

Gandhian Technique in Contemporary Indian Strategy Making: Some Explorations

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Abstract: *Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Strategic Thinking* in the same sentence gives out a counterintuitive vibe. Many scholars are of the view that one can either be a strategist or moralist. However, the paper seeks to answer the questions raised on Mahatma Gandhi's contemporary relevance in strategy making. The central question undertaken by in the paper is: Is Gandhian technique relevant in contemporary Indian strategic thought? The paper seeks to free Gandhi from an essentialised caricaturing. It engages with literature and Gandhi's own writings that accomplished this task.

Introduction

The paper has a seeks to engage with the relevance of Gandhi in contemporary strategic thought with certain core assumption. These are as follows:

1. *Universal Morality and Gandhian notion of morality* needs to be distinguished. Gandhian notion, on 'means justify ends' interpretation, seems closer to Kantian Deontological notion of morality. But when the issue of 'strategizing' is concerned, one cannot deny the pragmatism involved even for the strictest of Idealists. Therefore, the paper argues that equating 'Morality' with 'Gandhian Technique' on strict terms is wrong. This is not to say that Gandhiji was immoral or amoral, but that 'Gandhian morality' needs to be seen in a different context. For instance, Gandhi saw non-violence for the society as necessarily different from that of the individual.
2. Present Indian scenario should not be equated to the years of colonised India or the years just after independence of India. The idea of a 'colonial subjects'

and ‘democratic subjects’ does vary. The notions of *Satya* (truth), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Sarvodaya* (rise of all), *Dharma* (duty), *Swaraj* (self-rule), and peace as advocated by Gandhiji during British Colonial rule still holds relevance. However, being a free Nation, one needs to reinterpret these and contextualize it.

3. We need to look beyond the dominant Structural Realist paradigm, especially offensive realism which calls for ‘absolute power’ in the sense that promotes militarization. This is essentially a Eurocentric approach and ignores the ground realities of a post-colonial country like India, where developmental needs are of prime importance. After all, guns with empty bellies hardly make any sense.

The paper proceeds negatively, first the paper discusses the arguments which posit Gandhiji as having negligible relevance, and then it moves to the other side by discussing his relevance in the light of literature focussing how Gandhi and his ideals are relevant. The paper focusses specifically on the issues of Swaraj, pacifism and nuclear policy.

Are Gandhian techniques irrelevant today?

Bharat Karnad (2002), discusses in detail, how the ‘traditional’ visions associated with Manusmriti, Sukraniti and Kautilya’s Arthashastra stood for an expansionist state and how they justified that the enemy has to be killed in wars, whether conducted according to the rules of morality or against them. Such was the traditional, *Vedic Machtpolitik* – a statist military recipe to survive international anarchy (quoting Booth and Trood, 1999).

Karnad (2002) traces the decline of the traditional schools of machtpolitik to the emphasis placed upon asceticism, non-violence and spiritual awakening by advent of Buddhism and Jainism. The *spiritual side of Hinduism* was stressed by Adi Shankaracharya to counter such threatening religious developments (Karnad 2002). The ideas of diplomacy & military power got relegated and gave way to forging a

civilizational entity based on moral integrity with this Hindu Renaissance (Karnad 2002).

Coming to Gandhi, Karnad talks of over-crediting a person of lesser practical vision with helping India achieve independence (Karnad 2002). Further, talking of strategy making, Karnad (2002) considers that for Gandhi non-violence was a situation-dependent standard. Karnad (2008) even goes on to say that such advocacy of non-violence can be seen as a tantrum to cement his place in history. He talks about controversies in personal life of Gandhi, thereby indicating double standards of morality (Karnad 2002).

Karnad quotes Joan Bondurant in saying that Gandhi exploited the native religion to his own ends & reinterpreted the epics to prove that the religion of non-violence was at the root of Hinduism, thereby ignoring the Vedic sanctions for expansionism and military proliferation (Karnad 2002). He went on to point out inconsistencies in Gandhian thought insofar there were occasions when Gandhi supported military actions, which were inherently not non-violent in nature (Karnad 2002).

Karnad considers Gandhi as having less impact on Nehru insofar that the latter was a true realist (Karnad 2002, 2008). Inspired by Blackett, the Nobel-laureate in physics, Nehru considered that the atomic bomb was a decisive weapon that had revolutionized warfare. He invoked the hyper-realist ancient Hindu Machtpolitik which extols the virtues of 'covert warfare' and 'total war', and even recommends the use weapons of mass-destruction when all other diplomatic and military instruments fail (Karnad 2002).

Joseph Lelyveld argues that Gandhi was ultimately forced to see the limits of his ambitions to remake his world. In trying to assess his life, he downplays Gandhi's achievements to a great extent, finding inconsistencies in his principles (quoted in Thakkar 2011).

Elsewhere, Gandhian techniques have been criticized by Realist strategists for being a highly idealized view of human agency for compassion, love and peace. The idea of 'might is right' in anarchical world order overshadows alternative viewpoints.

