society’. There was no riot in Muraim where, according to Pyarelal, the Maulvi was like an oasis amidst the desert; he saw to it that there was no panic among Hindus and made himself responsible for their well-being.

13.7 MORAL AND ETHICAL CRITIQUE

The notion of responsibility therefore was a crucial link in Gandhi's idea of reconciliation. Gandhi's battle in Noakhali Tippera was an attack on communal ideology from a high moral and ethical plane. First, he emphasised the right of every individual to profess or follow any religion as long as it did not negatively affect the others' religious creeds. He was appalled to witness the religious intolerance shown during the riot and which continued during his visits.

He then appealed to the 'Muslim brethren' to assure him 'of that freedom which is true to the noblest tradition of Islam. There was no sense of appeasement, in his words and the prayer meetings testified to his fight for religious freedom. Here again, it will not be out of place to suggest that prayer for him broke all religious and communal boundaries and, in addition, it even gave voice to the protesting soul. The prayer meetings of Gandhi brought people out into the open for the first time after 10th October 1946, and thereby, broke the tyranny of fear. Gandhian defense came as an attack on that particular undercurrent of communal ideology, which legitimised religious intolerance'.

Further, by bringing up ethical-moral questions, Gandhi tried to delegitimise the forces of communal ideology, which, in fact, claimed religious sanction for their agenda of violence. In retrospect this seems quite significant, because clerics of religion, and religion itself, had become the main prop and legitimising factor in the Noakhali riot.

Gandhi's encounters during his visit made him realise that the acts of communal violence and attacks on religion during the riot had the strong sanction of the clerics and religious teachers. The large scale of conversions was a living testimony of that. He requested the Muslims to join the Peace Committees to restore the confidence among the Hindus that they would be able to pursue their religious practice in freedom.

He himself referred to Jinnah so that the local Muslim Leaguers did not commit misdeeds by using the latter's name. He said,

Qaid i Azam Jinnah has said that every Muslim must show by his conduct that not a single non Muslim need be afraid of him, the latter would be guaranteed safety and protection. For, thus alone can the Mussalmans command honour and respect.

Gandhi proclaimed that 'if people had known the true meaning of their scriptures, happenings like those of Noakhali could never have taken place'.

13.8 SUMMARY

By advocating fearlessness, invoking a sense of responsibility and discouraging at an ethical moral plane, Gandhi prioritised his ideological fight against the ideology that had created the circumstances in which violence of this kind took place. He understood, from the very beginning, that the hegemony of communal ideology was partially a reflection of the socio economic structure of that society. And this was quite significant because his own earlier understanding of communalism was not as focused as it was beginning to look like now. This makes his efforts at reconciliation a matter of not only historical importance but also of significant contemporary relevance. It is here that the question of communal violence becomes quite crucial. Quite often, historians and social scientists equate communal riots with communalism. They are however not the same thing- neither analytically nor in their nature. Violence in the form of the communal riot itself is not the cause of communalism; rather it is the product. Violence can certainly be a reflective index of the communalisation of society but there can be communalisation without any violence. Therefore, escalated violence and its aggressive insensitivity indicate the intensity and depth of ideological penetration that has taken place. A discourse on violence without taking cognisance of the ideological apparatus is to naively ignore the entire process that went into making that violence. Communalism, given its ideological apparatus, legitimises, sanctions and creates occasions for violence. And it is here that one needs to see that the reconciliation efforts should not merely attempt at stopping violence but try and critique the ideology that produces such violence.

13.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What was the mission envisaged by Gandhi in Noakhali?
2. Critically analyse Gandhi's ideas of fearlessness and courage in the Noakhali context.
3. How did Gandhi envisage the meaning of responsibility? What meaning does the ethical perspective hold?

SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 14 NORTH-EAST / KASHMIR

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14.3 The Case of Kashmir

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Suggested Readings

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Although Gandhian approach to peace and conflict resolution is widely considered as a normative approach and even criticised at times for being too normative to be followed in any concrete, real-life situation. Gandhi himself was of the firm opinion that whatever he wrote was intended to provide practical solutions to practical problems. However, it has to be kept in mind that his approach was by no means a mere problem-solving exercise; it was over and above an exercise in solving problems in accordance with certain moral principles. Gandhi would not mind continuing to suffer the conflicts than trying to solve them by flouting and violating these basic moral principles. Gandhi's approach, to say in simple terms, was essentially a moral approach to peace and conflict resolution.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The normative approach of Gandhi to peace
- The case of Kashmir and overtures to peace
- The case of North-East India and efforts towards peace.

14.2 THE GANDHIAN APPROACH

The Gandhian approach to peace, as we have already pointed out, is essentially a normative approach that seeks to solve problems by way of observing certain moral rules and principles. According to Thomas Weber, "... Gandhi clearly states that living within rules required for successful satyagraha is the type of life that is worth living".

1. Peace is desirable but certainly not at any 'price'. Even conflicts are preferable to peace that is achieved at the expense of rights. Peace - more than a mere cessation of hostilities - must be based on rights, justice and democracy.
2. Gandhi felt that truth and non-violence were more powerful than any instrument of violence including an atom bomb. He observed: "I am not afraid of atom bomb". No amount of violence can conquer our moral commitment to truth and non-violence. For Gandhi, registering moral protest itself is victory. He always asserted superiority of moral force to physical force.
3. The strength of moral power is capable of winning the hearts and minds of enemies. As Gandhi argued: "It is not enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business". Satyagraha, in this sense, means the discovery of truth and working steadily towards it, thus converting the opponent into a friend.
4. Violence breeds violence and triggers off chain reaction. Besides, we cannot distinguish between justified violence and unjustified violence. For both imply brutalisation of human nature. Gandhi had an abiding faith in human nature. As Gandhi argues, we must hate the sin and not the sinner. While violence is an alluring game that tempts us to apply it, it leads us nowhere. Resolution of conflicts presupposes changing the game altogether. He would believe that eventually good will win over evil.
5. Conflict resolution may require the mediators who help in reaching an agreement between the conflicting parties. But in order that they are accepted as mediators, it is essential that they wield the necessary moral authority and enjoy their trust.

14.3 THE CASE OF KASHMIR

During the colonial rule, Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state, and the British did not establish any direct rule over the state. The Dogra Rajput monarchs used to rule this multiethnic region on behalf of the British Raj. While the rulers were Hindus, a vast majority of the population in Kashmir is Muslims. 'Kashmiriyat' or a separate Kashmiri identity that developed over the centuries was essentially multiethnic and free from many of the orthodoxies. The Dogra rule was highly authoritarian and the discontent against the rulers was simmering particularly in the Muslim-dominated valley during the late-colonial times. The discontent turned into a popular movement for national identity against the 'alien' Dogra rule in 1946. National Conference, the party that led the movement under Sheikh Abdullah, raised the slogan: "Dogra rulers quit Kashmir". The 'Quit Kashmir' movement was in favour of and for attaining the right to self-determination. The Dogra rulers, aided by the British government, used all possible forces to suppress the movement and arrested Sheikh Abdullah.

At the time of Transfer of Power in August 1947, the Dogra ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, opted for maintaining the independent entity of Jammu and Kashmir, without joining either India or Pakistan. In September, the revolt of the Muslim population in Poonch posed a serious threat to the Dogra rule. On 24 October 1947, a large number of tribesmen from North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, emboldened by all accounts, intruded into the valley. The rebels of Poonch soon joined the intruders. The brutal raid of the tribesmen cost thousands of human lives, sparing neither Muslims, nor Sikhs nor Hindus. Maharaja Hari Singh desperately needed India's help to thwart the invaders and ultimately decided to accede to India for saving his kingdom. The Instrument of Accession was finally signed

between the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his Kashmiri counterpart Meher Chand Mahajan on 26 October, 1947. Maharaja Hari Singh conceded authority to the Indian Union only in matters related to defence, external affairs and communication. On 2 November 1947, Nehru declared in a radio broadcast, "As soon as law and order had been restored in Kashmir and its soil cleared of the invaders, the question of the state's accession should be settled by reference to the people". This was and continues to be construed as his pledge for plebiscite. On 1 January 1948, Nehru referred the issue to the Security Council of the UNO (United Nations Organisation). On the basis of Nehru's pledge, the Security Council decided that the future of Kashmir should be settled by a reference to the people of Kashmir. In 1952, India refused to hold any plebiscite in Kashmir on the ground that India 'would never have the conditions which were necessary for a plebiscite'. Moreover, it was argued that the consecutively held elections in Kashmir had more than ratified its incorporation into the Indian Republic. As a result the plebiscite in valley never took place.

A quick review of Kashmir's political history since Independence points to its essentially unstable nature. Sheikh Abdullah, as the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, took certain steps meant primarily for protecting the Kashmiri peasants from time-old oppression of predominantly Hindu landlords. On 9 August 1953, he was removed and arrested on the ground that he had joined hands with 'alien powers'. Abdullah spent almost 20 years in several spells in Indian jails. In the 1970s, Sheikh Abdullah finally compromised with New Delhi and renounced his demand for full self-determination. He reached an agreement with the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in February 1975. The agreement declared Kashmir as a 'constituent part' of India. The earlier steps for completing the process of Kashmir's incorporation into India were recognised as valid. Sheikh Abdullah remained the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir until his death in 1982. His son Farooq Abdullah took office as the new Chief Minister. In July 1984, the ministry- headed by Farooq - was dismissed by invoking Article 356 of the Constitution. Ghulam Mohammad Shah was installed as the new Chief Minister. In March 1986, Ghulam Mohammad Shah was again removed from power by the Central Government and Jammu and Kashmir came under 'Governor's rule'. In March 1987, Farooq Abdullah became the Chief Minister with the support of the Indian National Congress.

The Governing institutions never took their roots in the state so much so that *India Today* (30 April, 1990) remarked that the state about this time represented a "virtual abdication of governance". The new phase of agitation continued leaderless for a while. Finally a new leadership from the younger generation took charge of the situation. In 1987, five youths in jail, with a view to "liberate" Kashmir from the Indian rule formed an organisation called Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). By the time the new leadership took over, the state was under the grip of violence and there were many organisations that openly advocated the importance of violence in the movement for national self-determination. Some of them were raised and nurtured in Pakistan. The first signs of storm were felt in 1988. On 10 June, spontaneous demonstrations took place in different parts of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, to protest against a steep rise in power tariffs and erratic supply of electricity. What initially remained a movement against bad governance gradually assumed a violent character and threatened to challenge the Indian state.

Violence continued unabated in the state throughout the 1990s. The use of violence and counter-violence allows the same game to be played around and makes solution impossible. The years between 1990 and 1995 saw the use of the Terrorist and

Disruptive Activities Act, 1985 (TADA) in the valley. On 5 July 1990, two more acts were clamped down in Kashmir, which gave extraordinary power to the Armed forces and the Police. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) empowered the army and paramilitary forces “to arrest without warrant, any person, who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he had committed or was about to commit a cognizable offence and enter and search any premises to make any such arrest”. The Disturbed Area Act (DAA) conferred almost similar power upon the state police force.

