



Research Paper

## Non-Violent Resistance an Excellent Way of Conflict Resolution Against The Oppressors

**Abstract:** Non-violence remains a powerful and effective method for resolving conflicts, both at personal and collective levels, even in today's complex global environment. Various nationalist leaders had paved their achievement through the non-violent principles and it remains as an excellent way to resolve the conflict in modern times.

**Key words:** Non-violence, Resistance, Ethical Principle, Dandi March, Apartheid, American Civil Rights.

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### I. Introduction

A conflict is a clash or disagreement between two rivalry groups. Human society, throughout the history had witnessed a series of conflicts since the prehistoric period and conflict became inherent part of human lives throughout the centuries. Resolution for a conflict requires finding a peaceful solution on the point of disagreement between the rivals. It demands an open communication to identify the issues with respect to seek common solutions together. Non-violent method of resolving conflict had been practiced by many popular nationalists including Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther Jr.

In a world widespread with different forms of tensions like political, social, economic, or interpersonal and even the pursuit of effective conflict resolution has never been more critical. Among the various approaches available, non-violence stands out as a morally upright and practically effective strategy. Its root can be traced back to ancient philosophy but continually evolving, non-violence has proven to be not only a principle of high ethical value but also a pragmatic approach to resolving disputes and achieving lasting peace. In modern times, where the consequences of violent conflict can be catastrophic, non-violence remains an essential and excellent method for conflict resolution.

### II. Historical Background of Non-Violence

The concept of non-violence, or *ahimsa*, has deep roots in religious and philosophical traditions across the world. Jainism emphasizes non-violence as its most fundamental ethical principle teaches that all living beings must be treated with respect and compassion. Acharanga Sutra Book 1, Section 2 describes "All Beings love life, do not desire pain; know this and do not kill, or cause to kill". Buddhism also has emphasized non-violence as core principles, promoting compassion and the avoidance of harm to all living beings. According to Dhammapada Verse 129 it says "All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill". Christianity, too, preaches the virtue of turning the other cheek and loving one's enemies. However, non-violence was most visibly and effectively applied in large-scale political movements in the 20th century onwards. Mahatma Gandhi used non-violence as the foundation of India's struggle for independence from British rule. His methods of peaceful protest, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation mobilized millions and led to monumental political change. Inspired by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. led the American Civil Rights Movement through non-violent resistance, achieving significant progress in the fight against racial segregation. Nelson Mandela, though initially associated with armed resistance in his movement towards freedom, ultimately endorsed reconciliation and non-violent dialogue to dismantle apartheid in South Africa.

### **III. Historical figures who Championed Non-violence:**

#### **3.1 Mahatma Gandhi**

Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the foremost leader of the Indian nationalist movement by advocating non-violence and truth as powerful tools for political and social change. Rejecting violence in all forms, Gandhi believed that true freedom could only be achieved through peaceful means. His philosophy was deeply rooted in Indian spiritual traditions and was shaped by his experiences in South Africa, where he first used non-violent resistance to challenge racial injustice.

After returning to India in 1915, Gandhi led several mass movements, including the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920, Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and Quit India Movement in 1942. All these movements were grounded in non-violence. He mobilized millions across classes, castes, and religions to resist British rule through peaceful protest, boycott of British goods, and non-payment of taxes. His commitment to non-violence earned him international admiration and set him apart from other revolutionary leaders.

Gandhi's non-violent approach not only unified the Indian population but also exposed the lost sense of ethics, integrity and values by the colonial oppressors. His leadership proved that lasting political change could be achieved without bloodshed, leaving a legacy that influenced global movements for civil rights and freedom. Gandhi remains a symbol of peace and the power of non-violent resistance.

#### **3.2 Martin Luther King Jr.**

Martin Luther King Jr. was a central figure in the American Civil Rights Movement and a powerful advocate of non-violence as a method to achieve racial equality and justice. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance, Martin Luther King believed that peaceful protest could transform society without hatred or violence. His approach was deeply rooted in Christian values and the belief that love and moral force were stronger than brutality.