Relevance of Gandhian Techniques

Sarvodaya and Swaraj

Idea of Swaraj, as expressed by Gandhi, is not mere self-rule. It is more about self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Gandhi talked about village economy as the basic unit for development, better than the modernist project of large scale industrialisation. Jawaharlal Nehru, the chief architect of India's development model and strategy making also stood for self-sufficiency, but through large scale industrialisation. Though the Gandhian vision was inherent, but the idea of 'means justifying ends' was cornered in the rush to 'modernise' at greater pace. In the first few years, Nehru emphasized less on militarization and thus, more and more budget was allocated towards the 'end' of self-sufficiency. On Gandhian lines, peace was seen incompatible with exploitation and inequality of wealth.

Thomas Pantham (1983) talks of Gandhi's efforts to transform the western 'nominal' democracy to a fuller democracy -- '*Poorna Swaraj*'. Gandhi put forward the alternative of participatory democracy, which ruptures the positivist disjunction between subject and object, means and ends. This would be instrumental for peace (Gandhi 1941).

To quote Gandhi:

A superficial study of British History has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives... Swaraj will be an absurdity if individuals have to surrender their judgement to majority. The very essence of democracy is that every person represents all the varied interests which compose the nation. True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village (Gandhi 1941).

Anthony Parel (2011) talks about Gandhi's influences on Nehru. Nehru was of the opinion that only a fully integrated man with spiritual depth and moral strength will be able to meet the challenges of the new times. Material advance without spiritual balance can be disastrous. These Nehruvian reflections can be seen in the context of

the Gandhian philosophy that human development requires the integration of the material, the ethical, the aesthetic, and the spiritual. A clear ambitious logic that Nehru put forward through technological advancements could be understood as a remoulding of Gandhian aversion towards modernization (Parel 2011). Usha Thakkar views Gandhi's ambition to have a complete regeneration of humanity. Even when people were not with him, it did not deter him from his chosen path (Takkar 2011).

Gandhi: A pacifist?

The idea of demilitarization and disarmament for enduring peace was undertaken by Indian leaders invoking Gandhian ideals. They even appealed to other countries to follow suit. One can argue that such naïve understanding of world politics led to the humiliating defeat at the hands of China in 1962. There are, however, differing reasons attributed to the defeat.

Giuliano Pontara (1965) discusses Gandhi's rejection of violence. Gandhi regards violence in general or war in particular as a 'lesser evil'. He says that there are situations in which it is morally better for the actor to choose violence, for instance, in situations where the only choice is between direct and indirect violence or between violence and cowardice. Qualities of bravery, fearlessness, self-sacrifice and self-discipline were highly moral for Gandhi.

Gandhi said that he,

...never permitted violence. I have simply stated two grades of bravery and cowardice. The only thing lawful is non-violence... Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defence or for the defence of the defenceless it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission (Gandhi 1927).

Gandhi introduces a distinction between the action and the motive, the war and the cause for which it is fought. The motive (the cause) may be right, he says, but nevertheless the action (the war) is wrong. According to Pontara (1965), Gandhi saw violence as morally wrong. It would not have been able to give India her freedom, nor will it be able to settle the conflicts.

Here, one can see the link with lord Krishna's idea of 'just war'. Mahatma Gandhi considered Bhagvad Gita as his spiritual dictionary. Krishna advised Arjuna to follow his '*Dharma*' (duty) in war. The idea of *Dharmayuddha* or 'just war' in epic Mahabharata appear inconsistent with Gandhian non-violence to many. However, it is not so.

Pontara (1965) argues that Gandhi, on several occasions, *supported violence* saying that he acted rightly and dutifully. Gandhi has been quoted saying:

When two nations are fighting, the duty of a votary of ahimsa is to stop the war. It is better to be violent if there is violence in our breasts than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover our impotence. (Gandhi 1927)

Gandhi further says,

I want both the Hindus and Mussalmans to cultivate the courage to die without killing. But if one has not that courage, I want him to cultivate the art of killing and being killed rather than, in a cowardly manner, flee from danger. For the latter, in spite of his flight, does commit mental 'himsa' (violence). He flees because he has not the courage to be killed in the act of killing (Gandhi 1927).

Anima Bose (1981) tries to understand Gandhian perspective on peace. For Gandhi, human values take great prominence. 'Ahimsa' is seen as a way of life rather than a tactic and, together with 'Satyagraha', makes the difference between passive submission to injustice, and an active struggle against it. 'Sarvodaya' sees peace as incompatible with inequality of wealth. Peace is not seen as an end state, but as a continuous revolutionary process, where ends cannot be separated from means (Bose 1981).

Bose further says that it is an indisputable fact that war and violence, nationally and internationally, create more problems than they even begin to solve (Bose 1981). Yet we continue to rely on them to solve conflicts because of our preconceived notions and utter reluctance toward adopting non-violence as the means.

Ravindra Varma says that Gandhi pointed out that since conflict took birth in the mind, it could only be resolved through a mental process or mental force, not through the deployment of physical force (Varma 2013). He saw Satyagraha as a mental, moral or spiritual force that the mind used to work on other minds and to correct attitudes and acts that were inconsistent with Truth, justice or the principle of cohesion that is the essence of Dharma (Varma 2013).