The Kashmir case indicates that Gandhi is a forgotten man now. But he has clear message for us in spite of the fact that the case takes a toll on three of Gandhi’s cardinal principles of conflict resolution. The more they take a toll, the more we recognise their relevance: One, counter-violence cannot be an answer to violence. It only contributes to the spiraling of violence and makes solution difficult. Two, Gandhi’s firm belief that human beings are sovereign insofar as they listen to their inner voice is in jeopardy. Gandhi observed in 1947, “common sense dictates that the will of the Kashmiris should decide the future of Kashmir”. But unfortunately we seem to have reached a stage when people are caught in violence, rendered helpless and unable to respond to the call of their inner voice. It is essential that the conditions for a meaningful dialogue with the people that will help reduce their helplessness should be created. But there is no way to underestimate the courage of the people. We have stories of valiant people- particularly women- who have stood against the use of macabre violence, voiced against militarisation of society and negotiated the communal divide. Three, peace can return to the valley only by ensuring rights and not by curtailing and abrogating them. The militant organisations that issue fatwas and diktats (particularly relating to women’s dress code etc) and the extraordinary legislations that take away the constitutionally recognised rights cannot provide an enduring solution. The basis of these rights is enshrined in Article 370 of the Constitution of India that recognises the ‘special status’ of the state and provides for widespread legislative autonomy. Development is the need of the hour in this trouble-torn state.

14.4 THE NORTH-EAST EXPERIENCE

India’s North East is a highly heterogeneous region with as many as eight states including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and with hundreds of indigenous groups and communities living in them. The main sources of conflict are given as follows: First, this region has historically served as the gateway to the countries of South-East Asia and people migrated across the region from both the east and the west. Besides, it also forms part of the Ganga-Meghna-Brahmaputra (GMB) basin with a very long history of peasant migration. Again in 1947 when India became Independent and the subcontinent was partitioned, sharply deteriorating living conditions, climate changes and submergence of land under the sea, systematic persecution of the minorities in the countries adjoining the region have only aggravated the population influx. This is perceived to have strained the availability of land and employment for the locals and autochthones and posed a threat to their language and culture. The Assam Movement (1979-1985) that was directed against the ‘foreigners’ is illustrative of this fear. Secondly, the backwardness in the fields of economic and human development is believed to have been responsible for the proliferation of militancy in the region. Insurgency is regarded as the only booming ‘industry’ drawing the vast army of unemployed youth at a time when the overall industrial scenario is very grim. Thirdly, the Partition of 1947 by definition was

expected to bring the otherwise historically thriving cultural and economic continuities to an end with the effect that the region became landlocked sharing more than 98 percent of its land border with foreign countries. This has cut many an ethnic community into pieces and members of the same community are strewn across more than one nation-state and administrative unit. This has only reinforced their desire for consolidation.

14.4.1 The Naga Case

The Nagas consisting of a number of subgroups living in different parts of the region as well as Myanmar have been the first to challenge the Indian State and declare their 'Independence'. The British policy towards the hill tribes in general and the Nagas in particular was inspired by the imperative of exercising 'minimum interference' in the pattern of life of the Naga tribes and keeping the outsiders from entering the tribal areas.

On the eve of Independence, Angami Zapu Phizo, who headed the Naga insurgency through the Naga National Council (NNC), sent a memorandum to the British Government for establishing an interim government for a period of 10 years, at the end of which the Naga people could be left to form government of their choice. When the Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Tribes of the Constituent Assembly visited the Naga Hills in May 1947, the NNC maintained that the Nagas retained the right of deciding their future at the end of this ten-year period. In 1956 and with the completion of ten-year period, NNC informed the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN). The NNC rejected the provisions of the Sixth Schedule and held a plebiscite on the question of Naga independence. Around 99.9 percent of the Nagas, according to NNC sources, cast their vote in favour of 'independence outside India'.

Thus began an era of conflict and hostility. As hostility intensified, there were attempts at making peace. In the early part of 1957, a meeting consisting of church leaders from Kohima and Impur (of Naga Hills, then a part of undivided Assam) sent out an appeal for peace. Its main objective was to oppose violence and win over the rebels. A breakaway group of NNC- a section of moderates, wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru- the then prime minister of India - to settle the problem within the framework of the Indian Constitution. A Sixteen-Point Agreement, popularly known as Delhi Agreement, was reached in July 1960. The Agreement paved the way to the formation of a separate state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. Like Article 370, the Agreement also provides that no Act and Law passed by Indian Parliament relating to (1) the religious and social practices, (2) Naga customary laws and procedures, (3) civil and criminal justice concerning decisions according to Naga customary law and (4) ownership and transfer of land and its resources would have any legal force in Nagaland unless specifically applied by a majority vote in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. On 1 August 1960, Nehru announced the proposed formation of Nagaland as a separate state comprising the existing district of Naga Hills and the Tuensang Area although Phizo denounced the pact from London on 30 July 1960. Nagaland however became a state in 1963.

14.4.2 The Role of Peace Mission

The role of Peace Mission deserves a special mention insofar as it involved direct intervention by at least two very well-known Gandhians in the resolution of conflicts. With a spurt in the hostilities between the security forces and the underground forces immediately after the formation of the separate state of Nagaland, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) held a convention in Wokha from 31 January to 2 February 1964. This convention unanimously resolved to request the Government of India and the

underground Federal Government of Nagaland to negotiate with a Peace Mission that it formed with members comprising B. P. Chaliha (then Chief Minister of Assam), Jaya Prakash Narayan (the noted Sarvodaya leader) and Rev. Michael Scott (a British missionary). A ceasefire (technically 'suspension of operations' by both sides) was arrived between the Naga underground leaders and the Government of India on August 15, 1964.

After at least five rounds and four years of deliberation, the Mission finally came out with a proposal and urged both the warring parties to make flexible their otherwise 'rigid' understandings of 'sovereignty and independence' and called for the 'Union of Nagaland with India with certain distinct characteristics that are absent in the case of other states'. The proposal was intended to reach a middle point. The Naga Federal Government refused to accept the 'Constitutional Status' of the state of Nagaland within the Indian Union while its assertion of the right to self-determination and the demand for a sovereign Nagaland State was not acceptable to the Government of India. To overcome these conflicting positions, the Peace Mission came with the proposal that "the NFG (Nagaland Federal Government) could on their own volition decide to be a participant in the Union of India and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose. On the other hand, the Government of India could consider to what extent the pattern and structure of the relationship between Nagaland and the Government of India should be adapted and recast so as to satisfy the political aspirations of all sections of Naga opinion." The resolution of conflicts, according to the Gandhian approach, can take place only when the conflicting parties meet themselves halfway on their own volition.

The proposal found no acceptance among the parties. The Government of India welcomed the first part of the proposal in which it urged the NFG to participate 'on their own volition' but understood the second part in terms of providing greater autonomy to Nagaland. The NFG wanted to keep it open and asked for holding plebiscite supervised by a neutral body and the Naga people, through the plebiscite, would decide on the future according to 'their own volition'. Thus no agreement could be reached between them. While the Peace Mission was flooded with complaints of violation of ceasefire from both sides, Jaya Prakash Narayan pleaded their helplessness. As he pointed out: "The Peace Mission has no machinery to enable us to go into these complaints; we work merely as a Post Office, however sufficient grounds to conclude that one of the terms of the agreement, namely the personnel of the Naga Army will not move about in villages in uniform and/or with arms, this to a considerable extent is not being implemented". It seems that their moral authority could not prevail over the military power of the armed groups.

The Peace Mission was however keen more on the continuation of talks for it felt that it was easier to break them off than to resume them all over again. Y. V. Gundevia, the then Foreign Secretary of India directly involved as the chief delegate in many of these negotiations, for example in a letter dated 21 January, 1965 to B. P. Chaliha pointed out:

... we welcome the conclusion which the Peace Mission has arrived ... that a peaceful solution of the Naga problem can only be found within the Indian Union, by Nagaland continuing to remain within the Indian union.

Jaya Prakash Narayan reacted to this:

The GOI (Government of India) attaches an utterly wrong meaning to the proposals in that, while the PM (Peace Mission), conceding the Nagas' right to self-determination, had

invited them *on their own volition* to become participants in the Indian Union, the Indian chief delegate's letter said that the PM had come to a conclusion that the final solution of the problem of Nagaland can only be found within the Indian Union by Nagaland *continuing to remain within the Indian union*. The phrase 'continuing to remain within the Indian union' destroyed completely the principle of voluntary participation which was the heart of the PM proposals (*italics ours*).

While Narayan thought that this openness might have given the talks a new lease of life, it would take a little for the Government of India to 'fail' them. As he argued:

If the Nagas decide to participate in the Union, the effect would be not the beginning of balkanisation, but further consolidation and strengthening of the Union. If, on the other hand, they refuse to be participants, there would be no commitment on India's part to accept separation of Nagaland, which the GOI would be free to resist in the manner it chose.

Indeed, the problem also lay squarely with the rebels who found one of his statements unacceptable. Jaya Prakash Narayan was the first to resign from the Peace Mission. It was observed that:

The Nagaland Peace Mission was fortunate to have a person like him. Very unfortunately, he was the first person who resigned and left the Mission, when the underground protested against one of his alleged pronouncements: 'if the government of India desires, she can liquidate the Naga rebels'. Because of this ... he immediately withdrew his membership from the Peace Mission just after the first meeting with the Indian Prime Minister on the ground that the federal leaders had no confidence in him. It was in February 1966.

Did Jaya Prakash Narayan's resignation from the Peace Mission help in resolving the conflict? In fact as we will see, the conflict turned worse as the Peace Mission collapsed. Even Narayan knew this. But the basic issue here was the perceived loss of confidence and trust and Narayan seemed to realise that it was immoral on his part to remain in the Mission when he had lost confidence and trust from those for whom the Mission was set up. For a devout Gandhian, nothing is more serious than the loss of trust and credibility. He made a clear moral choice: for him it was better to continue with the conflict than to impose a solution on the unwilling parties.

14.4.3 From Conflict to Ceasefire

The NFG leaders rejected any offer short of 'complete Independence and Sovereign Nagaland'. It was at this point that Naga underground was seriously afflicted by factionalism within its ranks. The Indo-Pak war of 1971 that led to the liberation of Bangladesh dealt a blow to the Naga insurgent movement: "Foreign support to the Naga rebellion from China and Pakistan also dropped substantially after the creation of Bangladesh, and the defeat of the Pakistan army in 1971". The Indian army launched massive counteroffensive against the Naga underground in 1973 and this was also the time when many cadres of Naga Federal Army who went to China for arms training, returned with sophisticated arms.

The Church intervened for the second time, as there was a spurt in violence. They appointed a Liaison Committee to bring all sections of the Naga underground leaders and the Government of India. After months of negotiation, the Peace talks were held on 10-11 November 1975 culminating in what became known as Shillong Accord (1975). The

Accord was signed by them – not as FGN representatives but ‘on behalf of the underground organisations’. In spite of being excruciatingly brief, Article 3 clause (iii) held out the promise of arriving at what it had described as the ‘final settlement’ in the following terms. The rather dismissive phrase of ‘other issues’ never came for discussion in the first place – let alone reaching a solution. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim) emerged as a political force from the ashes of the aborted Shillong Accord. Describing the Accord as a ‘surrender pact’, it also referred to the NNC in its manifesto of 1980 as a spent force. It wanted a ‘Greater Nagalim’. Accordingly, the ‘Government of the People’s Republic of Nagaland’ (GPRN) was formed. It wanted to create this proposed state by integrating Naga-inhabited areas in Myanmar with those in India.

The ceasefire and Naga peace talks officially announced, during the United Front government led by I. K. Gujral in August 1997, for a peace dialogue on the more than five-decades-old protracted Naga issue. The ongoing peace talks between the New Delhi and NSCN are conditioned by the following terms: (i) talks between the two groups be held without either side stipulating any precondition, (ii) that the talks be held at the highest (prime ministerial) level, and (iii) at a venue anywhere outside India. So far the talks have not yielded any concrete political understanding and documentation.