King led numerous non-violent campaigns, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56), Birmingham Campaign (1963), and the March on Washington (1963), where he delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech. These movements challenged segregation and racial injustice which were prevalent in the society through marches, sit-ins, and civil disobedience, despite violent responses from authorities. His strategy won sympathy from the public and pressured the U.S. government to enact major civil rights legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

His unwavering commitment to non-violence made him a moral leader not only in America but around the world. He proved that peaceful protest could lead to profound social change and continues to inspire movements for justice, equality, and human rights across the globe.

#### **3.3 Nelson Mandela**

Nelson Mandela is remembered as a global symbol of peace, reconciliation, and resistance against injustice. As the leader of the struggle against apartheid which was a system of institutionalized racial segregation in South Africa, Mandela initially supported non-violent protest, inspired by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. In the early years of the African National Congress (ANC), Mandela participated in peaceful demonstrations and campaigns demanding equal rights for Black South Africans.

However, after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, when peaceful protesters were killed by police, Mandela concluded that the government would not respond to non-violence alone. He co-founded Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, and supported the destruction of government infrastructures which was a deliberate action aimed at weakening the government. He did not support the injury and destruction of people in the process of resistance against the injustice. Mandela consistently emphasized that violence was a last resort.

Mandela was imprisoned by the apartheid government of South Africa for 27 years (1962 - 1990), during which he became a global symbol of dignity and resistance. Upon his release in 1990, he returned to a path of peaceful negotiation and national reconciliation, leading South Africa to its first democratic election in 1994. As President, he promoted forgiveness over revenge, launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995, and worked to reduce racial tensions. His leadership emphasized democracy, equality, and rebuilding a deeply divided society through peaceful transition. His leadership showed that even in the face of deep injustice, peaceful dialogue and forgiveness can lead to lasting change.

### **IV. Principles and Methods of Non-Violent Conflict Resolution**

Non-violent conflict resolution is based on several key principles and methods. It emphasizes the principles of dialogue, mutual respect, love and understanding between parties. Techniques include negotiation, mediation, peaceful protests, civil disobedience, and truth and reconciliation processes. Non-violent resistance is a powerful method of social and political change that rejects the use of violence while actively challenging injustice. Rooted in the principle of ahimsa (non-violence), it is based on the belief that no form of

violence either physical or emotional should be used, even against oppressors. At the heart of this approach is *satyagraha*, a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi which means "truth-force" or "soul-force." It emphasizes the power of truth and moral courage in confronting oppression. Non-violent resistance calls for love, forgiveness, and compassion, even towards one's enemies, aiming to transform rather than destroy them.

A key requirement of this philosophy is self-discipline which means the ability to remain calm, patient and non-reactive even under provocation. Practitioners must be willing to suffer without retaliation, trusting that justice will ultimately prevail through peaceful means. This approach also requires faith in humanity, believing that moral pressure can awaken the conscience of society and bring about change.

Various techniques are used in non-violent resistance. These include peaceful protests, marches, and sit-ins, which help raise awareness and gather public support. Boycotts and strikes are employed to exert economic and social pressure on unjust institutions. Civil disobedience, where individuals deliberately break unjust laws, is a form of direct action that highlights injustice. Symbolic acts, speeches, and creative expression are also important tools for inspiring and mobilizing people. Non-violent resistance may also involve non-cooperation, such as refusing to pay unfair taxes or withdrawing from oppressive systems. In addition, legal and political advocacy is also used to challenge injustice through courts and government channels.

In essence, non-violent resistance is not passive it is a deliberate, courageous, and active struggle for justice. It seeks to create lasting change not through force, but through moral authority, appealing to the conscience of both the oppressors and the wider society.