Gandhi and Nuclear Policy

Stephen Cohen talks about Krishnaswamy Subrahmanyam, who, in his article, *Hedging against Hegemony: Gandhi's Logic in the Nuclear Age* interpreted Gandhi as favouring India's wars and the development and deployment of nuclear weapons (quoted in Cohen 2001). Even as Gandhiji was searching for an answer on how to use non-violence in defence, he approved and strongly supported the use of the Indian Army to defend Kashmir against Pakistani invasion (Cohen 2001). Gandhian values and approach have been used as a convenient alibi by people who did not understand Gandhi (Cohen 2001). The Mahatma, as he himself made clear often, *was not a pacifist*. He always maintained that violence was better than cowardice. Subrahmanyam further says that the problem with our country was not the Gandhian approach and values but our centuries old indifference to who rules us (Cohen 2001).

Mani Shankar Aiyer says that the origins of pressing for universal nuclear disarmament began with Mahatma Gandhi's revulsion at the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States in August 1945. Gandhiji urged that the mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred (Aiyer n.d.).

Writing in 'Harijan', on 7 July 1946, Gandhiji said that the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages (Gandhi 1946). There used to be the so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. Now the naked truth has surfaced: war knows no law except that of might. Gandhi has been quoted saying that in this age of atom bomb, unadulterated non-violence is the only force that can confound the tricks of violence put together. Non-violence is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy (Gandhi 1946).

Dr. Raja Ramanna, part of the nuclear programme during Indira Gandhi's regime, was a determined minimalist where nuclear deterrence was concerned. He was convinced a large nuclear weapons inventory would sit ill with Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on nonviolence and the country's pacifist reputation (Karnad 2008). Even more, Ramanna was concerned that a large nuclear arsenal would draw the military into the nuclear business, resulting in the scientists' losing control over the weapons program. Ramanna's saw the possibility of the military controlling nuclear weapons with their likely misuse (Karnad 2008). The consequences, Ramanna believed, would be disastrous. Ramanna at BARC and later as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission considered that a much smaller force with several scores of simple fission weapons and warheads was adequate. Successive Prime ministers did not approve nuclear tests to validate and improve various weapons designs in lines with Ramanna's idea of 'minimal deterrence' having a Gandhian spirit (Karnad 2002, 2008).

Parmeshwar Narayan Haksar, the former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Nehru, says that in the contemporary world of the nuclear bomb, when seen in the context of the explosion of science and technology, demands that even if we do not love our neighbour, we owe a duty to take care not to hurt him (Haskar 1987). So, a negative duty of not doing harm could be seen as being coterminous with the idea of no-first use policy that India pursues. This policy in clear consonance with Gandhian ideals.

Conclusion

Considering the various interpretations of Gandhian technique, the paper seeks to draw certain conclusions in the effort towards answering the central question raised in the beginning of the paper.

Gandhi discovered that there are no limits to our capacities. The solution to a problem lies in realizing our true potentials. Gandhian views of Swaraj, howsoever unrealizable, definitely found expressions in Nehruvian era when he undertook the task of making India self-sufficient. However, the notion of equity through trusteeship

found meagre expression in Acharya Vinoba Bhave's 'Bhoodaan' and 'Gramdaan' movements, and not through central leadership. Anyways, Gandhi was critical of Parliamentary Democracy working from the Centre and wanted initiatives to come from grass-root levels.

Still, the central leadership remains influenced by Gandhi's ideals to a large extent. Anthony Parel's proof of Nehru Paying heed to Gandhian ideals further shows his relevance. Also, India's 'second-strike' policy clearly shows her commitment to remain non-violent till the extent that she is not attacked. 'Self-defence' is better than 'cowardice' (Gandhi 1938).

Gandhi stood for disarmament but the idea faced a major jolt in 1962 war which furthered the idea of having nuclear capability. Though, Gandhi was not for unilateral disarmament but for gradual reduction in arms.

The paper argues that even the idea of nuclear deterrence can be attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, insofar that he stood for 'defensive' capability of states and his views appear compatible with the idea of minimal deterrence. He did not stand for nuclear proliferation and considered it to be one of the biggest curses of mankind. However, the 'doctrine of sword' espoused by him in 1921 justified the use of violence in self-defence and national security. Here, one can see Gandhi invoking the ideals of lord Krishna. Gandhian creed of non-violence is not a passive force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. Gandhi himself said that he is not a pacifist. Thus, those who critique Gandhi that it was wrong at times when he stood for violence, get an answer.

Gandhi argued for separate code of ethics for individuals and societies. Gandhi said that non-violence for the society is necessarily different from that of the individual. Groups do not act and react in the same way as individuals do. Thus, those who critique Gandhi for lack of coherence in arguments might get an answer (Gandhi 1938).

All said, the paper concludes by arguing that though in the present age of modernisation, it would be hard to go back to high moral ideals, still one can hope

that a more peaceful world could be established if the statesmen start to think in terms of reconciliation through Gandhian methods of tolerance, truth, peace and non-violence. After all, violence begets violence. Haskar's call to invoke the Nehru-Gandhi nexus needs attention, as the two are now treated as separate camps.

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