14.4.4 Insurgency in Assam

As one refers to the insurgency in Assam, one cannot but refer to one of the largest insurgent organisations that have been leading it. Although the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was born on 7 April 1979, it was not until 1983 that ULFA surfaced in the public arena and people could become aware of its political presence in Assam. It started as a more militant stream of the anti-foreigners’ movement (1979-1985) mentioned above and gradually broke away from the moderate forces that were associated with it. But ULFA shot into prominence by organising bank heists, undertaking rural development works and meting out summary justice in remote areas where state’s presence is thin and even by carrying out retributive killings. The organisation was declared illegal only as late as on November 27, 1990. The year 1990 marks the watershed as the army moved in and the first ever army operations were launched with the objective of ‘liquidating’ ULFA. While ‘Operation Bajrang’ ended up in an anticlimax, another operation codenamed ‘Operation Rhino’ began in September 1991 with the objective of ‘flushing out’ the ‘terrorists’ and isolating them from the people of Assam. Although one faction of ULFA was engaged in talks with the Government of India and reportedly came close to arriving at a negotiated settlement, another faction surrendered to it and became subsequently known as SULFA or Surrendered ULFA. Unlike ‘Operation Bajrang’, the objective of the second operation was quite different. ‘Operation Rhino II’, which is operational now, aims at ‘bringing the boys to the negotiating table’. A military operation in effect is launched for holding talks with the armed militants.

Although offers of talks have been extended to this organisation, talks - whether directly or through backchannels - could not take place. On November 16, 2004 Indira Goswami – an eminent litterateur from Assam - met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and handed over a memorandum drafted in consultation with the academics. The memorandum urged on the Government to initiate talks with ULFA. On November 18, Arabinda Rajkhowa – the Chairman of ULFA, confirmed that ULFA would enter into a dialogue if the organisation were invited on the Government of India’s letterhead with a signature and office seal, and with ‘sovereignty’ on the agenda. Both Goswami and the Government of

India consulted legal experts for an interpretation of ‘sovereignty’ and its place in the Indian Constitution. As *The Telegraph* reported it: “Legal opinion seems to be that there could be various kinds of sovereignty, some of which are not against the Constitution. Economic sovereignty is a possibility, for instance.”¹ On 19 November 2004, in one of her meetings with the Prime Minister, she was successful in attracting the attention of the Government to the serious problem of insurgency in Assam. She appealed to him to initiate a process of dialogue on the outfit’s demand for “sovereignty” for Assam, but the Prime Minister put to rest any such speculation and said in Guwahati on 22 November 2004 that “if they shun violence, then I will invite them for talks but violence and talks cannot go on simultaneously.” Both Baruah and Mamoni Goswami however maintained that the latter was talking with the Prime Minister in her own capacity and initiative but Baruah lauds her effort in bringing the issue of ‘sovereignty’ into the agenda. She maintained that “sovereignty” of Assam was an issue, which had to be discussed, even though it should not be seen as a ‘precondition’. On a number of occasions, she said that there was no harm in talking about ‘sovereignty’ of Assam.

It is in such a context that an 11-member People’s Consultative Group (PCG) consisting mainly of civil society activists was set up by ULFA to conduct negotiations with the Government. This is the first time that ULFA induced the civil society persons into the peace process. It too seemed to realise the necessity of involving the larger civil society in the peace process so that the issue gets widely discussed. The Prime Minister met them in late November 2005 and the members of PCG expressed satisfaction over their first meeting with the Prime Minister. Yet there were many hiccups in the way: First, even though talks were going on, there was no letup in the military operations. While according to one estimate at least 13 rounds of talks were held between the Government of India and PCG, no less than 36 ULFA cadres were killed by bullets of the security forces. Moreover, while ULFA stuck to its demand for release of five of its top leaders who were arrested in course of the Bhutan operations in 2003 on the ground that they might take part in peace dialogues, Tarun Gogoi- Assam’s Chief Minister - wanted a written response from the organisation assuring the Government of its commitment to talks. It may not be irrelevant to note in this connection that ULFA too insisted on written assurance from the Government on the question. The formalistic stand on both parts is reflective of the persisting mutual distrust and caught both of them in a stalemate. As a result, PCG disengaged from talks and a fresh round of army operation (Operation Rhino II) was launched against it. Recently, some of the top cadre of the ULFA was arrested; the organisation now stands cornered for want of strategy and support. As on date, the region is witnessing a spell of peace and its duration depends on further developments.

14.5 A COMPARISON BETWEEN KASHMIR AND THE NORTH-EAST

Both Kashmir and the North-East represent two regions which have historically developed highly tolerant and syncretic cultures. Both fall within world’s two important arterial routes connecting Central Asia and South-East Asia respectively and thereby constantly sending and receiving people across regions. The ever-spiraling violence and militancy have created an atmosphere of mutual distrust and hostility. Violence, as Gandhi would have us believe, exists first of all in people’s minds and then finds its material expression.

Yet both represent two rather different situations: On the one hand, while the state has been in dialogue mode with one militant organisation or the other in the North-East, the

talks have been extremely difficult insofar as Kashmir is concerned. The proliferation of militant groups with diverse agenda makes it impossible for the state to conduct peace dialogues and to reconcile the mutual differences. Besides, the direct involvement of foreign country makes it imperative that the dialogues also include it. But dialogues with them, to say the least, have not been sustainable for reasons not unknown to us.

How do we break the vicious circle? It is true that interventions made by such eminent Gandhians like Jaya Prakash Narayan did not of course bear fruit. He withdrew from Peace Mission on the grounds of losing trust of the conflicting parties. Although not explicitly stated, Indira Goswami's unwavering commitment to non-violence brought her to the centre of peace politics. She too dropped out on the same ground of perceived loss of confidence. In other words, individual interventions were called off on moral grounds. But these cases, in no way, undermine the importance of Gandhian approach. For one thing, appropriate social conditions need to be created to break the vicious circle. Truthfulness and local autonomy as suggested by Gandhi and enunciated by the Indian Constitution can still serve as the essential first step to conflict resolution in both cases. The foundations of local autonomy are already laid down in Articles 370 and 371 of the Constitution of India. For another and as a corollary to the above, individual interventions need to be backed up by broader social movements for peace. If individual interventions fail, a vibrant social movement cannot. Gandhi's success lay not in making individual interventions but in taking people along in each of them.

14.6 SUMMARY

Although the Gandhian approach was never truly tested in either case, whatever little was done particularly in the form of Peace Mission in respect of the Naga conflict was saddled with its own contradictions: On one hand, not all in the Peace Mission were inspired and guided by the same Gandhian principles. There were very different kinds of interests playing within it and its internal schisms were too significant to be brushed aside. For another, although initially encouraged by both Naga civil society groups and the Government of India, the members of the Mission gradually discovered that they had lost trust from both sides. Modern statecraft is far too complex than what Gandhi would have thought. That Gandhian approach does not seem to produce quick and instant results does not mean that it has exhausted all its potential. Gandhi after all would have preferred to suffer the problems than to resolve them in ways that violate the normative principles that he held so dearly throughout his life. Sufferance of conflicts per se is not a failure but as Gandhi would have us believe, is a step towards the resolution of conflicts. For it is likely to melt the heart of the enemy. Even that crucial one step was 'enough' for him.

14.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Draw out, in line with the Gandhian approach, an outline for the possible resolution of the Kashmir issue. What do you think are the constraints to such resolution?
2. Discuss, in the light of the Gandhian approach, the role of Peace Mission in the Naga conflict. Do you consider it as only an unsuccessful experiment?
3. Make a comparative assessment of the conflicts in Kashmir and in the Northeast and point out where the Gandhian approach is likely to be more successful in the near future and why.

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UNIT 15 SRI LANKA/ PALESTINE

Structure

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

"I believe it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul and to lay the foundation for an empire's fall or its regeneration."

"The golden rule is to dare to do the right at any cost."

M.K. Gandhi

The end of Cold War has seen the global resurgence of '*Himsa*' in the form of poverty and inequality within and between nations, intolerance through racial, religious and ethnic outburst, environmental degradation, proliferation in Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), inhuman treatment meted to women and children, with an ever mushrooming growth of terrorist groups aimed at annihilating the human race. Amid such troubled times, most decision-makers have preferred '*violence*' over '*non-violence*,' the use of '*might*' to bring down resistance movements, the unwanted division of the globe between "us" vs. "them," "axis-of evil" vs. "axis-of good," and 'clash within civilizations'.

In such troubled times Gandhian techniques of '*Satyagraha*' and '*Ahimsa*' have often been looked down upon as meekly sublime and weak to solve the injustices unleashed on mankind. However, on most occasions Gandhi and his philosophy has been misread and misunderstood. For both his philosophy- that of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) and '*Satyagraha*' was placed not as an abstract principle, but as a practical solution to the largest and smallest problems of contemporary life in particular or political situations. It was, in fact, a constant endeavour at self-purification of the inner-self through the search for truth, love and compassion from 'within.' "To attain perfect purity," Gandhi said, "one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action, to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. So long as a man does

not of his own free-will put himself last among his fellow creatures there is no salvation for him. For 'Ahimsa' is the farthest limit of humility. It stands for moral opposition to immorality. It believes in the essential goodness of human nature and aims to overcome evil by good, 'Himsa' by 'Ahimsa' and enlightenment through inner purity of the soul" (M.K Gandhi, 1927). From Rev Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, those fighting for the just rights have enormously relied on non-violence as primary means.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- The relevance of Gandhian techniques worldwide.
- Gandhi's philosophy as applicable to conflict situations today.
- The progressive nature of nonviolence that can be conceived through various stages.

15.2 GANDHIAN TECHNIQUES AS APPLICABLE TO CONFLICT SITUATION

15.2.1 Sri Lanka

In judging Gandhian techniques as applicable to the conflict situation in Sri Lanka underpinned by the ethnic strife between the majority Sinhala Buddhists and the minority Tamils of Indian origin (according to a 1981 census the Sinhalese constituted 74 percent of the population; Sri Lankan Tamils 12.7 percent; Indian Tamils 7 percent concentrated in the Northeast of the country, Moors 7 percent and others 0.6 percent), a few points have to be kept in mind:

One, the systematic exclusion of the Tamil speaking minorities practised by the Sri Lankan government over a decade- following a dual-faced approach of preaching peaceful settlement of dispute (through negotiation and agreement) between the two communities, while allowing the military to operate in a ham-fisted fashion to crack down on the Tamil minorities;

Two, the extra-regional support meted out by the Lankan government through the involvement of United States, Pakistan (for arms supply) and India to address the ethnic problem. Throughout, the Indian government has pursued a two-pronged strategy of persuasion and coercion against the Sri Lankan government and the Sri Lankan Tamils on different occasions. The objective behind such a strategy was to advance a viable political settlement to the ethnic issue through negotiations on one hand, and on the other in deterring the Lankan government's search for extra-regional help from outside. In support of this latter objective, there were allegations that India even trained, armed and extended refuge to the militant Tamil groups (Mayilvaganan, 2007, pp.398-403). However, most believe that the Indian leadership firmly ruled out intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, while it provided peace-keeping forces to settle the dispute.

Three, there was overriding influence of the Tamil Tigers, under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran. Under him the group had graduated from a moderate militant group to a 'full-blown' terrorist organisation. Started in 1972 as the 'Tamils New Tigers,' and later renamed as the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam' (LTTE) on 6 May 1976, the outfit has been spearheading militancy for the last 37 years, occasionally pausing for peace talks but single-handedly pursuing its goal of a separate state. In its *Eelam War*, the guerilla fighters

acquired conventional military capability, building a loyal network of Tamil cadre—the Black Tigers—whose deadly suicide terror attacks made the LTTE one of the most gruesome guerilla fighters in the world.