## **V. Advantages of Non-Violence**

The advantages of non-violence are manifold. Most importantly, it avoids the tragic loss of human life and the destruction of communities that violent conflict often entails. It is a sustainable approach that seeks justice and reconciliation rather than mere victory. Non-violence empowers individuals and communities to participate in change, fostering democratic values and mutual respect. By addressing the root causes of a conflict such as inequality, oppression, or misunderstanding, non-violent methods are more likely to result in long-term peace than temporary suppressions achieved through force.

Non-violent resistance offers a major advantage by preventing loss of life and minimizing destruction. Unlike armed struggle, it avoids bloodshed and protects both protesters and opponents from physical harm. This peaceful approach reduces the risk of civil war, mass casualties, and long-term societal trauma. Non-violence also preserves public infrastructure and economic stability, allowing societies to recover and rebuild more easily. By focusing on moral strength rather than force, it wins greater sympathy from the public and international community, increasing pressure on oppressive regimes. Ultimately, non-violent movements can lead to more lasting and humane solutions with fewer harmful consequences.

Non-violent resistance helps build sustainable and just peace by addressing injustice without causing further harm. Unlike violent methods that often deepen divisions and create cycles of revenge, non-violence encourages dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual understanding. It promotes justice by challenging unfair systems through peaceful means, allowing space for reforms rather than destruction. By respecting human rights and the dignity of all, non-violent movements lay the foundation for lasting peace built on trust and inclusion. This approach not only ends oppression but also helps societies heal and unite, making peace more stable, meaningful, and just for future generations.

Another key advantage of non-violent resistance is that it focuses on the root causes of conflict rather than just the symptoms. Instead of using force to suppress unrest, it challenges the underlying injustices such as inequality, discrimination, and political oppression that lead to violence. By peacefully confronting these deep-seated issues, non-violent movements push for lasting structural changes in the society. This approach helps transform unjust systems and promote fairness, rather than simply ending conflict temporarily. As a result, it creates the conditions for long-term peace and justice, ensuring that the problems do not resurface in the future under new forms.

## **VI. Challenges and Limitations**

However, non-violence is not without its challenges. It is often misunderstood as a passive or weak approach, especially in the face of aggressive opponents. It may yield slow results, which can be frustrating in urgent situations. Moreover, those who practice non-violence often face severe repression, imprisonment, or even death, as seen in the lives of Gandhi and Luther Jr. King. Successful non-violent movements require strong leadership, disciplined organization, and a deep collective commitment to ethical principles, which can be difficult to sustain.

A disadvantage of non-violent resistance is that it is often misunderstood as passive or weak. Opponents may see it as a lack of resolve or strength, leading to underestimation of the movement's determination. This perception can delay meaningful responses from authorities or provoke harsher crackdowns, making it harder for the movement to gain momentum or achieve its goals quickly.

Non-violent resistance may also face repression or violence from adversaries, despite its peaceful nature. Oppressive regimes or powerful groups may respond with brutality, arrests, or intimidation to silence dissent. Since non-violent protesters often do not retaliate, they can become vulnerable targets. This can lead to suffering and demoralization within the movement, and it requires great courage, discipline, and resilience from participants to continue.

Non-violent resistance requires strong leadership and collective commitment to succeed. Without clear guidance, unity, and shared discipline, movements can become disorganized or lose direction. Effective leadership is essential to maintain non-violent principles, especially under pressure or provocation. Additionally, widespread participation and trust in the cause are needed; if support weakens, the movement may struggle to sustain momentum or achieve lasting impact.

## **7. Case Studies**

### **7.1 Gandhi's Salt March**

Gandhi's Salt March, launched on March 12, 1930, was a defining moment in the Indian freedom struggle and a powerful display of the true spirit of non-violent resistance. In protest against the British-imposed salt tax, Mahatma Gandhi led a 240-mile march from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, where he symbolically made salt from the sea, breaking the law peacefully. This simple yet bold act mobilized millions across India to engage in civil disobedience without resorting to violence.