Prabhakaran set up a training camp in a jungle near Vavuniya, which raised funds from illicit sources—bank robbery, money laundering, transshipment of arms and ammunition, deadly suicide missions through the deployment of human bombs (women and child soldiers). Prabhakaran even supplemented his ground troops with a naval wing—the Sea Tigers—and managed to build an air wing to fight for the Tamil cause. His expertise lay in his systematic decimation of prominent political figures—the suicide attack on Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993 and the brutal assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The LTTE also detonated truck bombs directed to paralyse Sri Lanka’s economy, while it decimated Lanka’s infrastructure by targeting commuter trains, buses, oil tanks and power stations.

Throughout the 1970s, non-violent methods (often inspired by Mahatma Gandhi) were used to protest against the discriminating politics of the state. The *Sarvodaya Movement* (started in 1958) staged large peace mediations and promoted youth exchanges between Tamils and Sinhalese. NGOs worked for peace with activities both at national and local levels. They included the National Peace Council; research institutions like the International Centre for Ethnic Studies; women’s organisations working for peace, movement for inter-racial justice and equality. But all these peace efforts finally succumbed to, a) unbearable ‘majoritarian’ radicalism unleashed by the Sinhalese; b) it lacked the strength and charisma to run a durable mass movement, and c) the Tamil Tigers ‘militancy’ stole the region’s attention away from peace. At the end of the day it was widely accepted that: “We have tried peace, but it did not work” and now military means are dominating.

15.3 SINHALESE ‘MAJORITARIAN’ RADICALISM

Sri Lanka attained universal suffrage in 1931 and the island gained independence from its British colonisers in 1948. Soon after independence, the island’s political structure enabled particularistic and ethnic-based groups to hold sway—leading to its triumph over interethnic and minority groups to generate adverse political change and illiberal governance. The Indian Tamils, who came here as indentured labourers, were the worst victims of Sinhala ‘majoritarian radicalism.’ Their systematic ‘exclusion’ first came to the forefront in the form of the *Swabasha* Movement that made Sinhala the sole national language replacing English (as the Tamil were well-versed in English and held important government posts) as the country’s only official language.

The Sinhala-only Bill was passed on 5 June, 1956. This led to widespread protest by the Tamils who wanted equal representation of their respective languages. The Tamils gathered outside the Parliament to non-violently fast and meditate. The Sinhala Language Protection Council attacked the Tamils and soon their violence killed around 150 Tamil minorities. Around this time, the minister of transport issued a directive calling for the Sinhala ‘*sri*’ to be included on all vehicle number plates. When the Tamils started replacing the Sinhala ‘*sri*’ with the Tamil ‘*shri*’ many Sinhalese protested by smearing tar over Tamil lettering on buses, public buildings and street signs (Sahadevan and Neil Devotta, 2006).

A standardised system and a subsequent district quota system for higher education were also designed to lower the number of Tamil students gaining access to higher education. Policies were implemented to ensure that the government hired only Sinhalese for the civil

service. Post 1977—the Jayawardene’s government resorted to hand-fisted practices to silence its critics and rein amid a growing Tamil rebel movement. The government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979, which retaliated against Tamil insurgency by inciting the August 1977, June 1981 and 1983 anti-Tamil riots. In most instances, military personnel raped, tortured and murdered Tamil civilians. To hurt the cultural sentiment of the Tamils, the SLA even torched the Jaffna Public Library. Successive governments in Sri Lanka (except Chandrika Kumaratunga’s regime) have used the Tamil issue as a trump-card to (a) intimidate, harass and murder opponents who ever spoke otherwise, and (b) as a powerful weapon to continue in power in the centre.

Post-1983, the Kumaratunga regime took some bold steps to bring the Tamils closer to her government. She tried to draw a distinction between the Tamil people and the LTTE. War was declared as “against the enemies of peace” and not against the people. She partially lifted the economic embargo, offered a rehabilitation and reconstruction package worth Rs 40 billion to the North-east as a goodwill gesture. Restoration of supply of electricity to Jaffna and reconstruction of the Jaffna Library were also offered. The government proposed to supply food, clothes, medicines and other essentials to the people affected by war. A Human Rights Commission was set up by an act of Parliament in July 1996, while the armed forces were given strict instructions to spare the civilians from their attacks. In a bid to restore the democratic process and grass-roots level administration in the war-torn Jaffna peninsula, the government held civic elections on 29 January 1998. However, Chandrika Kumaratunga’s peace initiatives were only short-lived as the peace process dwindled due to several reasons (Sahadevan and Neil Devotta, 2006). Firstly, there had been steady efforts on the part of the government to dilute the original peace proposals under pressure from the Sinhala hard-liners. Secondly, the long-drawn-out delay in giving constitutional status to the proposals due to lack of consensus among the Sinhalese, eroded the Sri Lankan Tamil faith in the proposed constitutional exercise. Thirdly, the continuation of war, persistence of misery, hardship of the people in the North-East after re-imposition of the economic embargo failed to alter the view of the Tamils in favour of the government. The people’s continued reliance on the LTTE, as a result of the collective sacrifices made at the behest of its leaders, made it exceedingly difficult for the government to win their support through any political and economic concessions.

15.4 INDIA’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE SRI LANKAN CONFLICT

As far as India is concerned, there are distinctly two phases in India’s policy vis-à-vis the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The first phase (1983-90) saw India playing a proactive interventionist role, while in the second phase (since 1990) it has been changed to a policy of non-intervention without abandoning its interest in the conflict.

Since 1984, India followed a two-pronged strategy of ‘persuasion’ and ‘coercion’ both against the Sri Lanka government and Tamil militants on different occasions. The objective behind such a strategy was to evolve a viable structure of political settlement through negotiations without augmenting one party against another. According to Sahadevan, if India had supplied arms and extended training facilities to the militants, it was to increase the Sri Lankan Tamils’ bargaining power vis-à-vis the government. It would also compel the Sri Lankan government to give up its military approach through the strategic

involvement of extra-regional powers- US, UK, China and Pakistan, thereby destabilising the balance of power in the region.

On 29 July 1987, then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Jayewardane signed an accord, whereby they agreed that a) Tamil majority northern and eastern provinces would be merged to ensure distinct Tamil nationality without disturbing the integrity of Sri Lanka; b) to hold election to Provincial Councils of north and east before 31 December 1987; c) To invite an Indian peace-keeping contingent to guarantee and enforce cessation of hostilities in Jaffna; d) India shall ensure that its territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka.

However, this goodwill accord was short-lived. The new President Premadasa was opposed to the Indo-Sri Lankan accord from the beginning and he insisted on the replacement of the accord by a friendship treaty and called for withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) from Sri Lanka by 29 July, 1989 (the role of IPKF became controversial for its alleged atrocities and ruthless use of force). It refrained from taking part even in the SAARC meeting held at Islamabad in July 1989. On 19 September, 1989 the IPKF unilaterally suspended its military operations.

After the IPKF's withdrawal, there were drastic changes in India's Sri Lanka policy. Since then successive governments in New Delhi expressed their anguish by deciding against any form of direct intervention in the ethnic conflict. Sri Lanka, since the mid-1990s, sought India's direct politico-military role, but the brutal assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May, 1991 turned the tables against any direct involvement in the conflict. India strongly preferred a home-grown solution to the conflict, reached through a serious negotiation process involving all the ethnic stakeholders. It was strictly opposed to assume the role of a mediator in chalking out a peace process, while it increasingly approved greater international involvement in peacemaking. India now, openly approved the involvement of Norway, Japan and the European Union for engaging the LTTE into negotiations. On the LTTE's demand for a free *Eelam*, India has taken a stand that would enable both the adversaries—the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE—adopt a reasonable stand on the issue of interim administration for the Northeast (Sahadevan and Devotta, 2006).

15.5 LTTE'S WAR-FOR-PEACE STRATEGY

Prabhakaran was the product of a generation that felt Tamil rights and equality could not be obtained through moderate politics and **Gandhian** methods. Based on the level of use of violence and the duration of fighting, LTTE's 'war for Tamil *Eelam*' highlighted all the traits of a *total* war, encompassing:

- Intense regular fighting;
- Heavy deployment of forces (above a level of 50,000 men) and use of sophisticated weapons (tanks, artillery, helicopter, gun-ships);
- A higher level of battle-related deaths (more than 1,000 people per year);
- Large-scale displacement of people and refugees (over 20,000 people per year);
- Extensive damage to property and economic infrastructure (source: Sahadevan and Devotta, 2006).

His entire war-for-peace strategy had six distinct phases: the first phase (1983-87) saw highly intense military confrontation between the insurgent groups and the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) that led to opening up of multiple war fronts. The SLA's counter-insurgency operations during this phase were to wrest control of territories from the LTTE and marginalise the Tigers militarily.

The second phase (1987-90) of the war was solely between the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and the LTTE: the former with strength of about 70,000 troops supported by heavy tanks and artillery went to the island to implement the bilateral peace agreement signed in 1987. The IPKF through its counter-insurgency operations chased the Tigers out of the Jaffna peninsula to the Vavuniya and Mullaitivu jungles and hideouts in the east. But, the IPKF soon withdrew from the island.

Thereby, the LTTE entered the third phase of its war (1990-94) with the SLA. The Army regained its hold over the eastern region, while the Tigers, in order to maintain their control over the north, engaged in a series of set-piece battles and hit-and-run operations. This was followed by the breakdown in any attempt to chalk out a peaceful settlement to the dispute, the LTTE having entered its fourth phase of Eelam War in April 1995. The Tigers, by this time, shifted their headquarters to Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi and spread their sphere of influence in the east. The LTTE had also developed the Sea Tiger Wing- a daring guerilla Navy that played havoc with the Sri Lankan Navy. With territorial victory forming the core objective of both the rebel group and the government, this phase of war continued till 2002 when the government and the LTTE signed a cease-fire agreement and held peace talks facilitated by Norway.

Although Prabhakaran had demonstrated strategic military capability, he appeared to have failed to analyse two warfront disadvantages: a) there was no factoring the impact of the defection of Karuna, his able military commander from Batticolao on the LTTE's overall military capability; b) the second was in misunderstanding the determination of the Sri Lankan political and military leadership to eliminate the LTTE thoroughly.

Ultimately, in its last two phases (2002-04; 2004-09) when the security forces launched their offensive in the north with huge numerical strength, the LTTE did not have the essential force to face the onslaught. Somehow Prabhakaran failed to use his superior insurgency tactics to overcome his limitations in conventional warfare. By the beginning of the Eelam War VI, Prabhakaran had lost all the 15,000 sq km of land he lorded over in the east and the north. President Mahinda Rajapakse evidently scored better over his opponent, Ranil Wickremesinghe, as he promised in his election manifesto to eliminate LTTE terrorism at any cost.

Prabhakaran's 'aggressive' nature, his monolithic and egocentric leadership style had been a major obstacle in his strategic decision-making process. His manhandling of the international community and violation of international humanitarian laws, post 2002, following recruitment of *child soldiers*, using civilians as human shield, illegal arrests and abduction and suicide bombings, brought it disgrace at home and abroad. By 2005, LTTE was banned in 32 countries across the globe.



At the end of 37 years, what Prabhakaran earned for his people in the name of ‘independence,’ is the onus of a deceased leader who has left thousands dead (6,432 according to UN report, mostly by LTTE mines and those shot by Tiger’s suicide wing, besides Prabhakaran’s own demise on 19 May 2009), several injured and homeless, children and mothers brutally tortured and the Lankan Tamils speculative of either a peaceful solution to their decades-old ethnic strife or those juxtaposed with terms that will leave them more physically vulnerable and politically marginalised.

To the world, 19 May 2009 marked a new beginning in the history of counter-terrorism, as it once again proved that violence as a means to peace is bound to **crumble shamelessly**, its fight for claiming the freedom of its people would denigrate to ‘**outright mockery**,’ and as Gandhi said, its success through violent means would only be ‘**short-lived**’.

Gandhi once said, “Non-violence is not abstention from the real fight against evil. It is, as I understand it, a more vigorous fight against evil. It is, more effective than the eye for eye law which normally leads to the aggravation of evil.” (M K Gandhi, Autobiography, 1927). Twenty seven years of Gandhi’s non-violent fight for Indian independence (from the launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920 to our independence in August, 1947) earned us freedom from the British rule, well recognised by the international community. Thirty seven years of Prabhakaran’s violent fight against the Sinhalese has earned him and his organisation the epithet of a ‘terrorist organisation’ and the Tamils speculative about their freedom.

Had the LTTE embraced ‘non-violent’ means to voice the legitimate cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the organisation would have continued with general protests (*hartals*), sustained agitations involving both the rich and poor Tamils, occasional peaceful *gherao* of government institutions, surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated post in local bodies, closure of economic and cultural sources which the Sinhala government drew from these Tamil-dominated areas, boycott of Sri Lankan goods and services, draw media (print and electronic) attention through frequent involvement of national and international Press. The organisation would have kept the educated Tamils

living abroad upbeat on the plight of the Tamils at home and seek their help through extensive signature campaigns, written petitions and articles sent to foreign journals and publicists to (a) keep the unity of the community intact and (b) enable the international community to take serious notice of the issue.

The Tamil minority cause is closely comparable to the plight of the Natal Indians in South Africa. The treatment meted out to the indentured Indian labourers through racial discrimination, non-renewal of their contract to stay in South Africa, imposition of a hefty tax and invalidation of all marriages not conducted according to Christian rights, hold similar glimpses of 'soft' discrimination against Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka.

At Natal, Gandhi's techniques of 'moderate' methods of struggle in its initial phase and later the use of civil disobedience through *Satyagraha* stood in good stead as it compelled the South African government to accept most of the Indian demands and to treat the immigrant Indians in a sympathetic manner. Through South Africa, Gandhi inculcated the feeling of Indian-ness among all its proponents- Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis, rich, poor, women and old. He learnt in the hardest way that leadership involves patience to face the ire not only of the enemy but also of one's followers.

The Tamil minority cause lacked the strong leadership necessitated to successfully drive the movement. As the issue involved 'political exclusion' and 'marginalisation' of the Tamil minorities, the leadership should have been over-cautious of violating law that would have given enough reason to the state to further segregate the Tamils (Using the propaganda of the 'war on terror', the Lankan government has unleashed a racist war. According to reliable sources nearly 20,000 civilians face starvation and mass genocide in the North-East of the country).

The LTTE's 'any means to an end' has also seen it denigrating from a moderate separatist group to a militant organisation and finally into a terrorist organisation. The brutal assassination of important political figures, mishandling of the international community, the illicit nexus it wove to procure arms and ammunition, the forcible recruitment of children and women to carry suicide missions only highlighted the arrogance and greed of its leadership. Its central leader, Prabhakaran enjoyed absolute power. Prabhakaran was both the Chairman of the Central Committee of the LTTE and Commander-in-chief of its military wing. Field commanders could have a role in the planning of operations and in the formulation of strategies, but in matters of war and peace, Prabhakaran had absolute discretion. Anyone who showed even the slightest inclination to prescribe peace for the Tamils was condemned as a traitor. Even those who showed reluctance to further continue within the organisation were subjected to abject punishment- ranging from retirement to unpublicised execution. While Prabhakaran had a stable family life, most cadres were debarred from falling in love or leading a *grihastha* / *family* life (Sahadevan and Devotta, p.12).

Over time, for most, the biggest enemy of the Tamils was the LTTE itself. It was the LTTE, which had taken away their democratic rights in the name of winning a victory for the Tamils in the Northeast. The people were not able to express themselves freely especially in matters involving the LTTE. Their oft-repeated declaration that "we are representing the political aspirations of our people," who are "solidly behind" them, and their assertion that they constitute the "vanguard of- revolutionary armed resistance movement" were part of their consciously designed strategy to build up opinion in favour of themselves and their claim of an extensive support base in Tamil society in the

Northeast. A part of LTTE's claim to Tamil support was artificially created- actually created by means of coercion and sustained by propaganda. What the Tamils needed was a leader like Gandhi and a policy that persistently adhered to non-violence and *Satyagraha* that could have turned world opinion in their favour.

15.6 GANDHI AND PALESTINE

Several letters have been received by me, asking me to declare my views about the Arab-Jew question in Palestine.

My sympathies are all with the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of untouchables by Hindus is very close. But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirement of justice.

The cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after return to Palestine.

*Why should they not like other people of the earth make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood? **Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English as France to the French.** It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs.*

If the Jews look to Palestine as their national home it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of the British gun. A religious act cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonet or the bomb. They can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs.

Gandhi's view on Palestine, 1938.

The Jewish people settled in the region of Palestine about 1,200 years before the birth of Christ. From about 70AD to 700 AD, the region was under the control of the Romans who dispersed most of the Hebrews from the region. With the collapse of the Roman Empire, The Ismaelites (Arabs) settled in the region and remained there until the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire subjugated them in 1516.

By the later part of the 1800s, the Ottoman Empire, controlled by Turkey, was in total disarray and internal factional disturbances as Turkey's influences waned. The Turkish Empire bordering Persia was under the imperialistic control of the Russians and the British. During the First World War as Turkey was fighting on the side of the German Empire against Britain and France, it suited Britain to turn the Arabs against the Turks, while it also promised the Jews a homeland of their own (Balfour Declaration) to win the economic and political support of the Jews in Europe and elsewhere. After World War I, Palestine was assigned to UK as a mandated territory by the League of Nations. Many of the Arab leaders were willing to render Palestine up to Jews as long as the rest of West Asia was under Arabs' control. But the Arabs who lived in Palestine desperately opposed the Jews' establishing their own nation within their territory. From then on, countless riots have broken out in the territory. The British, who finally found that Palestine would never reconcile with the Jews, proposed 'a two-nation' solution to the problem. They handed the problem to the United Nations. According to Resolution 181, the UN General Assembly proposed the partitioning of Palestine into Arab and Jewish

states, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime. The UN Partition Plan granted the Jews over 56% of the area at a time when they owned less than 7% of the land and constituted one-third of the population. On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was declared and the first Arab-Israeli War began. From then, the Arab resistance has continued in the face of overwhelming odds. By the end of the First Arab-Israeli Conflict (1948-49), Israel controlled 77.4% of the land of Palestine, including much of the territory assigned to the Arab states. Jewish military activities, massacre and expulsion orders caused the depopulation of 418 Palestinian villages and the flight of 750,000 Palestinians. The Palestinians found themselves divided into four communities. Some were refugees within Israel, some fled to the West Bank, those who fled to the Gaza Strip lived under Egyptian administration. The rest sought refuge in the neighbouring Arab countries. By the end of the Third Arab-Israeli War in June 1967 (also known as the Six-Day War), Israel controlled the entire Sinai Peninsula up to the east bank of the canal. The cost to human life was beyond all apprehension. Negotiations towards a permanent ceasefire began in December 1973 which resulted in the first disengagement agreement of 18 January 1973 and a second agreement signed on 1 September 1975. The agreement provided for a partial Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and limited the number of troops and weapons Egypt could have on the eastern side of the canal.



Even though the ground firing stopped, what fermented underneath was the growth of Palestinian resistance groups—the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Hamas—better traced to the *Intifada* resulting in civilian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from December 1987. The Arabs fought the first *Intifada* (1987-1993) with stones and were answered with Israeli bullets. They fought the second *Intifada* (2000-04) with weapons and were answered with Israeli tanks and airplanes. The *Intifada* led to the peace talks in Oslo, but it did not end the occupation, and it certainly did not end fresh Israeli settlements. There were always some fundamentalist Palestinian groups that advocated

violence; these have gained greater credibility in the light of recent Israeli actions and their backing by the United States' government. Paul Wolfowitz, once in his address to the students of Georgetown University, said that terrorism is the greatest obstacle to Palestine. "If Palestine had adopted the ways of **Gandhi**, they could, in fact make an enormous change very quickly." Gandhi, however, counselled non-violence to the Jews. He suggested them to offer *Satyagraha* to the Arabs, not under the shadow of the British but on the basis of their own will and determination. A Gandhi for our times would very likely have told the Palestinians to abandon the methods of Hamas in favour of civil disobedience. To the Israelis, he would have preached *Satyagraha* by discarding the Western (US) support and lend a patient hearing to the Palestinians, make friends with them, and acquire their goodwill (Ramachandra Guha, 2006).

15.7 SUMMARY

Whether it is Palestine or Sri Lanka there is no doubt that it is not possible to abstain from violence altogether. Violence is a fact of life, but it cannot be our ideal or destiny. Violence has been at the centre of human history but there is an unmistakable evidence of the march of mankind from savagery to civilisation, from ferocity to gentleness, from violence to non-violence. Human society, as a whole, has been steadily progressing towards nonviolence. Our remote ancestors were cannibals; then they took to live on chase. Next came the stage of agriculture and industry. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilised stable life. All these were signs of human endeavour at progressive nonviolence and diminishing violence.

Nonviolence is not an individual but social virtue. It can be practised by all, not merely individually but collectively as well. India had the privilege to proudly own people who preached and practised nonviolence not as an abstract principle but as a practical solution to problems of daily life. Gandhi was such a gift to mankind. His relevance will resonate again and again whether in war or peace. Since every war is man's lasting penchant for a durable peace and in every peace lays the foundation of a better civilisation bond with love. In his *Autobiography*, Gandhi once rightly said: "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills."

15.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Gandhi's technique of non-violence would have offered a lasting solution to the Sri Lanka-Tamil ethnic problem?
2. 'Gandhi's non-violent method would have amicably solved the Arab-Israeli conflict.' Justify this statement in your own words.
3. Write short notes on:
 - a) Majoritarian radicalism of Sinhalese
 - b) India's role in Sri Lanka ethnic conflict

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UNIT 16 TIBET/MYANMAR/BHUTAN

Structure

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16.8 Summary

16.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Tibet, Myanmar and Bhutan are India's immediate neighbours. Bhutan and Tibet are landlocked. On the other hand, Myanmar is situated along the Bay of Bengal. Bhutan and Myanmar are sovereign independent countries but Tibet is occupied by People's Republic of China since 1950. All the three are Buddhists and influenced by Indian culture and civilisation. Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar retain their faith in Buddhism whereas India is secular. Although Buddhism was born in India, it is preserved in letter and spirit in the Himalayan nations, where Buddhism is an important pillar of their nationalism and identity. The Chinese communist system or India's democratic system have not been able to transform the social values and religious faith of the people in Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The problems of nation-building in Tibet, Myanmar and Bhutan
- The nature of their political systems and foreign policies
- The movement for reforms along the Gandhian lines

16.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

16.2.1 Bhutan

Bhutan lies in the Himalayan range of mountains with Tibet in the north and India in the South. Stretching along the southern slopes of the Himalayas for 250 miles, Bhutan is comprised of the people of Tibetan stock, culture and outlook. Lamaism is the prevailing religion and the political order is led under the hereditary monarchical system.