The Salt March demonstrated how non-violence could be a disciplined and strategic force capable of challenging colonial power. Gandhi's method united people across caste, class, and region, drawing global attention to the injustice of British rule. Despite arrests and brutal crackdowns, the movement maintained its peaceful character, showcasing moral strength and the power of truth (*satyagraha*). It became a landmark event proving that non-violent resistance could drive political and social transformation.

### **7.2 The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a civil rights activist, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. At that time, Alabama laws mandated that Afro-Americans sit in the back of buses, and if white passengers filled the front section, Black passengers were required to give up their seats.

Following Parks's arrest, local civil rights leaders called for a boycott of the bus system. Approximately 90% of African Americans in Montgomery participated in the boycott, refusing to use the city buses. Then the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed to coordinate the boycott, with Martin Luther King Jr. as its president. The boycott significantly impacted the bus company, as Black riders comprised a large portion of its customer base.

The MIA filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of bus segregation. Thus, in 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was unconstitutional, a landmark decision that ended the boycott. This became a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and highlighted the power of nonviolent resistance.

### **7.3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa was established in December 15, 1995, under the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995. It was established after the end of apartheid and stands as a profound example of non-violent resistance and restorative justice. Led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC was formed to address the atrocities committed during apartheid without resorting to revenge or violence. Instead of punitive justice, it promoted truth-telling, healing, and national unity.

Victims of human rights abuses were invited to share their experiences, while perpetrators could confess their crimes in exchange for amnesty, provided they disclosed the full truth. This transparent and inclusive process allowed the nation to confront its painful past, acknowledge suffering, and lay the foundation for a peaceful future.

The TRC demonstrated that non-violence does not only mean passive resistance; it also means actively engaging in reconciliation and accountability. It shifted focus from retribution to healing, fostering dialogue between former enemies and encouraging forgiveness over vengeance. While not perfect or without critics, the commission prevented a potential cycle of violence and civil war in post-apartheid South Africa. Through this process, South Africa showcased to the world that peaceful conflict resolution is possible, even after decades of systemic oppression and brutality, when truth, empathy, and justice are prioritized.

### **7.4 Pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong**

The recent pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, particularly during the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019–2020 demonstrations, showcased non-violent resistance as a powerful tool against political oppression.

Protesters, largely students and young citizens, used peaceful marches, sit-ins, human chains, and symbolic gestures like holding umbrellas and singing songs to demand greater democratic freedoms and autonomy from Beijing.

Despite facing police crackdowns, tear gas, and arrests, many demonstrators maintained a strong commitment to non-violence. The Umbrella Movement, in particular, drew global attention for its disciplined and organized approach, turning public spaces into forums of peaceful resistance. These protests highlighted how non-violent action can unite citizens, attract international support, and challenge authoritarian systems without resorting to violence.

While the movements did not immediately achieve their political goals, they strengthened civic identity, raised global awareness, and inspired future advocacy efforts. The Hong Kong protests remain a compelling example of how non-violent resistance can mobilize millions, express dissent, and uphold democratic values even in the face of overwhelming power.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In any form of conflict resistance human tendency is a tit-for-tat method with a severe blow to the oppressors. Seemingly it may appear better to solve the conflict but the question here is how long it can sustain solving the conflicts. A non-violent method may appear disadvantage in solving conflicts. However, true championship comes from winning the heart of the opponent and establishing a lasting peace and brotherhood among the people in the society. Thus, non-violence is not just a moral ideal but a practical necessity in resolving the conflicts of our time. It offers a path to peace that respects human dignity, seeks justice, and builds inclusive communities.

In an era where violence often dominates headlines, the quiet strength of non-violence stands as a beacon of hope. It is imperative that governments, educational institutions, and civil society nurture and promote non-violent methods as essential tools for conflict resolution. Only through such collective commitment can we move toward a more peaceful and just world. Through the utilization of non-violent principle Gandhi, Mandela and Martin Luther Jr established a lasting impact which the world has witnessed. Thus a lasting peace, unity and brotherhood are all established by the use of non-violent principles in the resistance against oppressors and it truly becomes a champion of conflict resolution.

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