The official language is Dzongkha, spoken mainly in Western Bhutan. Written Dzongkha is based on Tibetan script. The state religion is Mahayana Buddhism. Drukpa and Kagyupa sects are considered indigenous, but there are thousands of Nepali settlers, who comprise about one quarter of the country's total population. The Nepali speaking population of Bhutan inhabits in southern part and is known as southern Bhutanese.

Bhutan indeed is a buffer state between India and China. In 1865 Wangchuk ruler of Bhutan had signed Sinchula Treaty with British by which Kalimpong and Duars had been ceded to British India and Wangchuk had promised to stop Bhutani raids into British territories. In return Wangchuk was granted an annual subsidy of Rs.50, 000. The relations with Great Britain started growing thereafter to the extent that the Bhutanese king accompanied Col. Younghusband to visit Lhasa to sign a convention in 1904 through which Tibet agreed to end its special ties with Bhutan in favour of the Britishers. In 1910 a fresh treaty was drawn up between Bhutan and British India by which Bhutan surrendered her foreign relations to British India and accepted the latter as arbiter in her disputes with Cooch Bihar and Sikkim. In return Britain increased the annual subsidy to Bhutan to 100000 and also assured that they will not interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan.

After India became independent, the Anglo-Bhutanese Treaty (1910) was replaced by Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship in 1949, whereby Bhutan agreed to seek the advice of government of India with regard to its foreign relations. India also assured that it would not interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan and also agreed to pay annual subsidy of 500000, which was five times more than the Britishers. India also returned some territory to Bhutan in Devangiri area and promised facilities for transport of all imports-exports, including arms, machinery and stores. Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-72) introduced structural reforms in the political system. He established the National Assembly (tshogdu Chen mo) in 1953 and Royal Advisory council of Ministers (Ihengye Zhungtshog) in 1968. Bhutan became a member of the UN in 1971.

Bhutan has landlocked status and it is full of hilly terrain, forests and snow. It faces developmental problems because of its geography. Besides, it has some ethnic groups like Drukpa, Nepali and Tibetans who are concerned about protecting their distinct identity and culture. Situated along Tibet (China), Bhutan has to address the concerns expressed

by the Chinese authorities from time to time. When China occupied Tibet, Bhutan gave asylum to 6000 Tibetan refugees on humanitarian grounds. When China raised the alarm that those refugees were engaged in spying and subversion in Tibet, Bhutan dispersed them in 1976 in different parts of the country, and in 1979 Bhutan told those refugees either to take Bhutanese citizenship or be repatriated to Tibet. By 1985 most of the Tibetans took Bhutanese citizenship but some also entered India to join the entourage of Dalai Lama at Himachal Pradesh.

16.2.2 Tibet

Tibet, situated between India and China, has been the ancient centre of Buddhist learning and civilisation. In 1950 China ignored Tibet's traditional buffer status and sent its army to change its independent status in China's favour. The communist rulers in China were afraid that Tibet might be used against China by the Western world to destabilise the communist system. Although there was lot of opposition to Chinese military moves, China proclaimed the formation of Autonomous Region of Tibet and usurped the functions of local government led by the Dalai Lama. There were violent protests and revolt in Tibet against Chinese actions in 1959 but they were suppressed with an iron hand. The Dalai Lama, who symbolised Tibetan sovereignty, fled to India in 1959. China removed the Dalai Lama from his post in 1964 and Tibet was declared an Autonomous Region of China. The Dalai Lama lives in exile in India and is leading the movement against Chinese occupation. He is highly revered by the Tibetans and has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

The population of Tibet, according to the 2000 census, is 2.62 million. The ethnic Hans are encouraged to migrate to Tibet and Tibetan culture and national identity have been marginalised. The political dissidents are severely punished and there are restrictions on religious freedom, as the Chinese authorities dislike the expression of Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese occupation, however, cannot erase the glorious history of Tibet, which existed in the past.

Tibet exercised cultural influence in the neighbourhood, especially in Bhutan and Ladakh. While Buddhism came to Tibet from India in the seventh century, both Bhutan and Ladakh derived it from Tibet. The geographical and genealogical similarity of Bhutan, Ladakh and Tibet are close and similarities in gesture, rituals, language and the social customs are more pronounced.

Religious mask dances, folk songs, including Gesar war songs from gesar epic are extremely popular in Ladakh and Bhutan. Every festival assumes a religious tone with the sounding of cymbals, clarinets and drums, all suggestive of the sanctified atmosphere of a Tibetan festival. Masked dances entertain their audience with humour. Chham, the religious dance, is popular that shows the triumph of good over evil. The most spectacular is the observation of death rites in Ladakh, Bhutan and Tibet, which is similar. Offerings to Lamas and monasteries are made for the deceased and prayer flags and thang-ka are erected for the departed soul. The actual date of cremation is decided by astrological calculation and the corpse is kept for forty nine days during which there is continuous recitation of the holy Tibetan book of the dead (Bardo Thodrol) in front of the dead person.

Tibetan interaction with India had been from time immemorial. Buddhism was the important subject of our discourses. Along with Buddhism, traders also used to travel in the area and thus religion and trade had been interlinked. According to Geshe Gedun

Chophel, Tibetan King Trisong (836-43) sent a large expedition of caravans to Magadh, to import relics related with Lord Buddha for the Samya Stupa in Tibet. When the caravan arrived at Magadh, they were unwilling to return back to Tibet. They settled in different parts of the Himalayan regions. These people were eventually known as Tamang, from whom the numerous Himalayan hill tribes descended, including Tamang tribes of Nepal.

Trade was an important channel of cultural exchange and influence. Leh, Ladakh's capital, used to be the foremost barter centre of Central Asia and caravans from Tibet, India, Turkey and China used to gather there to sell their wares. K. Thondup (1977) says that Bhutan used to collect dyes, coarse silk arecanut and tobacco from Assam and Bengal and exchange them for wool, tea, salt and musk from Tibet. Again the spices, timber, agricultural products were also bartered for the merchandise of Tibet. It is also well known that Hah (Bhutan), situated closer to Chumbi valley (Tibet), was also a busy centre of trade where numerous caravans of horses and pack mules passed back and forth until quite recently.

16.2.3 Myanmar

Myanmar (Burma) lies to the east of India and Bangladesh and to the southwest of China. It shares common frontiers with China, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh and India. It has a long coastline facing the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Sittang are the major rivers and Patkai, Naga, Chin Hills and Arakan Yoma are important mountain ranges.

Myanmar's population is about 48,379,000 and their major concentration is in the Irrawaddy delta. Ethnic Burmans (Bamar) form the majority but the number of ethnic minorities is substantial. The Bamar, whose ancestors came from the Sino-Tibetan borders, comprise 68 per cent of the total population and Shan seven per cent, Karens six percent, Arakanese four per cent, Mon two percent, Kachins two percent, Chin two percent and others comprise nine percent of the total population.

Myanmar had powerful kingdoms in the past. Although the Mons and Pyus had dominated initially, there was large-scale migration of Tibeto-Burmans in the 10th Century and they conquered the Mon and Pyus. Tibeto-Burmans absorbed the culture and religion of Mons and Pyus and laid the foundation of a large Kingdom known as Pagan in the 11th century. Theravada Buddhism became the religion of the majority.

Pagan was destroyed by the Mongol invasion in 1287. Its successor Ava proved a weak state because of the infighting between ethnic Mon and the Shan. In 16th century, the Toungoo dynasty expanded the frontiers but it was not sustainable. Toungoo was succeeded by Konbaung in the 18th century, which tried to unite the country. They, at the same time, began to expand the territories but in doing so, it came into conflict with Britishers who had established a strong foothold over India. The Britishers retaliated against Burmans against their expansionist policies. The British India intervened militarily and colonised Burma. Hence monarchy was abolished in 1885.

Burma was integrated with British India and thus it was projected as a part of Indian Territory. A number of Indians migrated there to be inhabited and their representation in police and civil service is substantial. Indians helped in the expansion of agricultural land and Burma emerged as one of the largest rice exporting country. Subsequently, the Indians emerged as big land-owners, which was disliked by the ethnic Burmans. Therefore a

campaign was launched against the Indian interests and 'hate Indian' was one of the agenda of the Burma nationalist movement. Thus, when the country became independent in 1948, the government of Burma passed citizenship laws to turn their Indian population stateless. Their landed properties were nationalised in due course and the majority of Burmese Indians were compelled to migrate elsewhere.

When Burma became independent, it adopted the system of parliamentary democracy. There was a national assembly and multiparty system. Anti-Fascist people's Freedom League, which led the freedom movement under the leadership of Bogoyoke Aung San, had popular mandate to rule. Unfortunately, Aung San was assassinated in July 1947 and his successor Thakin Nu (U Nu), whose skills of governance were so inadequate, could not stay in power for long. He was ousted from power by General Ne Win in 1962. Therefore, the military came into power and suspended the democratic institutions including the constitution. The military has been in power in that country ever since and the struggles for restoration of democracy have been crushed.

16.3 PROBLEMS OF NATION-BUILDING

Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar are facing the problem of nation building, but the nature of their problems differs from one another. Tibet is occupied by China and it does not recognise the existence of Tibetan refugees in contrast to their policies vis-à-vis overseas Chinese. Again ethnic Hans who have migrated to Tibet in recent years, find difficulties in integrating with the Tibetans. On the other hand, Bhutan has thousands of settlers from Nepal and their integration with Drukpas is difficult. Further, Myanmar is witnessing ethnic conflict ever since its independence. The integration of ethnic Burmans with Rohingyas, Karens, Kachins and Nagas are intricate issues for political leaders.

16.3.1 Bhutan

The ethnic unrest was witnessed in Bhutan for the first time in 1990, when the southern Bhutanese (Nepalese), organised demonstrations to protest against the domination by the Buddhist Drukpas. They demanded greater role in the country's political and economic life. The demonstrators resented official attempts to strengthen Bhutanese sense of national identity derived from Tibet.

The government of Bhutan had earlier, in June 1989, issued an order that all Nepali-speaking Bhutanese nationals in southern Bhutan are required to wear the national dress (Gho for men and Kira for Women). Failure to observe the order would first invite a police warning, then a fine, and lastly disciplinary action. Another order was passed declaring that the learning of national language Dzongkha is compulsory for southern Bhutanese. Yet another order was issued to prevent the Bhutanese nationals from getting married to non-nationals, to stand for election to the National Assembly. All these orders were disliked by the migrant population from Nepal and this prompted Teknath Rizal to appeal to the King to stop discrimination against the Nepali speaking people. The king was unhappy with Rizal's appeal and the reports are that he has been persecuted on the grounds of holding pro-Nepali sentiments. The activities of pro-Nepali dissidents are banned and many have been arrested. A number of ethnic Nepali population have deserted their homes in Bhutan and have come to Darjeeling, Sikkim or Nepal to carry on agitations against the royal government in Bhutan for a separate ethnic identity.

16.3.2 Tibet

Tibet, which has been permanently occupied, is under the influence and control of Han Chinese. In their daily lives, ethnic Tibetans have not gained anything after occupation. The Chinese authorities continue to arrest political dissidents and there are many instances of human rights abuses as their cultural and religious rituals and customs are under control. The completion of their first railway line in 2005 to China increased the fears of the Tibetans that they would lose more of their culture and that Han Chinese will forever remain in the dominating position.

In November 2005 when the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson visited China and expressed concern about separatist groups in Xinjiang and Tibet, the Chinese authorities declared that anti-human rights strategies were part of the global anti-terror battle. Sidney Jones, the Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, on the other hand has argued that the war on terrorism has been a heaven-sent opportunity for some governments in Asia to justify oppression against government critics.

China has consolidated its grip over Tibet. Education policies are aimed at Tibetan integration. Although Tibetan has been recognised as the official language, the university and technical education are uniformly given in Chinese language. China's western development campaign is geared to link Lhasa with Beijing by railways and roadways and migration of Chinese from other provinces to Tibet will certainly dilute the essence of Tibetan life and culture, which had been the source of inspiration in all parts of the Himalayan region.

16.3.3 Myanmar

Burma came under military dictatorship in 1962. General Ne Win emerged as the supreme leader in the new dispensation that believed in the policy of "Burma for Burmans". He did not care for other ethnic groups like Rohingyas, Karens, Shans, Chins and Kachins. He disliked the Indian diaspora and envisaged no role for them in business, trade or farming. His policy of Burmanisation forced Indians to desert their homes and emigrate elsewhere. Rohingyas were targeted to the extent that thousands of them deserted their homes and took shelter in Bangladesh. Shans and Karens have been persecuted especially in the post-1988 era, when the military gave logging contracts to Thai merchants in that area and purchased weapons from China to contain ethnic insurgencies. In short, it can be stated that the military rulers are trying to integrate the country through terror and intimidation. The ethnic minorities such as Shans, Karens and Rohingyas are frequent targets of state repression and the most common abuse being their induction into forced labour. On occasions the villagers are displaced and their lands are confiscated. A policy of burning homes and planting landmines to terrorise the Karens and others have been executed.

In March 2006, the Geneva based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that at the end of 2005 Myanmar had the worst internal displacement situation in Asia. There were 540,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar and approximately 92,000 were hiding in forests. The most popular leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi has been kept under house arrest and the movement for the restoration of democracy has been ruthlessly suppressed.

16.4 POLITICAL SYSTEM

16.4.1 Bhutan

Bhutan has the system of monarchy, which is introducing the democratic reforms. A new constitution has been framed, which has made the provision for the establishment of a democratic constitutional monarchy in accordance with the principle of hereditary succession, the establishment of a parliament consisting of the monarch, a 25-member National Council (Upper House) and a 47-member National Assembly (Lower House), with members of the latter body to be elected by universal secret ballot from constituencies with approximately equivalent populations, and for two political parties to be represented in the National Assembly, the election campaigns of which would be funded by the state. Within the National Council, 20 members - one representing each of the 20 electoral districts - were to be directly elected by a national vote, with the remaining five 'eminent members' to be selected by royal appointment. According to 2006 royal decree (Kasho), Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel is the head of the state, who advocated the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Bhutan. The two recognised national political parties are (a) the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) led by Lyonpo Jigmi Yozzer Thinley and (b) People's Democratic party (PDP) headed by Lyonp Sangye.

DPT secured 45 seats in 2008 elections and PDP got the remaining two seats and DPT leader is now the Prime Minister of Bhutan. The King of Bhutan is keen to provide enlightened leadership to his country and therefore the powers are divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government.

16.4.2 Tibet

On the other hand, Tibet is occupied by the Communist China. When the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, Tibetan leaders were forced to sign the "17 Point Agreement" in 1951 surrendering Tibet's independence to China. However, under that agreement, China gave a number of undertakings, including promises to maintain the existing political system of Tibet, to maintain the functions of the Dalai Lama, to protect freedom of religion and the monasteries and to reform, from compulsory reforms. These undertakings were entirely violated subsequently. Thus the government of Tibet was entitled to repudiate the agreement, as they did in 1959. Today, the International commission of Jurists Report (1997) observes that, "Tibetans are a people under alien subjugation, who are entitled under international law to the right of self-determination, by which they can freely determine their political status. The Tibetan people have not exercised this right, which requires a free and genuine expression of their will".

All powers of the government in Tibet are centralised in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese have been oppressive against the Tibetan nationalist dissent and trying to marginalise Tibetan culture. There have been numerous instances of destruction of houses belonging to the ethnic Tibetans and forced evictions. There is no freedom of speech, expression and religion. In 1996, a patriotic education campaign in the monasteries was initiated wherein monks were called on to denounce the Dalai Lama. Hundreds of monks were forced to leave their monasteries and many were arrested for maintaining their allegiance and links with the Dalai Lama.

In fact, in 1964, China had formally removed the position of the Dalai Lama and Pancham Lama posts and in 1965 the Autonomous Region of Tibet was created. 301 delegates were elected to the first People's Congress, of whom 226 were Tibetans. But

these exercises could not legitimate the sovereignty of China over Tibet. There is a large concentration of Tibetan refugees in India, who expose Chinese actions intermittently. The essence of Tibetan Culture is preserved at Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh), where the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile is located. The Dalai Lama's office is placed there and they articulate the response of Tibetans. Several Free Tibet organisations in India and abroad have connections with Dalai Lama's office, who believe in larger Buddhist tradition and culture. To sum up the political system in Tibet, it can be stated that the Chinese have established an authoritarian system there, which is disliked by the indigenous people.

16.4.3 Myanmar

Myanmar on the other hand, is under military rule and they have established an authoritarian political structure to perpetuate their rule. State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), led by General Than Swe, supports the regimentation in which there is no respect for human rights and democracy. Thousands of political prisoners are detained since 1988. Ethnic minorities have been persecuted and men, women and children are forced to work for the regime to construct railways, roadways, dams and other projects. There is repression and therefore thousands of people have deserted their homes. State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which usurped power on 18 September 1988 under General Saw Maung, had announced that general elections would be held to frame a new constitution. The election took place on 27 May 1990 and the National League for Democracy (NLD), under Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 out of 485 seats but the military did not respect the mandate of the people. NLD was not given a free hand to frame a new constitution and restore the democratic system. The national convention, which was called by the military for a new constitution since 1993, has been adjourned several times and there is no consensus on various provisions despite the absence of core NLD leaders. The rulers stress the central role of the military (as permanent representative of the people) to be enshrined in the new constitution. The key chapters of the constitution regarding legislature, judiciary and executive at the Union, State and Regional level are required to include representatives of the military. People's Assembly must have one-third members from Tatmadaw (armed forces) and the military must remain above the purview of civilian authorities. The military rulers are trying to incorporate the provisions of dwifungsi (dual role of the military) as adopted in Indonesia under Suharto. However, Suharto had neither abrogated the 1945 constitution, nor the elections for the two houses of parliament after five years. The military in Myanmar is apprehensive about holding any elections, as they have no trust of getting popular support through an election. The political system has generated the violation of basic rights of life, liberty and property.

16.5 FOREIGN POLICIES

Foreign policies are formulated to fulfill domestic requirements and Bhutan and Myanmar are not much different in their approaches while dealing with their neighbours. Bhutan attaches importance to India whereas Myanmar attaches importance to China on vital security and economic matters. Tibet, on the other hand, is occupied by the Communist China, and the main task of the government is to assimilate Tibetans with Han Chinese. The Tibetan government in-exile, under the Dalai Lama, is trying to mobilise international support for self-determination in Tibet. They organise demonstrations, seminars and workshops to keep the momentum for "Free Tibet" alive.

16.5.1 Bhutan

Bhutan is land-locked and sandwiched between India and China. It uses Indian Territory for access to sea or gateway to the outside world. The country does not have railway network or effective roadways because of the mountainous terrain and thick forests. Bhutanese commercial contacts traditionally have been with India, particularly Ladakh, Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur in the West; Tibet in the North; and Sikkim, Cooch Behar and Northern Assam in the East. After the occupation of Tibet, Bhutan's trade with that country was disrupted. Hence Bhutan has to depend upon India for its trade and transit with the rest of the world. Its geo-strategic importance for India after the Chinese occupation of Tibet (1959) and Chinese aggression on India (1962) has been increasing. Although India and Bhutan had signed a Friendship treaty at Darjeeling on 8 August 1949 through which India promised to respect Bhutan's independence, and Bhutan had reciprocated it by assuring that it would maintain the same relationship with India which existed in the past with the British, certain adjustments were required to keep pace with the changing international system.

Article Two of the Indo-Bhutan treaty stated that "the government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the government of India in its external relations". The Indian leaders were so happy with the outcome of talks in Bhutan that they decided to return Dewangiri hill strip (Deothan) back to Bhutan as a goodwill gesture. Indo-Bhutan Treaty was subsequently ratified by King Jigme Wangchuk of Bhutan and the Governor General of the newly Independent (India) C. Rajagopalachari of India on 22 September 1949. This treaty also allowed free trade and commerce between India and Bhutan.

The Indo-Bhutan friendship is the cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign policy. Bhutan had always appreciated India's security concern in the Himalayan region, especially after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, remarked that "the protection of the borders and territorial integrity of Bhutan is the primary responsibility of India. India would consider any aggression on Bhutan as aggression on India". India thus had mutual security arrangements like the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan, which would keep surveillance over the subversive elements. But insurgents from Assam and Nepal have been creating problems for the governments of the two countries. The entry into the Royal Bhutanese Army, which is under the direct command of the King, is through voluntary recruitment. The Indian military training team provides army-training facilities. In 2007, the Indo-Bhutanese relations entered a new phase, because a revised India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was signed in February and ratified in March, which ensured greater autonomy to Bhutan in external and military affairs and increased economic cooperation between the two countries. The Treaty also allowed Bhutan to import arms from and through India, and guaranteed equality and justice for citizens of each country when residing in the other.

Bhutan's economic linkages with India are close. India is the main market for Bhutan's apples, oranges, cardamom and timber. Besides, the hydro-electric power produced in Bhutan is purchased in bulk by India. Chhukha hydroelectric power (HEP) project, generating 336 MW, provides electricity for domestic consumption and also for export to India. The Kurichhu HEP and Tala HEP are supplying most of its electricity to India.

Bhutan is slowly trying to diversify its relations with neighbouring countries. In 1985 it

became a member of SAARC and in 2003, Bhutan became a member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and a signatory to the group's free trade area. In 2004, Bhutan signed the framework agreement on the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA), which is likely to be fully operational by 2016. It has opened dialogues with China. In 1998, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of China and Bhutan signed an official interim agreement to maintain peace and harmony in the border areas and to observe the status quo of the border existing before 1959. The contentious areas were Doglam, Sinchulumba and Dramana areas.

16.5.2 Myanmar

Burma (Myanmar), under the democratic rule (1948-62), pursued a policy of neutrality and Non-Alignment. It was a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. However, when the military usurped power in 1962, it introduced changes in domestic and foreign policies. Initially Burma was isolationist under Ne Win and it sought to exclude foreign influences for almost a decade but later it realised the importance of foreign contacts and investments.

Myanmar, together with northern Thailand and northwestern Laos, has been known as Golden Triangle, where cultivation of opium has been substantial. The bulk of the opium and drugs are supplied in the Western markets. Burma, under Ne Win, began to give an impression to the UN and the US that it would suppress the cultivation of opium and in 1976 took part in the drug enforcement programmes, but it turned out to be an empty promise. Ne Win had to resign in 1988 but it did not usher in the era of democracy. General Saw Maung came into power who had ruthlessly suppressed people's movement for democracy. Burma stood isolated at the international level during 1988-91, when China started pouring support to the military rulers. The two countries signed cross border trade agreement, which opened the Burmese market and resource to the Chinese.

In 1990 China became the major supplier of consumer goods to Myanmar. In 1991 China became Myanmar's main supplier of weapons, sales of which were valued at more than US\$1000 million. Myanmar purchased fighter aircraft from China to curb insurgency problems. China improved roads and bridges and the Chinese firms became important in timber industry. Various places in Myanmar have become tourist centres for gambling, drugs and prostitution. The Chinese Yuan is an acceptable currency there. The Chinese Prime Minister, Li Peng paid a visit to Myanmar in 1994 and signed some agreements for providing soft loans for building infrastructure which included the construction of air base at Mandalaya, a highway to connect Mandalaya to Yunnan, a port at Hanggyi and a passage through Irrawady delta to Bay of Bengal. Another agreement worth US\$400 million for naval frigates, jet aircraft, tanks, APCs etc was also signed. Hence China has emerged as an important strategic partner.

Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in 1997. As the member countries of ASEAN wanted constructive engagement with the military rulers, they supported Burma at the regional level. They wanted to prevent Myanmar to be totally dependent on the Chinese. Myanmar was subsequently offered the membership of ARF also, but ASEAN has proved ineffective to change the pro-China tilt of Myanmar. Thailand has been one of the important protagonists of the constructive engagement. After 1988 it was a major source of foreign investments. The SLORC had granted licences to Thai business interests to exploit raw materials in Burma, especially teak and timber, in return for foreign exchange. Plans were to construct a bridge across Sai River, which would facilitate communication

between the two countries for a gas pipeline to Thailand. However, the efforts of Thailand and other ASEAN leaders for constitutional processes in Myanmar have been a frustrating experience.

India has been trying to cultivate relationship with Myanmar because of their association in ASEAN, ARF and BIMSTEC and also because of its policy of Look East. It has been developing roadways to link Myanmar and Tamu-Moreh road, which has become vibrant for people-to-people contacts. The project to construct other roadways at Mizoram and Nagaland frontiers with Myanmar are in progress. The joint collaboration to explore oil and gas are in the pipeline and initiatives have been taken to promote strategic cooperation in the Andaman region.

16.6 MOVEMENT FOR REFORMS

There are undercurrents for reforms in Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar because of several domestic and external challenges. The culture generated by globalisation in the 21st century demands liberal democratic system, free trade, human rights and environmental protection. The developing countries have to set standards to cope with the challenges and introduce reforms accordingly to exploit the opportunities in the new world order. Again there is also a threat of international terrorism led by Al Qaida, Taliban or the like. A new culture has to be evolved in order to face those challenges through political system, educational curriculum and ideals so that the younger generation remains immune from the virus of communal and fanatic elements.

16.6.1 Bhutan

Bhutan has Buddhists and Hindus who argue the importance of their identity and culture and there is a need to develop respect for multiculturalism. The country has been facing ethnic unrest and there were several demonstrations by the ethnic Nepalese in 1990 to protest against the domination of Drukpas. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-72) and his successor Jigme Singye Wangchuk have been sensitive to political developments in the country and have introduced reforms. The King was responsible for the establishment of National Assembly, Royal Advisory Council, Council of Ministers in 1950s and the system of Constitutional Monarchy in 2008. The king also wanted to nurture the party-system in the country, to keep an effective watch on legislative and executive bodies and on the expenditure of the major political parties that are funded by the government treasury.

In 1990-91, a number of ethnic Nepalese left Bhutan and came as refugees to Jhapa district in eastern Nepal. For Bhutanese refugees the UNHCR also arranged a relief programme. The number of refugees in that camp started growing by the number of ethnic Nepalese not only from Bhutan but also by Indian territories of Assam. Bhutan People's Party began to articulate the grievances of the so-called Bhutanese refugees to pressurise the government for more concessions and reforms. The king was sensitive to address the grievances but repeatedly said that his government could not tolerate pressures for change if they were based on intimidation and violence. The violence in Samtse, Chhukha, Tsirang, Sarpang and Gelephu in 1990s had a disturbing impact on the political system. However, the monarchy has been accommodative and is trying to work out a middle path for peaceful coexistence. Bhutan is expected to change gradually as the constitutional system has been evolved only recently, which is likely to support pragmatic reforms. But the victories of Maoist forces in Nepal and the growing Chinese influence in the region have empowered southern Bhutanese. These issues have to be addressed in the new

dispensation. Bhutan has always tried to prove itself as a model of welfare state where all the citizens have the right to free education and free health care facilities.

16.6.2 Tibet

Tibet offers a different case for reforms. Although the Tibetan movement revolves around the preservation and promotion of Tibetan Culture and about three lakh Tibetan refugees struggling in India have ambition to return back to their homeland, the developments in Tibet under the Chinese reign are not favourable. China has been advocating autonomy for Tibet in the name of “one country, two systems”, but substantial steps in that direction have not been taken. For any political solution in Tibet, the presence and consent of the Dalai Lama is required. The Dalai Lama may be keen to visit Tibet with the support of the Chinese to find out an amicable solution but authorities in China are unwilling to invite him. However, the Chinese authorities are so afraid of the popularity of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, that they block every proposal of bringing the Dalai Lama for conflict resolution in Tibet.

According to the 2000 census, Tibet has a population of 2.62 million of which 2.42 million were Tibetans. Most of the indigenous people find their spirits stifled under the Chinese occupation. They aspire to have the functions of old monasteries restored, the role of the ousted Buddhist monks back and above all the return of their most revered leader, the Dalai Lama to Tibet. China is not willing to concede to such demands. There have been demonstrations against Chinese rule in Tibet and outside Tibet. There were mass demonstrations in Lhasa in 1987 against the Chinese rule, but that was suppressed. On the eve of Olympics (2008) in China, there were demonstrations once again but China did not show any sensitivity to address the grievances of the Tibetans. China is pursuing the policy of massive campaign against Tibetan nationalism. Many Tibetans, particularly the political detainees, are deprived of even the elementary safeguards of due process of law.

Further, the educational system needs to be reformed. The exclusive use of Chinese language in middle and secondary schools discourage children; so there is low enrolment rate and a high drop-out rate among Tibetans. Tibetan language teaching has low priority, with the result that Tibetan illiteracy rate is three times the Chinese national average. The objective of Chinese is to generate respect for Han cultural identity, language and values at the cost of Tibetan language, culture and identity. Again Tibetans have no right to homing in TAR and there is a continuing destruction of Tibetan neighbourhood, forced evictions and demolition of their homes. The Han Chinese are given preference in housing policies and Tibetans are discriminated. The Chinese interference and repression of religious freedom and activity in Tibet have been painful. In 1996 China started “patriotic education campaign” in the monasteries. Thus monks were called on to denounce the Dalai Lama. Hundreds of monks were persecuted and forced to leave their monasteries and many more arrested for not understanding the questions of Chinese officials.

16.6.3 Myanmar

Myanmar is one of the most authoritarian and repressive regimes, where any norms and values of the civilised society are disliked. The civilian leaders campaigning for restoration of democracy are detained, tortured and persecuted. It is one of those countries, where government abolished private e-mail service and Internet is totally banned. Illegal possession of a fax machine or modem is punishable with seven to 15 years’ imprisonment. Naturally there is movement for reforms, but the military rulers have been able to suppress them

with an iron hand. There are about 1300 to 1400 political prisoners detained since 1988 and 70 NLD leaders have died while campaigning for restoration of democracy. The most respected popular leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi is under house arrest and strategies are evolved to delay any election for a popular mandate. (Has been released now).

There is also the difficult question of ethnic minorities, such as Karen, Shan and Rohingyas. They are frequent targets of state repression and violations. Sometimes they are forced to flee to neighbouring countries. Although the military has been calling for the meetings of national convention to finalise the broad contours of the constitution, it has been postponed because the rulers are not determined to restore democracy. It is well known that a roadmap for democratic reforms had been evolved under the leadership of General Khin Nyunt, but he is under house arrest at present. The respect for individual life, liberty and property, is more or less absent; the military wants to remain in power perpetually. Hence, Myanmar is witnessing silent movement for reforms.

16.7 RELEVANCE OF GANDHISM IN TIBET, MYANMAR AND BHUTAN

There is a deep impact of Buddhist philosophy in the social life of the people in Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar. The broad meaning of Buddhism is not only confined to Sangha but it covers all aspects of humanism, internationalism and eternal peace. Mahatma Gandhi has taken numerous ideas from Buddhism and hence his political philosophy has relevance for the struggling masses in the Buddhist societies.

Gandhi always opposed the oppression and subjugation policies of the colonial masters. His tools to oppose the oppressive system were truth and non-violence. Lord Buddha had also opposed the political system of King Ajatashatru of Magadh. He was opposed to rigid rituals and animal sacrifices. He preached austerity and brotherhood. He had a great appeal on the social and political life for centuries. Similarly Gandhi wanted to transform social and political values of the masses in such a way that the oppressive regimes would crumble into pieces.

Gandhi had given the ideals of Rama Rajya, which signified great respect for human values. It was a system in which there was to be no oppressor and no oppressed. His Rama Rajya was to give equal opportunities to all the people and set an example of civil society worth emulating. The powers of the government were to be decentralised and all the villages were to be self-ruled and vibrant. Gandhi was also an exponent of the concept of “Unity in diversity”, where all the ethnic groups and races were to be treated without any discrimination.

Tibet is under an alien system. The Communist China has occupied it and any opposition to its governance is ruthlessly suppressed. Strategically the government has superior power and the changes cannot come through violent means. Similarly, Myanmar is firmly under the control of the military and every move against it by the opposition forces is unable to weaken the hold of the military. However, if there is proper mobilisation of public opinion and if there is united action to oppose the imposed political system, the oppressive establishment would be compelled to address their grievances. All this requires the support of an able leadership and leaders who can lead the people for renaissance and reformation. The Gandhian path is difficult to pursue, but in view of the presence of well-armed and strong adversary, this is the only pragmatic alternative to change the society and politics in those countries.

Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, civil disobedience movement or Quit India movement against colonial rulers were non-violent, and successful to arouse the masses. It generated patriotic ideas to throw out the colonial rule. The essential ways through which the movements were launched were not only through demonstrations but also through appropriate literature, dance, drama, short stories and various other activities. The religion and religious symbols were extensively used by Gandhiji to mobilise support. Although the dissident leaders in Tibet and Myanmar are using religion and religious symbols, the political masters are unwilling to give up. The international society has not been able to influence China to hold the act of self-determination in Tibet or free and fair election in Myanmar. Thus the civil societies in those countries have to build up pressure for democratic changes and peaceful coexistence.

16.7 SUMMARY

Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar constitute different political systems and foreign policies inspite of many similarities in terms of culture and religious systems. All the three of them have been following different modes of struggles to assert their freedom and sovereignty. Nation-building often involves a great amount of statesmanship, community work, cooperation and a larger vision of individual entity. Violence has often been witnessed in the course of these struggles but it is to be noted that the Gandhian way of mass mobilisation is still relevant. Truth and non-violence generate favourable environment for political resolution and bring about positive outcomes. Thus Gandhian method of non-cooperation, mass mobilisation and non-violent means becomes relevant for conflict resolution.

16.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Analyse the characteristics of socio-political life in Tibet.
2. Examine the nature of ethnic conflict in Bhutan.
3. Discuss the role of military in the politics of Myanmar.
4. Evaluate the relevance of Gandhi for democratic movements in Myanmar.
5. What is the common factor in the society and politics of Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar?

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(Compiled by **Ms.Mamta Tyagi**, Research and Teaching Assistant, School of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi)