PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

COURSE CODE: M23PS04DE

Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Discipline Specific Elective Course
Self Learning Material

SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Peace and Conflict Resolution

Course Code: M23PS04DE

Semester - III

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in Political Science
Self Learning Material
(With Model Question Paper Sets)

വിദ്യകൊണ്ട് സ്വതന്ത്രരാവുക

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The MA programme in Political Science offers an advanced study of governmental structures and processes. It combines theoretical frameworks with practical applications, emphasising policy analysis and implementation. The curriculum covers organizational theory, public policy, administrative law, governance ethics, etc. Through the courses, learners gain expertise in public sector management. This programme prepares graduates for leadership roles in government agencies, non-profits, and international organizations, as well as for further academic pursuits. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-10-2025

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BLOCK 1
PROLOGUE TO PEACE STUDIES

UNIT 1

Origin and Evolution of Peace Studies

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the historical evolution of peace thought from ancient, religious, and philosophical traditions to contemporary Peace and Conflict Studies.
- explain the key concepts of negative and positive peace and their relevance in conflict analysis and resolution.
- analyse the contributions of major thinkers and institutions in shaping the field of Peace Studies.
- understand different schools of Peace Studies, including Minimalist, Maximalist, Critical, Feminist, Human Needs, Liberal, and Cosmopolitan approaches.
- critically assess the evolution of peacebuilding practices, including mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, and Track II diplomacy.

Background

The unprecedented destruction of World War I revealed the limitations of traditional diplomacy and intensified demands for new approaches to preventing war, encouraging the development of International Relations and early conflict research. The later horrors of World War II, including genocide and nuclear weapons, further highlighted the need for scientific study of peace, driving efforts to understand the causes of violence and develop effective mechanisms for global security. During the Cold War, fear of nuclear annihilation catalysed the formal institutionalisation of PACS through academic programmes, research institutes, and scholarly publications. These conditions collectively fostered a shift from moral and philosophical reflections on peace to a multidisciplinary, research-oriented field aimed at preventing, managing, and transforming conflict at local, national, and global levels.

Keywords

Negative Peace, Positive Peace, Structural Violence, Peacebuilding, Human Security, Critical Peace Studies

Discussion

This unit traces the origin and evolution of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS), showing how ideas of peace have developed from ancient religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions to today's globally recognised academic field. It explains key concepts like negative and positive peace, examines contributions from major thinkers, movements, and institutions, and highlights how the discipline grew after the world wars into a multidisciplinary study of conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation. The unit outlines different schools of thought, ranging from minimalist approaches focused on ending direct violence to maximalist, critical, feminist, human needs, liberal, and cosmopolitan perspectives that address structural injustice, gender, human security, and global challenges. It also explores the practical applications of PACS, including mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, peace education, and Track II diplomacy, while acknowledging the challenges posed by modern conflicts such as terrorism, identity-based violence, environmental crises, and cyber threats. Ultimately, the study presents PACS as a dynamic, ethical, and globally inclusive discipline dedicated to transforming conflict and promoting justice, equity, and sustainable peace.

❒ Emergence of Peace Studies as multidisciplinary field

Peace studies, as an academic discipline, has roots that stretch back through history, but its formal emergence and evolution are largely tied to the 20th century. Originating from humanity's enduring desire to understand, prevent, and resolve conflict, especially in the aftermath of large-scale wars and social upheaval, the field developed into a multidisciplinary area of study. What began as philosophical and historical reflections on war and peace gradually transformed into a research-oriented academic discipline, with institutional foundations accelerating in the 20th century, particularly after the World Wars. At its core, Peace and Conflict Studies arises from the need to understand, prevent, transform, and resolve violent conflict. Its goal is not merely to oppose war, but to develop sustainable,

dignified, and nonviolent approaches for achieving and maintaining peace.

❒ Significance of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS)

The war, conflict, and violence have deep social, economic, and moral costs (e.g. loss of life, diversion of resources, damage to societies). PACS helps to understand these costs, explore non-violent approaches, and provide tools to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. It proposes that peace is more than absence of war and it involves societal wellness, dignity, justice, and sustained cooperation and welfare. Similarly, conflict is not just overt war but includes systemic, structural, and interpersonal forms. Understanding both peace and conflict together is essential, because they are interlinked: peace without knowing what conflict causes/looks like is incomplete; conflict study without direction toward peace is vacuous.

1.1.1 Origin and Evolution of Peace Studies

❒ Peace rooted in global philosophical, religious traditions

The concept of peace has been central across religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions throughout history. Early human thought rejected war as a natural or divine inevitability, instead envisioning peace as harmony, justice, and the absence of domination. Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, emphasise inner peace, compassion, and social justice, while Indigenous traditions highlight harmony with nature and non-exploitation of the environment. Western religious and philosophical traditions stress goodwill, love, unity, and the cessation of violence, with influences from the Bible, early Christianity, Greek philosophy, and Roman/Medieval ideas of social stability. Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau viewed war as unnecessary and believed social contracts could prevent conflict. Anarchist and pacifist thinkers, including Tolstoy, opposed state power, seeing it as the source of violence, while socialist movements linked peace to economic equality, social justice, and the creation of a classless society. Across these traditions, peace is consistently seen as a condition of justice, harmony, and human well-being—whether within individuals, societies, or with nature.

❒ Ancient wisdom - early ethical foundations

The idea of peace has deep roots in ancient thought and culture. Philosophers like Plato and Thucydides explored the nature of war, justice, and human behaviour, analysing the causes and consequences of conflict within societies. Across cultures, religious and ethical teachings emphasised peaceful coexistence and nonviolence. Figures such as Buddha, Lao Tzu, and early religious leaders promoted principles of compassion, forgiveness,

and harmony, advocating moral ways to prevent and resolve conflict. These early ideas laid the foundational ethical and philosophical groundwork for later reflections on peace, highlighting that the pursuit of justice, order, and human well-being has long been central to human thought.

❒ Enlightenment Ideas

The Enlightenment period played a crucial role in shaping early ideas about peace and conflict. Thinkers such as Comenius advocated for universal knowledge as a pathway to harmony among diverse cultures, while philosophers like Grotius, Hobbes, Kant, and Rousseau laid the conceptual foundations for understanding war, treaties, natural law, and moral constraints on conflict. The end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 marked a turning point in European state relations, prompting new reflections on sovereignty and peace. Enlightenment ideas profoundly influenced the evolution of peace studies by introducing rational, humanistic, and universal principles, encouraging the belief that peace could be achieved through reason, law, education, and the restructuring of social and political systems.

❒ 19th Century Peace Movements

Following the Napoleonic Wars, the 19th century witnessed the rise of organised peace movements in Europe and North America, which laid an important foundation for the later development of peace studies as a discipline. These movements, led by intellectuals, politicians, religious leaders, and eventually working-class associations, sought to study the causes of war while advocating for disarmament, arbitration, and peaceful mediation. Figures such as Bertha von Suttner, whose seminal work Lay Down Your Arms inspired generations of pacifists and influenced Alfred Nobel in creating the Nobel Peace Prize, played crucial roles in institutionalising peace activism. The century also saw the growth of pacifist organisations, international peace congresses, and calls for treaties that would embed conflict resolution within legal frameworks. Through systematic philosophical and moral reflections on the futility of war and the promise of international cooperation, peace increasingly moved from being a moral aspiration to becoming a subject of social, political, and eventually academic inquiry.

The devastating human and material costs of World War I intensified global interest in preventing future wars, highlighting the urgent need for systematic study of peace and conflict. During this period, peace activism was coupled with institutional innovation and academic research. A landmark development was the emergence of International Relations (IR) as a distinct

academic field, focused on promoting harmonious interstate relations. New institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the first chair of peace research at the University of Lyons (1931) marked the formalisation of peace as an academic subject. Intellectual contributions also expanded: psychologists developed the frustration–aggression theory to explain conflict, Mary Parker Follett advanced win-win negotiation models, and social scientists like Sorokin, Richardson, and Wright undertook empirical and statistical studies of warfare. Meanwhile, medical and natural scientists, disturbed by their fields' complicity in war, likened war to a disease requiring both diagnosis and cure.

❒ World War I and the Interwar Period

The horrors of World War II, including the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, provided a moral and intellectual catalyst for the formal establishment of peace studies. The global call of "never again" and fears of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War spurred efforts to develop peace as a scientific discipline. The first known academic peace studies course had been offered at Swarthmore College as early as 1888, but the field gained formal recognition when Manchester College in Indiana launched the first full academic program in 1948. This was followed by significant growth in peace research institutes, academic journals, and programs across Europe, North America, and beyond.

❒ Formal establishment and growth of peace studies in post WWII period

The 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of "peace research" as a systematic and scientific endeavour, aimed at analysing the causes of war and exploring pathways to peace. Key milestones included the establishment of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in 1959, the Journal of Conflict Resolution (1957), and the Journal of Peace Research (1964). Scholars such as Johan Galtung, often regarded as the "father of peace studies," introduced influential concepts like "negative peace" (the absence of violence) and "positive peace" (the presence of justice and social harmony). Alongside Kenneth Boulding and John Burton, Galtung shaped the interdisciplinary character of the field, combining activism with research and setting the stage for practical applications such as mediation, problem-solving workshops, and Track II diplomacy.

❒ Rise of systematic research

Initially focused on preventing war and nuclear conflict, **peace studies** gradually broadened its scope to address a wider range of issues such as human rights, social justice, economic inequality, environmental sustainability, and conflict resolution at interpersonal, societal, and international levels. During the

- Broader focus on social justice, gender, environment, and global reach during cold war

1970s and 1980s, the field expanded beyond traditional concerns of war and security to incorporate themes like gender and peace, structural violence, and the environment, reflecting a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of peace. With the end of the Cold War, peace studies experienced significant global expansion, spreading to universities in the Global South and gaining recognition in both academic and policy-making circles. Key areas such as conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation became increasingly prominent, while international organisations like the United Nations and numerous NGOs began applying peace studies principles directly in conflict zones. Today, peace studies programs and research centres continue to proliferate worldwide, underscoring the universal relevance of peace in an interconnected and complex global context.

- Focus shifted to intrastate conflicts and civil society during post cold war era

The end of the Cold War transformed the focus of Peace and Conflict Studies. With the decline of superpower rivalries, attention shifted to intrastate conflicts, asymmetric warfare, ethnic and identity-based violence, and global terrorism. The discipline expanded to include systemic conflict transformation, intercultural dialogue, and the empowerment of marginalised actors in peace processes. The rise of NGOs such as International Alert, the International Crisis Group, and the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) highlighted the increasing role of civil society in global peacebuilding efforts.

- Emphasis on structural, relational conflict transformation and cultural perspectives

During this era, peacebuilding became a central concept, encompassing disarmament, political reform, reconciliation, and economic recovery. Concepts such as conflict transformation, introduced by scholars like John Paul Lederach, emphasised addressing structural and relational dimensions of conflict rather than simply ending violence. Cultural and religious perspectives were also increasingly integrated, recognising the diverse sources of peace knowledge across societies.

- Multicultural, globally inclusive approaches to peace studies in the 21st century

Since the early 2000s, Peace and Conflict Studies has become a globally recognised academic and practical field, marked by multicultural inclusivity and cosmopolitan perspectives. Moving beyond its largely Western foundations, the discipline now draws upon diverse traditions such as the African principle of Ubuntu ("I am because we are"), Gandhi's satyagraha (truth-force/nonviolence), and Japanese philosophies of flexibility and adaptation. This global orientation enriches the field while reinforcing the importance of cultural diversity in building sustainable peace.

❒ Universities adopt specialised peace programmes; education integrated nationally

Institutional expansion has been remarkable, particularly in Africa, where universities such as Ibadan (Nigeria), Makerere (Uganda), and Cape Coast (Ghana) now host specialised programs in peace and conflict studies. Nigeria even requires undergraduates to undertake basic peace and conflict resolution training, signalling the growing recognition of peace education as essential for national and regional stability.

❒ Applied peace operations, journalism, environmental and health initiatives

Equally significant has been the widening scope of practice. Peace and Conflict Studies now informs Peace Support Operations (PSOs), including peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peace making. It also extends into specialised domains such as peace journalism, environmental conflict management, transitional justice, and peace-related health initiatives. Concepts like Track Five Diplomacy, which integrates peace education with broader conflict resolution, illustrate the blending of academic inquiry with practical engagement.

1.1.2 Major Schools in Peace and Conflict Studies

❒ Diverse theoretical approaches addressing direct and structural violence

Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) has evolved into a diverse and multidimensional field, encompassing a wide range of theoretical perspectives that address both the prevention of direct violence and the deeper structural, social, and cultural causes of conflict. From the Minimalist or Pragmatist school, which emphasises the narrow goal of preventing overt war and achieving negative peace, to the Maximalist or Structuralist approach, which advocates addressing structural and cultural forms of violence to achieve positive peace, the discipline has continually expanded its scope. Contemporary schools of thought further diversify the field: Critical Peace Studies focuses on power, inequality, and structural injustice; Feminist Peace Studies highlights gendered dimensions and the inclusion of women in peace processes; the Human Needs and Human Security School emphasises addressing fundamental human needs to prevent conflict; the Liberal/Neoliberal School prioritises institutions, governance, and democratic mechanisms; and Global or Cosmopolitan Approaches address transnational, environmental, and technological challenges while promoting multicultural and globally inclusive perspectives. Together, these frameworks reflect the complexity of conflict and peace, demonstrating PCS's commitment to both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for achieving sustainable and just peace.

- Focus on preventing direct international violence

The Minimalist, or Pragmatist, school of thought, led by Kenneth Boulding in North America, maintained that Peace and Conflict Studies should concentrate narrowly on preventing direct violence at the international level. Emerging during the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union loomed large, this approach emphasised achieving negative peace, defined as the absence of war. Advocates argued that keeping the field focused on this goal was practical and attainable, cautioning that expanding its scope to broader social or structural issues could weaken its effectiveness.

- Address structural and cultural violence for positive peace

In contrast, the Maximalist, or Structuralist, school, championed by Johan Galtung in Europe, proposed a far-reaching vision for PCS. Galtung highlighted that violence extends beyond armed conflict to include structural and cultural forms embedded in social, political, and economic systems, which perpetuate inequality, exploitation, and injustice. From this standpoint, achieving peace requires addressing these deeper forms of violence, promoting human rights, and tackling global challenges such as poverty and environmental degradation. This focus on positive peace, the presence of justice and equity, has profoundly shaped contemporary peace research and practice, even though debates between Minimalist and Maximalist approaches continue.

- Challenge inequality, empower marginalised groups for justice

Critical Peace Studies / Emancipatory School focuses on power, inequality, and structural injustice as the root causes of conflict. Drawing on postcolonial theory, feminist perspectives, and critical theory, it seeks to empower marginalised groups and challenge dominant social, political, and economic structures to achieve more just and equitable peace.

- Gendered perspectives; meet fundamental human needs

Feminist Peace Studies highlights the gendered dimensions of conflict, emphasising how violence disproportionately affects women and children. It advocates for inclusive peace processes and actively promotes women's participation in negotiation, decision-making, and broader peacebuilding efforts. Human Needs / Human Security School underscores the importance of meeting fundamental human needs, such as security, identity, recognition, and participation, to prevent and transform conflict. This approach closely aligns with conflict transformation theories, aiming to address the underlying social grievances that drive violence.

❒ Institutions, governance, and global inclusive strategies

Liberal / Neoliberal School emphasises the role of institutions, law, and governance as stabilising mechanisms. It promotes democracy, human rights, and economic interdependence as key tools to prevent conflict and maintain peace within and between societies. Global / Cosmopolitan Approaches expand the scope of peace studies to address transnational, environmental, and technological challenges, including climate change, cyber conflict, and pandemics. This school advocates a multicultural, globally inclusive perspective that moves beyond Western-centric paradigms, emphasising cooperation and shared responsibility in an interconnected world.

1.1.3 Contemporary Nature and Trends in Peace Studies

❒ Interdisciplinary study of complex conflict dynamics

Peace Studies today is inherently interdisciplinary, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict and peace. It draws insights from political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, economics, international relations, philosophy, law, and religious studies, among others. Even natural sciences contribute, especially in areas such as environmental conflict, public health, and the impact of technology. This broad intellectual foundation allows scholars and practitioners to analyse the causes, dynamics, and consequences of conflict while designing effective strategies for sustainable peace.

❒ Emphasis on mediation, negotiation, and nonviolent strategies

A practice-oriented approach is central to contemporary Peace Studies, emphasising the connection between theory and action. Methods such as mediation, negotiation, dialogue, peacebuilding workshops, and community-level reconciliation are widely used. The field prioritises non-violent strategies, including conflict prevention, management, transformation, and resolution, over coercive or military responses, ensuring that academic research informs real-world peacebuilding efforts.

❒ Integrate non-Western and indigenous peace traditions

Contemporary Peace Studies has embraced decolonisation and inclusivity, seeking to re-centre non-Western perspectives and value indigenous approaches to peace. Concepts such as Ubuntu in Africa, Satyagraha in India, and Buen Vivir in Latin America have enriched the discipline with diverse philosophical and cultural insights. This shift challenges earlier Western-centric biases and promotes multicultural perspectives in both scholarship and applied peacebuilding.

Peace education has become a cornerstone of the discipline, equipping individuals, communities, and institutions with the

❒ Skills for nonviolent conflict resolution and culture of peace

skills necessary for non-violent conflict resolution, intercultural understanding, empathy, and the cultivation of a culture of peace. Initiatives are implemented across schools, universities, grassroots organisations, and international institutions, fostering long-term capacity for peacebuilding.

❒ Various peace approaches addressing systemic and emerging conflicts

Contemporary Peace Studies incorporates diverse theoretical approaches, including conflict transformation, mediation, reconciliation, and critical peace studies that address systemic and structural injustices. Scholars explore varying conceptions of peace, such as liberal peace, sustainable peace, and everyday peace, reflecting different levels and practices of societal harmony. The field has expanded to address emerging domains and global challenges, including cyber conflict, online radicalisation, environmental resource disputes, maritime and space security, climate change, pandemics, migration, terrorism, and growing socio-economic inequalities. These developments highlight the evolving nature of conflict in the 21st century and underscore the need for adaptive, holistic peacebuilding strategies.

❒ Multidisciplinary, multilevel, ethical, and nonviolent focus

Characteristics of Peace and Conflict Studies further define the contemporary nature of the discipline. PCS is recognised as a distinct academic field defined by its subject matter, the study of human conflict and its peaceful resolution, rather than by a single methodology. Its defining features include a focus on root causes, addressing structural inequalities to promote justice; multidisciplinary approaches drawing on insights from multiple fields; multilevel analysis, examining micro, meso, macro, and global dimensions of conflict; and a global, multicultural outlook, incorporating peace traditions from around the world. PCS combines analytic and normative dimensions, linking empirical research with ethical concerns for justice and nonviolence, while integrating theory and practice to inform applied peacebuilding. Its commitment to nonviolent transformation prioritises peaceful means to resolve and transform conflicts at all levels.

❒ Shift from preventing war to promoting justice and inclusivity

Overall, contemporary Peace Studies emphasises a shift from merely preventing war to actively promoting peace, justice, and inclusivity. It blends theory and practice, values cultural diversity, and continuously adapts to address both traditional and emerging forms of conflict, making it a globally relevant and ethically grounded field.

1.1.4 Challenges, Limitations and Prospects

❒ Fragile peace, evolving conflicts, non-state actors, global dynamics

Even when treaties are signed or peace institutions are established, peace often remains fragile due to underlying ethnic, religious, and geopolitical tensions. The rise of non-state violence, asymmetric warfare, terrorism, and identity-based conflicts has further complicated existing frameworks, which were largely designed with state-centric models in mind. As the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies continues to expand, it faces the challenge of keeping its theories, methods, and teaching relevant to these changing realities. New forms of conflict, shaped by non-state actors, identity politics, environmental pressures, and other global dynamics, demand that the field adapt its institutions and theoretical tools beyond the traditional post-World War II frameworks.

❒ Dynamic, interdisciplinary, globally relevant, ethically grounded discipline

The origin and evolution of Peace and Conflict Studies reflect humanity's enduring quest to understand, prevent, and transform conflict while promoting justice, equity, and sustainable peace. From ancient philosophical and religious reflections on nonviolence to the Enlightenment's rational approaches, through 19th-century peace movements, the catastrophic experiences of the World Wars, and the institutionalisation of peace research in the post-1945 period, the field has continually expanded in scope, methodology, and application. Contemporary Peace Studies integrates diverse theoretical perspectives, interdisciplinary approaches, and global, multicultural insights, addressing both traditional and emerging forms of conflict, from structural violence and gender inequality to cyber, environmental, and transnational challenges. While the discipline has made significant strides in linking research with practice, fostering inclusive peacebuilding, and cultivating a culture of nonviolence, it continues to face challenges posed by evolving global conflicts, fragile peace arrangements, and complex socio-political dynamics. Ultimately, Peace and Conflict Studies remains a dynamic, ethically grounded, and globally relevant field, committed to advancing human well-being and creating societies capable of transforming conflict into sustainable and just peace.

Summarised overview

Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) emerged as both a scholarly and practical response to humanity's recurring struggles with war, violence, and injustice. While the philosophical and religious roots of peace thought can be traced back to ancient and Enlightenment traditions emphasising justice, compassion, and rational order, the 19th century marked the rise of organised peace movements advocating disarmament, arbitration, and international cooperation. The devastation of World War I institutionalised early academic interest in peace, leading to developments in International Relations and conflict analysis. Thinkers such as Mary Parker Follett and Sorokin contributed early theoretical models, while institutions like the Carnegie Endowment and university peace chairs formalised the study of peace.

Following World War II, the horrors of genocide and nuclear warfare catalysed the formal establishment of peace studies as a distinct academic discipline. The Cold War years saw rapid institutional growth with programs, journals, and research institutes emerging worldwide. Scholars like Johan Galtung advanced key concepts such as negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (presence of justice), while Kenneth Boulding and John Burton developed complementary approaches to mediation and conflict resolution. The field's scope expanded to include issues beyond war prevention, such as human rights, gender, structural inequality, and environmental concerns, while also developing practical applications like Track II diplomacy, problem-solving workshops, and reconciliation initiatives.

In the post-Cold War and 21st century era, PACS has globalised, incorporating diverse traditions such as Ubuntu, Gandhian nonviolence, and Buen Vivir into its frameworks. Contemporary peace studies emphasise inclusivity, decolonisation, and interdisciplinarity, addressing emerging global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, migration, cyber conflict, and pandemics. Schools of thought now range from minimalist pragmatism, which prioritises the prevention of direct violence, to maximalist structuralist and critical approaches that address systemic injustice, human security, and global interdependence. While the field continues to face challenges from fragile peace settlements, asymmetric warfare, and identity-based violence, it remains a dynamic and ethically grounded discipline committed to transforming conflict and advancing sustainable peace.

Self-Assessment questions

1. What historical, religious, and philosophical traditions contributed to the early development of peace thought?
2. What role did 19th-century peace movements play in shaping peace studies?
3. How did World War I contribute to the institutionalisation of peace research?
4. In what ways did World War II accelerate the formal emergence of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS)?
5. What major contributions did Johan Galtung make to the field, and how do they shape contemporary peace research?
6. What key institutions helped establish peace studies as an academic discipline during the 20th century?
7. How does Feminist Peace Studies contribute to understanding conflict and peacebuilding?
8. Identify major contemporary challenges facing Peace and Conflict Studies in the 21st century.

Assignments

1. Why were 19th-century peace movements significant in the institutionalisation of Peace Studies as a discipline?
2. How did World War I change the global conversation about peace and conflict resolution?
3. How did the catastrophic experiences of World War II and the atomic bombings accelerate the formalisation of Peace Studies?
4. Why is Johan Galtung often considered the "father of Peace Studies," and how do his concepts of negative and positive peace continue to shape the field?
5. Compare and contrast the Minimalist (Pragmatist) and Maximalist (Structuralist) schools of thought in Peace Studies. Which do you find more convincing?
6. In what ways did peace research in the 1960s–1980s expand beyond the prevention of war to include issues of justice, gender, and environment?
7. Why did the end of the Cold War shift attention from interstate to intrastate and identity-based conflicts?
8. How does Critical Peace Studies differ from earlier schools, and why is its focus on power and structural injustice important?

9. How does the Human Needs / Human Security approach deepen our understanding of conflict prevention compared to traditional state-centric models?
10. Why is interdisciplinarity essential in Peace Studies, and how do disciplines like psychology, sociology, and environmental science enrich the field?

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5. John, M. S. (2006). Feminism and Peace Studies: Taking Stock of a Quarter Century of Efforts. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 13(2), 151-172.

Suggested Reading

1. Confortini, C. C. (2010). Feminist Contributions and Challenges to Peace Studies. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Boulding, K. E. (1978). *Stable Peace*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
3. Boulding, K. E. (1986). Peace, Justice, Freedom, and Competence. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 21(4), 519-533.
4. "Concept of Peace in Peace Studies: A Short Historical Sketch." (n.d.). Hiroshima University, Heiwa (Peace) Studies. *Concept of Peace in Peace Studies*. Hiroshima: Heiwa Program.
5. Bradshaw, G. J., & Lötter, C. (2019). Re-Evaluating Burton's Human Needs Approach from Critical Theory Perspectives. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 24(1), Article 6.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 2

Positive and Negative Peace

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the distinction between negative peace and positive peace as conceptualised by Johan Galtung.
- describe structural and cultural violence and their roles in obstructing lasting peace.
- analyse the contributions of Kenneth Boulding to peace research and compare his framework with Galtung's.
- critically evaluate the limitations and criticisms of Galtung's broad conceptualisation of peace.
- explore how conflict transformation, human needs theory, and peacebuilding initiatives support positive peace.
- apply peace concepts to real-world contexts, including diplomacy, governance, and community development.

Background

The conceptual foundations of positive and negative peace emerged as peace research sought to move beyond traditional understandings of peace as merely the cessation of war. While earlier thinkers such as Jane Addams and Martin Luther King Jr. recognised that genuine peace requires the presence of justice, it was Johan Galtung who systematically formalised the distinction. His work broadened the scope of peace studies by shifting attention from direct, physical violence to deeper forms of structural and cultural violence embedded within social, political, and economic systems. This re-conceptualisation challenged conventional, state-centric approaches to peace by arguing that lasting stability depends not only on halting armed conflict but also on transforming the institutions and cultural norms that produce inequality, exclusion, and oppression. Kenneth Boulding and other scholars further enriched the debate by emphasising co-operative relationships, systemic stability, and the fulfilment of basic human needs as

essential for sustainable peace. In contemporary contexts, this expanded understanding of peace underpins conflict transformation and peacebuilding initiatives that integrate justice, social reform, and good governance, demonstrating that achieving durable peace requires addressing both visible violence and its underlying causes.

Keywords

Negative Peace, Positive Peace, Structural Violence, Cultural Violence, Direct Violence, Conflict Transformation, Human Needs, Peacebuilding

Discussion

This unit explores the distinction between negative peace, the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, the presence of justice, equality, and social harmony, as conceptualised by Johan Galtung and further developed by scholars like Kenneth Boulding, John Burton, and John Paul Lederach. It explains how structural and cultural violence obstruct lasting peace, highlights debates on the scope and limitations of Galtung's framework, and compares alternative perspectives such as Boulding's idea of stable peace. The study also examines how concepts like conflict transformation, human needs theory, and institutional peacebuilding contribute to achieving positive peace. By linking theory to practice through examples like the Global Peace Index, it shows that sustainable peace requires not only ending violence but also addressing root causes of conflict through justice, equity, and resilient governance.

❒ Positive and negative peace: A general background

The concepts of positive peace and negative peace are widely attributed to Johan Galtung, the pioneering Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher, yet the ideas behind them have roots that predate his work, shaped by multiple thinkers across history. Negative peace refers to the absence of direct or physical violence, essentially the cessation of war or violent conflict. Positive peace, on the other hand, encompasses the presence of justice, equality, and social structures that prevent violence from arising, addressing underlying causes such as structural inequality, oppression, and social injustice. Importantly, peace does not imply the total absence of conflict or differing opinions; rather, it involves the absence of violent conflict and the ability to manage disagreements constructively. In this sense,

conflicts may still occur, but they unfold through dialogue, negotiation, and nonviolent means, fostering cooperation, mutual understanding, and sustainable harmony.

1.2.1 Early Ideas

Jane Addams (1860–1935), the renowned social reformer and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, articulated concepts akin to positive and negative peace long before Galtung. In her 1907 work *Newer Ideals of Peace*, she argued that peace was "no longer merely the absence of war," and as early as 1899, she emphasised that defining peace solely as the absence of conflict was insufficient. Scholars like Berenice A. Carroll and Clinton F. Fink note that Addams used the notion of "negative peace" to critique narrow, traditional understandings and to advocate for a broader vision encompassing social justice and human well-being—principles closely aligned with what would later be termed positive peace. Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) articulated this distinction prior to Galtung. In his 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, King criticised "negative peace," understood as the mere absence of tension, and called instead for a "positive peace," characterised by the active presence of justice. He emphasised that a society may appear peaceful yet remain deeply unjust, highlighting that true peace requires addressing systemic inequalities.

❒ Peace includes social justice, not just war cessation

1.2.2 Johan Galtung's Contribution: Positive and Negative Peace

Primarily as a response to Galtung, the focus of peace research shifted from eliminating direct violence (negative peace) to eliminating structural violence (positive peace). This structural violence idea drew inspiration from Gandhi's non-violence approach, which targeted the structure of violence itself.

❒ Negative and positive peace

Johan Galtung, widely regarded as the founder of peace studies, formalised and popularised the concepts of negative and positive peace, providing a foundational framework for Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS). In his influential 1969 article *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,* he introduced the foundational concepts of positive and negative peace, which have profoundly shaped the study of peace and conflict. He differentiated between two types of peace:

❒ Negative and positive peace in the context of peace and conflict studies

❒ Absence of direct violence

Negative Peace: This refers to the absence of direct violence, such as war or physical aggression. While it marks a halt to hostilities, it does not address the deeper causes of conflict. Galtung defined negative peace as the absence of direct violence, such as war or physical aggression. While necessary, negative peace alone is insufficient for achieving lasting peace because it does not address underlying causes of conflict. That leads to the conceptualisation of positive peace.

❒ Justice, equality, structural and cultural nonviolence

Positive Peace: Positive peace goes beyond merely ending violence; it embodies social justice, equality, and harmonious relationships. It seeks to eliminate structural and cultural violence—systemic forms of oppression that prevent people from meeting their basic needs—and to create conditions that promote long-term societal well-being. By fostering restorative relationships, equitable social systems, and cooperative coexistence, positive peace is more durable and sustainable than the mere absence of direct violence. Johan Galtung expanded the concept to include structural violence, a framework that Wiberg noted became firmly embedded in peace research despite earlier critiques of its abstract nature. Unlike negative peace, which can be achieved through ceasefires or armed deterrence, positive peace requires proactive social measures, such as human rights education, disarmament programs, and community-based conflict resolution. Lasting peace thus depends on addressing structural inequalities, promoting justice, and maintaining systemic interventions to prevent future violence.

❒ Peaceful conflict transformation

Achieving peace is important in a conflict situation. However, Galtung viewed conflict itself as natural and even necessary for societal growth and change; the real problem lies in violent conflict, where disagreements escalate into physical harm. Hence, he emphasised that societies should transform conflicts peacefully through dialogue, mediation, mutual understanding, and respect for diverse opinions, rather than suppressing or eliminating conflict. His concept of the two forms of justice becomes relevant here.

❒ Structural violence elimination for lasting peace

Enduring peace depends on proactive measures that transform societal structures, resolve underlying causes of conflict, and foster an environment conducive to well-being. This distinction between negative and positive peace underpins modern peace research and continues to guide both academic inquiry and practical approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

❒ Expanded violence typology – Direct, structural, cultural, time violence

Johan Galtung sought to project positive peace as a higher ideal than negative peace. He argued that peace research must move beyond merely reducing direct violence to understanding the conditions for preventing violence in its totality. Galtung significantly expanded the scope of peace by introducing the concept of structural violence (violence inherent in unequal social structures, inspired by Gandhi's focus on non-violence against structures). This shifted the central concern of peace research from negative peace (elimination of direct violence) to positive peace (elimination of structural violence).

❒ Galtung and typology of violence

Furthermore, Galtung later expanded the typology of violence to include cultural violence (aspects of culture used to justify direct and structural violence) and time violence, alongside direct violence and structural violence. This broad scope, while comprehensive, made the achievement of positive peace seem "more illusory," leading Galtung to conclude that positive peace is the best protection against violence and that prevention is the best cure.

❒ Positive peace over negative peace

In essence, Galtung's key insight is that negative peace stops violence, whereas positive peace builds a just and harmonious society that prevents violence from recurring, making it both a goal and a process for sustainable human coexistence.

1.2.2.1 Structure Oriented Explanation of Violence and Peace

❒ Address systemic inequality and oppression

Adequate understanding of violence is essential to define peace. Galtung shifted peace research from an actor-oriented perspective, which focused on the visible actions of individuals, groups, or states, such as war, assault, or aggression, and defined peace merely as the absence of such violence, to a structure-oriented approach. He argued that violence also exists when social, political, or economic systems systematically deny people access to basic needs and opportunities, even without direct physical harm. This he termed structural violence. In addition, cultural violence refers to societal norms, ideologies, or beliefs that justify or legitimise harm. From this standpoint, peace is not simply the cessation of hostile actions but requires transforming systemic arrangements that perpetuate inequality and oppression. Thus, the concept of peace evolved from a narrow absence of violence to a broader condition encompassing justice, equity, and well-being.

❒ Introduction of cultural violence

Since the 1980s, Galtung expanded the concept of peace to include dimensions of social cosmology, culture, and ecology. He critiqued prevailing peace theories, arguing that the traditional Roman notion of "pax" primarily serves to protect the interests of the powerful and maintain the status quo. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of peace, Galtung introduced the concept of cultural violence in 1990, defined as aspects of culture that justify or legitimise direct and structural violence. He described cultural violence as "avoidable insults to basic human needs," adding it as a third category alongside direct and structural violence.

❒ 1996 typology – Multi-dimensional peace: social, cultural, ecological

In his 1996 typology of the causes and effects of violence, Galtung further refined his framework by identifying six spheres and five types of violence: nature, person/direct, structural/indirect, cultural, and time-related violence. Within this framework, negative peace is understood as the absence of all these forms of violence, while positive peace represents a more comprehensive state, encompassing harmony with nature, direct, structural, and cultural aspects. By incorporating social, cultural, and ecological dimensions, Galtung emphasised that while negative peace may offer temporary respite, positive peace provides the only sustainable, long-term protection against violence, reinforcing his principle that "prevention is the best cure."

1.2.2.2 Critical Theorists on Galtung's Views

❒ Critical theorists' view

Critical theorists raised concerns about Galtung's broader definitions of peace and violence. They argued that by including structural and cultural forms of violence, the concept becomes too wide and vague, making it hard to measure or use consistently in research. Some critics pointed out that if almost all forms of inequality or injustice are labelled as violence, the term loses clarity. Others felt that Galtung's idea of peace as the full integration of human society was too idealistic and didn't reflect the complex realities of power, politics, and conflict. In short, while Galtung's approach was ground breaking in moving from focusing on individual actions to structural factors, critics warned that its broad scope could blur the lines between violence, injustice, and conflict, making both theory and practice more complicated.

1.2.3 Kenneth Boulding and Galtungian Framework

❒ Kenneth Boulding overview – Systems perspective; stable peace concept

Kenneth E. Boulding (1910–1993) was an influential economist, systems theorist, and peace researcher whose work significantly shaped the study of peace and conflict. He introduced the concepts of negative and positive peace from a systems and international relations perspective, emphasising the structural and psychological conditions that allow societies and states to coexist without war. Boulding's work focused on creating "stable peace" through cooperation, orderly conflict resolution, and the development of resilient social and political systems.

❒ The Boulding-Galtung Debate

The intellectual debate between Kenneth Boulding and Johan Galtung highlights contrasting perspectives on the scope and focus of peace research, particularly concerning the concepts of negative and positive peace and the inclusion of structural violence. The intellectual relationship between Kenneth Boulding and Johan Galtung was characterised by a debate over the scope and focus of peace research. Boulding criticised Galtung for labelling the study of international peace as merely "negative peace" and for introducing the concept of structural violence, arguing that this forced peace researchers into domains like development studies where they lacked expertise. Conversely, Galtung sought to understand the different forms of violence and how to achieve positive peace even in situations of ongoing conflict, emphasising proactive peacebuilding rather than merely resolving disputes. Ultimately, this debate highlights that the strict separation between negative and positive peace may be overly rigid, and that maintaining attention to both concepts is essential to a comprehensive understanding of peace.

❒ Kenneth Boulding's Contribution

Kenneth E. Boulding elaborated on the distinction between negative and positive peace, emphasising long-term structural stability. He defined negative peace as the absence of war, violence, turmoil, or open conflict. While necessary, this state is often unstable, as adversaries may engage in arms races, trade restrictions, or strategic planning for potential conflict. Boulding's concept of positive peace represents a stable and harmonious state characterised by orderly conflict resolution, mature relationships, cooperation, and non-violent means of managing disagreements. He described this as "stable peace," where

organised violence is minimised and conflicts are resolved through social systems rather than force. Boulding emphasised that achieving positive peace requires deliberate efforts to build institutions and relationships that sustain stability and prevent the recurrence of violence.

1.2.3.1 Comparing Boulding and Galtung

❒ Different perspectives

Although both scholars developed influential ideas around negative and positive peace, they approached the concepts from different perspectives:

Boulding framed his ideas within systems theory and international relations, focusing on structural and psychological conditions that allow states to coexist peacefully. His emphasis was primarily on interstate stability and cooperation.

Galtung, coming from sociology and peace studies, emphasised structural and cultural dimensions of violence. For him, positive peace includes the absence of social injustices and inequalities, extending the concept beyond interstate relations to societies and communities.

❒ Complementary approaches to peace

Despite these differences, their approaches are complementary. Both recognise that negative peace is temporary or incomplete, and that positive peace involves more than merely the absence of violence. Boulding's focus on stable, cooperative relationships between states aligns with Galtung's emphasis on social justice and structural reform, together offering a multi-layered understanding of peace.

1.2.3.2 Practical Implications of Boulding's framework

❒ Practical Implications of Boulding's framework

Boulding's framework is particularly applicable to diplomacy, international policy, and conflict management at the state level. Galtung's framework, in contrast, informs societal reform, human rights advocacy, and development initiatives. When combined, their approaches provide a comprehensive perspective on peace, addressing both immediate conflict resolution and the creation of long-term conditions for justice, equity, and social harmony.

1.2.4 Expansion of Galtung's Framework of Peace: Contribution of Other Scholars

❒ Scholars extends structural, cultural, social peace dimensions

Several scholars have built upon and complemented Johan Galtung's foundational concepts of negative and positive peace by exploring the social, cultural, and structural dimensions that sustain peace.

❒ Cultural and Social Foundations of Peace

Elise M. Boulding (1920–2010) emphasised the role of civil society, family, education, and women's participation in fostering a "peace culture." Her work highlighted how social and cultural structures form the foundation of positive peace, extending the concept beyond mere absence of violence.

❒ Conflict Transformation

John Burton (1915–2010) focused on the fulfilment of basic human needs, such as identity, recognition, and security, as essential for lasting peace. He advocated problem-solving approaches that address the underlying causes of conflict, aligning closely with the goals of positive peace.

❒ Human Needs and Conflict Resolution

John Paul Lederach (b. 1955) developed the concept of conflict transformation, emphasising relational and structural change to build sustainable and just relationships. His approach goes beyond immediate conflict resolution to address long-term societal stability.

♦ Protracted Social Conflicts and State Fragilit

Edward Azar (1938–1991) introduced the idea of protracted social conflict, pointing to enduring grievances rooted in identity, deprivation, and political exclusion as barriers to positive peace. Similarly, Mary Kaldor (b. 1951) analysed "new wars," emphasising the challenges of weak states and fractured societies, and advocating for rebuilding political legitimacy and civil institutions to achieve lasting peace.

❒ Institutional Peacebuilding

Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1922–2016), in his 1992 Agenda for Peace, emphasised post-conflict peacebuilding through institutional reform, development, and human rights protection. His work reflected the broader aims of positive peace by integrating social justice, governance, and institutional stability.

Building on Galtung's insights, scholars like Benjamin Jakubowski highlight that peace is a dynamic, ongoing process rather than a fixed state. Collectively, these contributions extend Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace:

❒ Dynamic Conception of Peace

while negative peace addresses the absence of direct violence, positive peace focuses on structural, relational, and cultural factors that create conditions for enduring stability, justice, and societal harmony.

1.2.5 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) on Negative Peace and Positive Peace

❒ Negative peace and absence of violence; positive peace and long-term stability

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), negative peace is defined as the absence of violence or the fear of violence. It describes a situation where people are not experiencing wars, conflicts, or other forms of physical harm. In other words, negative peace exists when there is no active fighting, no threats, and no violent incidents. For example, a country where citisens are free from armed conflict and direct harm can be considered to have negative peace. However, negative peace does not imply that a society is ideal, stable, or just—it merely indicates that violence is currently absent.

❒ Global Peace Index

The Global Peace Index (GPI), developed by the IEP, is a tool used to assess and rank countries based on their levels of peace, focusing primarily on negative peace. It evaluates factors such as conflicts, crime rates, and security conditions to provide a snapshot of a country's current state of safety. While the GPI is useful for identifying which countries are more peaceful and which face higher levels of violence, it does not provide guidance on how to strengthen or sustain peace over the long term.

❒ Focus on structures, governance, human rights

Positive peace, in contrast, goes beyond simply the absence of violence. It examines the underlying conditions that promote long-term peace and social stability. Positive peace involves addressing structural and cultural factors that support peaceful coexistence, such as good governance, equitable social systems, access to education, economic opportunity, and respect for human rights. Rather than only measuring the lack of violence, positive peace focuses on creating the conditions that prevent conflict from arising in the first place.

❒ Guides sustainable peace strategies and solutions

The significance of positive peace lies in its ability to guide strategies and solutions for sustainable peace. While tools like the GPI reveal where violence is absent, positive peace helps societies understand and address the root causes of conflict and instability. By focusing on the structural, social, and cultural

foundations of peace, it ensures that peace is not just temporary but durable and resilient.

In essence, negative peace is about the absence of violence, while positive peace emphasises building and maintaining the conditions for lasting peace. The GPI provides a measure of negative peace, whereas positive peace offers a framework for understanding how to create and sustain peaceful societies, particularly in regions still facing social or structural challenges.

❒ Negative Vs positive peace

1.2.6 Positive Peace vs. Negative Peace: A Comparative Summary

The concepts of *positive peace* and *negative peace*, first articulated by Johan Galtung, remain central to the study and practice of Peace and Conflict Studies. While negative peace refers to the mere absence of direct violence or armed conflict, positive peace encompasses the deeper presence of justice, equity, and harmonious social relations. Understanding this distinction is crucial because peace is not simply the silencing of guns but the creation of conditions that sustain human dignity, address structural inequalities, and foster long-term stability. A comparative analysis of these two dimensions highlights their interdependence, revealing why sustainable peace requires moving beyond the cessation of violence to the proactive building of inclusive, just, and resilient societies.

❒ Comparison of positive and Negative Peace

1.2.6.1 Negative Peace: The Absence of Violence

Negative Peace is defined simply as the absence of direct violence, such as war, physical aggression, or armed conflict.

❒ Negative peace being absence of violence

Key Feature: The cessation of active hostilities (e.g., ceasefires, peacekeeping operations).

Focus: Symptom control—addressing the visible fighting without tackling the underlying causes like injustice or inequality.

Limitation: It offers short-term or fragile stability and can mask deep societal problems. Examples include ceasefires or authoritarian regimes that maintain order through fear. It does not guarantee justice or prevent a future relapse into conflict.

1.2.6.2 Positive Peace: The Presence of Justice and Equity

❒ Positive peace being social justice, cooperation, reconciliation etc.

Positive Peace is a comprehensive state that goes beyond merely stopping violence. It is the presence of social justice, equality, and harmonious social relations, allowing societies to truly thrive.

Core Components:

Social Justice and Equity: Fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and human rights, addressing systemic inequalities.

Structural and Cultural Nonviolence: Eliminating oppression and discrimination embedded in social and political institutions.

Cooperation and Integration: Fostering mutual respect, trust, and collective problem-solving among individuals and groups.

Dialogue and Reconciliation: Using nonviolent conflict resolution, restorative practices, and understanding between conflicting groups.

Sustainable Development: Addressing root causes like poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

Better well-being, economic performance, resilience, inclusivity.

Resilience and Capacity Building: Strengthening institutions to manage conflict and prevent a relapse into violence.

Transformational Power: Societies with high levels of positive peace enjoy better economic performance, higher well-being, greater resilience to crises, and lower corruption, it is likened to preventive medicine for society.

Practical Examples: Equal rights, access to quality education and healthcare, inclusive economic policies, and transparent governance.

1.2.7 Prospects

❒ Transforming structures, fostering justice, long-term stability

Peace Studies is a vital interdisciplinary field centred on the distinction between Negative Peace (the mere absence of direct violence) and Positive Peace (the comprehensive presence of justice, equality, and harmonious social relationships). Inspired by Johan Galtung, the field asserts that true, sustainable peace requires actively transforming the structures that generate conflict. This transformation involves more than just halting hostilities; it demands addressing the root causes of violence, such as structural inequalities, unmet human needs, and historical grievances. By focusing on concepts like conflict transformation, transitional justice, and nonviolence, Peace Studies provides the essential framework for building societies that are not only free from war but are fundamentally resilient, just, and conducive to the long-term well-being and dignity of all people.

Summarised Overview

The concepts of negative and positive peace, popularised by Johan Galtung, differentiate between the mere absence of violence and the presence of justice, equality, and social harmony. Negative peace refers to the cessation of direct violence, such as wars or physical aggression, but does not address underlying social, economic, or political inequalities. Early thinkers like Jane Addams and Martin Luther King Jr. emphasised that true peace requires more than stopping hostilities; it involves creating conditions that prevent structural and systemic injustices from fostering new conflicts.

Galtung's framework expanded peace research by introducing structural and cultural violence, highlighting that societal systems and cultural norms can perpetuate harm even without direct physical violence. Scholars like Kenneth Boulding, Elise Boulding, John Burton, and John Paul Lederach further developed these ideas, emphasising conflict transformation, the fulfillment of human needs, and the creation of stable social systems. Practical applications include fostering equitable governance, human rights protections, inclusive institutions, and proactive conflict resolution strategies.

Modern peace studies distinguish between negative peace as the temporary absence of violence and positive peace as a sustainable, justice-oriented societal condition. Tools like the Global Peace Index measure negative peace, while positive peace requires addressing structural inequalities, promoting social cohesion, and building resilient institutions. Ultimately, achieving positive peace demands ongoing societal transformation, dialogue, and systemic interventions to ensure long-term stability, well-being, and harmony within communities and between nations.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What is structural violence, and how is it related to positive peace?
2. What is cultural violence? Explain with suitable examples.
3. Why is positive peace considered more sustainable than negative peace?
4. How do economic inequality and marginalisation contribute to the absence of positive peace?
5. Why is the mere absence of direct violence insufficient for lasting peace?
6. How can policies addressing poverty contribute to positive peace?
7. Explain the relevance of human rights in the framework of positive peace.
8. Why is the concept of positive peace central to contemporary peacebuilding theories?

Assignments

1. What is the key difference between negative peace and positive peace?
2. How does structural violence differ from direct violence?
3. What is cultural violence, and why did Galtung include it in his framework?
4. Why is negative peace considered insufficient for lasting societal harmony?
5. How do Boulding's ideas on "stable peace" complement or differ from Galtung's positive peace?
6. What role does social justice play in achieving positive peace?
7. How can conflict transformation strategies help build positive peace?
8. Why did critical theorists argue that Galtung's broad definition of peace could be problematic?
9. Why is dialogue and reconciliation crucial for maintaining positive peace?

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Suggested Reading

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3. "Positive and Negative Peace." (n.d.). *BuildingPeaceForum*. (PDF version of Galtung's text)
4. Grewal, B. (2022). Johan Galtung Positive and Negative Peace. *SCIRP References*.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 3

Structural and Cultural Violence

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Define and differentiate between direct, structural, and cultural violence.
- Explain Johan Galtung's concept of the "violence triangle."
- Analyse how structural violence is embedded in social, political, and economic systems.
- Examine how cultural violence legitimises and normalises direct and structural violence.
- Assess the interconnectedness of direct, structural, and cultural violence.
- Critically examine how inequalities based on race, gender, class, caste, and nationality perpetuate harm.

Background

The final stage of any research project involves transforming raw findings and analysis into a coherent, well-structured, and professionally presented research report. This unit focuses on the critical skills needed to organize, document, and refine political science research into a compelling and academically rigorous final product. Students will learn to structure their research reports effectively, master proper citation and referencing techniques, and develop systematic approaches to revision and proofreading that ensure clarity, accuracy, and scholarly integrity.

Political science research reports serve multiple audiences and purposes, from academic assessment to policy recommendations and public discourse. Since the word *report* often refers to a specific form of writing, it is useful to clarify here that the term is being used in a broader sense to include all forms of academic writing, such as theses, dissertations, journal articles, and similar outputs. The ability to communicate research findings clearly and persuasively is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a fundamental skill for political scientists working in academia, government, think tanks,

and civil society organizations. This unit provides the practical tools and theoretical understanding necessary to produce research reports that meet the highest standards of scholarly communication.

Keywords

Structural violence, Cultural violence, Direct violence, Peacebuilding, Systemic oppression, Marginalisation, Intersectionality

Discussion

This unit explains Johan Galtung's concepts of structural and cultural violence, showing how harm is not only caused by visible acts like war or assault (direct violence), but also by systemic inequalities and cultural norms that legitimise injustice. It introduces Galtung's "violence triangle," which links direct, structural, and cultural violence as mutually reinforcing forces that sustain oppression. The study explores how political, economic, and social systems embed inequality (structural violence) and how ideologies, traditions, and beliefs make such harm appear natural or acceptable (cultural violence). Through examples like poverty, racism, patriarchy, caste, and colonial legacies, the unit highlights how violence becomes normalised in society. It also draws on contributions from other scholars, such as Paul Farmer, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Pierre Bourdieu, and bell hooks, who expanded these ideas into fields like health, education, and gender. Ultimately, the unit shows that addressing hidden and systemic forms of violence is essential for sustainable peace, requiring both institutional reform and cultural transformation to build just, inclusive, and equitable societies.

❒ Structural and cultural violence explained

Structural and cultural violence are central concepts in understanding the multifaceted nature of harm and oppression in societies. Introduced by Johan Galtung, these forms of violence reveal that harm is not limited to visible, direct acts such as war, assault, or murder, but can also be embedded in social structures, institutions, and cultural norms. Structural violence refers to systemic inequalities that prevent individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs, including access to

healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, while cultural violence legitimises and normalises both direct and structural violence by embedding discriminatory beliefs, ideologies, and traditions into societal consciousness. By examining these invisible yet pervasive forms of violence, scholars across disciplines, from anthropology and sociology to political theory and peace studies, have highlighted how oppression, marginalisation, and inequality are maintained over time. Understanding these forms of violence is essential for developing comprehensive approaches to peace, as it shifts the focus from merely addressing immediate, observable conflict to transforming the deeper social, political, and cultural roots of harm.

1.3.1 Typology of Violence: Direct Violence, Structural Violence, and Cultural Violence

Peace studies distinguishes between different forms of violence beyond direct physical harm, offering a more nuanced understanding of how harm and injustice operate in societies. One of the foundational thinkers in this field, Johan Galtung, developed the key concepts of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence refers to physical acts such as assault, murder, or war, visible and immediate forms of harm. In contrast, structural violence is embedded in social, political, and economic systems, causing harm by systematically preventing individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs. Cultural violence legitimises both direct and structural violence by embedding harmful ideologies, beliefs, and norms within a society, making these forms of violence appear acceptable or natural. Together, these concepts reveal the often hidden mechanisms through which violence is maintained and normalised.

❒ Direct, structural, and cultural violence

1.3.1.1 Direct violence

It represents behaviours that threaten life itself or diminish an individual's capacity to meet basic human needs. This type of violence is the most visible and readily understood, it includes acts such as killing, maiming, bullying, sexual assault, and emotional manipulation. Direct violence can occur across different levels: at the personal level (e.g., suicide, drug abuse, and self-harming behaviour), the interpersonal level (e.g., gender-based violence such as intimate partner violence, rape, forced marriage, child abuse, and verbal abuse), and the community or societal level (e.g., war, armed conflict, mob violence, terrorism, gang violence, torture, genocide, and state-sponsored violence). Because it is visible and immediate,

❒ Visible harm across personal, interpersonal, societal levels

direct violence tends to receive the most attention in public discourse and policy. People mobilise against war, gender-based violence, or violent crime, yet this focus often only addresses the surface of a much deeper and more systemic problem.

1.3.1.2 Structural Violence

- Invisible, systemic inequality causing harm

Structural violence differs from direct or interpersonal violence in that it is often invisible, normalised, and institutionalised. It is deeply rooted in laws, policies, traditions, and cultural norms that perpetuate inequality and suffering. As Johan Galtung famously noted, structural violence is present "when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations." In other words, it is the gap between what people could achieve and what they actually do, due to unjust structures.

Meaning

In Peace Studies, structural violence refers to harm caused by social structures or institutions that systematically disadvantage individuals and groups, often preventing them from meeting their basic needs or achieving their full potential. This form of violence is termed indirect because it is not inflicted by a clearly identifiable individual but is embedded in the very fabric of society, through its political, economic, and social systems.

- Indirect harm from unequal resource distribution

Indirect harm does not arise from overt physical acts but from systemic barriers and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Unlike direct violence, it is often invisible, normalised, or accepted as "the way things are," making it difficult to recognise without critical analysis. This form of harm is embedded in long-standing institutional practices, norms, and policies that reinforce inequality. Crucially, it is avoidable, as the suffering it causes is not inevitable but the result of human-made decisions and social frameworks.

- Policies and institutions reinforce inequality

The structures that sustain structural violence are deeply rooted in policies and institutions that systematically disadvantage certain groups. They restrict access to essential services such as healthcare, housing, and education while limiting opportunities for wealth-building and upward mobility. These systemic arrangements perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, reinforced by segregation and the denial of access to public goods. Structural violence also manifests through the exploitation of labour and the disempowerment of specific populations,

ensuring that inequality persists. The militarisation of society, whether through heavily armed policing, the protection of state violence from accountability, or the prioritisation of security over social welfare, further entrenches these hierarchies. By legitimising and normalising inequality, structural violence reproduces harm across generations, often without being seen as violence at all.

Its outcomes are wide-ranging and deeply affect social, economic, and political life. Poverty, for example, does not stem from an actual lack of resources but from their unequal distribution, reflecting Gandhi's observation that "poverty is the worst form of violence." Discrimination, whether based on race, gender, class, caste, or nationality, reinforces inequality by restricting access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. Educational disparities perpetuate structural harm by limiting opportunities and reproducing cycles of inequality. Environmental injustices compound these challenges, as marginalised groups are disproportionately exposed to pollution, climate change impacts, and environmental degradation. Similarly, exploitative labour practices, including unsafe working conditions and unfair wages, undermine worker well-being and sustain economic inequality.

❒ Poverty, discrimination, and environmental injustices

Political systems often worsen this marginalisation through voter suppression, underrepresentation, or the exclusion of minority voices. A certain group are systematically excluded from decision-making and representation, weakening their ability to effect change. The suppression of rights, such as denial of housing, voting rights, legal protection, or even citisenship, deepens social exclusion. Mass incarceration and over-policing, disproportionately targeting marginalised populations, further reflect systemic bias and reproduce cycles of violence. Finally, militarisation, evident in the overfunding of military and police institutions at the expense of social services, diverts resources away from community well-being while reinforcing systemic violence and impunity. Collectively, these manifestations show that structural violence not only restricts opportunities but also sustains widespread and long-term harm.

❒ Exclusion, over-policing, and resource diversion

1.3.1.3 Cultural Violence

Violence is not always direct or visible; it can be hidden in the cultural fabric of society, shaping how people perceive, justify, and normalise harm. Johan Galtung introduced the concept of cultural violence to explain how symbols, beliefs, tra-

❒ Hidden, legitimising harm

ditions, and institutions can make structural and direct violence appear legitimate or even necessary. Unlike physical violence, cultural violence operates at a deeper level, subtly influencing values, norms, and worldviews so that inequality, discrimination, and oppression become accepted as natural parts of life. Understanding cultural violence is essential because it reveals how harmful practices and hierarchies are sustained across generations, often without being recognised as violence at all.

❒ Challenging beliefs and promoting peace

Addressing cultural violence is essential for building lasting peace, as it challenges the underlying beliefs and norms that legitimise harm. Strategies for resistance include critically analysing cultural narratives to identify patterns of exclusion and oppression, as well as implementing peace education and awareness programs that challenge harmful beliefs and promote tolerance. Intercultural dialogue and inclusive governance help rebuild trust, foster mutual understanding, and promote equality. Additionally, transforming cultural symbols and practices that sustain inequality is crucial for creating societies where justice and human dignity are respected.

Meaning

Cultural violence refers to aspects of culture, such as religion, ideology, language, art, science, and media, that are used to justify or legitimise direct and structural violence. Coined by Johan Galtung, the concept highlights how cultural norms, values, and symbols can change the "moral colour" of violence, making what would typically be considered wrong appear acceptable, necessary, or even good. Cultural violence is subtle, pervasive, and often internalised, operating below the surface of conscious thought and behaviour.

❒ Embeds harmful ideas, normalises inequality

Cultural violence legitimises and sustains structural violence, perpetuating systems of poverty, inequality, and oppression. It obscures the root causes of suffering, making meaningful change more difficult by rendering violence and injustice invisible or morally acceptable. This form of violence operates by embedding harmful ideas and practices into the symbolic systems of society, justifying harm through religious, ideological, or moral arguments, and normalising inequality by presenting social hierarchies as natural or divinely ordained. Simultaneously, it distorts reality by hiding, minimising, or rationalising suffering and reshapes language to obscure or sanitise harm, as in the use of terms like “collateral damage” instead of “civilian deaths.”

❒ Examples - Religion, race, gender, caste, and media influence

Examples of cultural violence can be seen in many aspects of society, where beliefs, traditions, and narratives legitimise harm and inequality. Religious or ideological justifications for war, such as religious fundamentalism or nationalistic ideologies, often sanctify conflict. Racist ideologies that promote the superiority of one race over others validate discrimination, while sexism and patriarchal norms normalise male dominance and even domestic violence. Similarly, caste discrimination, particularly prevalent in India, reinforces deeply rooted hierarchies that devalue individuals based on birth. Media portrayals also contribute by stereotyping or dehumanising certain groups, making violence against them appear acceptable. Language and traditions can carry expressions, idioms, or rituals that belittle or exclude marginalised communities, while nationalistic narratives often glorify war, suppress dissent, and create "us vs. them" divisions. Finally, cultural imperialism, rooted in colonial legacies, marginalises indigenous practices and languages, further entrenching systemic inequalities.

❒ Ideologies perpetuate exclusion and harm

The ideologies behind cultural violence are rooted in belief systems that legitimise exclusion, inequality, and harm. Religious extremism and fundamentalism often frame violence as divinely sanctioned, while nationalism and patriotism can be distorted to justify aggression or the exclusion of certain groups. Caste pride, white supremacy, and other racial superiority ideologies reinforce social hierarchies and systemic discrimination. Cultural domination and colonial legacies perpetuate the marginalisation of indigenous practices, languages, and identities. Similarly, demagoguery and authoritarian populism manipulate public sentiment, fostering division and legitimising oppressive structures under the guise of protecting tradition or national unity.

❒ Media, leaders, education, family reinforce violence

Cultural violence is spread through a wide range of agents and institutions that shape beliefs, values, and social norms. Media organisations and social media influencers play a major role in amplifying certain narratives, while political and religious leaders often use their authority to legitimise harmful ideologies. Educational institutions and curricula can reinforce dominant worldviews, while think tanks, lobbyists, and corporate entities shape public opinion and policy in ways that sustain inequality. Families, community leaders, and cultural groups also contribute by passing down traditions and norms that may normalise exclusion or discrimination.

Propaganda, misinformation, suppression, emotional manipulation

These actors rely on various strategies to disseminate cultural violence and ensure its persistence. Misinformation and propaganda are commonly used to distort reality, while academic or pseudo-scientific claims provide an air of legitimacy to harmful ideas. Distraction and emotional manipulation shift attention away from systemic issues, and appeals to tradition, religion, or patriotism make harmful practices seem natural or justified. At the same time, the suppression or distortion of minority voices ensures that alternative perspectives remain marginalised, allowing cultural violence to endure across generations.

1.3.2 Interconnection of Structural and Cultural Violence

Johan Galtung conceptualised the "violence triangle" to illustrate the interconnected nature of direct, structural, and cultural violence, showing how each form is distinct yet deeply interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

❒ Direct Violence and Structural Violence

Direct violence refers to physical or overt harm, such as war, assault, or domestic abuse, and is the most visible form of violence. Structural violence, by contrast, is embedded in social, political, and economic systems, creating and sustaining inequality through mechanisms like poverty, racism, or limited access to healthcare and education. Although often invisible, it produces widespread and enduring harm. Cultural violence consists of the values, beliefs, norms, and ideologies that legitimise and normalise both direct and structural violence, making such harm appear acceptable, natural, or deserved.

❒ Norms and ideologies legitimising harm

Galtung emphasised that these forms of violence are deeply interconnected. Cultural violence legitimises structural violence by embedding inequality within societal values and norms, such as racist or sexist ideologies that justify discriminatory laws. Structural violence, in turn, fosters cultural violence by creating conditions of injustice that give rise to harmful beliefs and attitudes. Together, structural and cultural violence generate environments in which direct violence becomes more likely or is even perceived as a legitimate response to perceived oppression.

❒ Direct, structural, and cultural violence intertwined

Galtung illustrated this dynamic with the historical example of slavery. Africans were forcibly captured, transported, and enslaved, representing massive direct violence. Over time, this system became entrenched as structural violence, with institutionalised racial hierarchies. Simultaneously, cultural violence

emerged in the form of racist ideologies that justified and perpetuated this inequality. Even after slavery ended, the language and narratives used to describe its legacy were sanitised, "discrimination" for structural violence and "prejudice" for cultural violence, reflecting cultural violence in the very way the past is remembered and discussed.

Peacebuilding: Addressing all forms for sustainability

Understanding the relationship between these three forms of violence is crucial for effective peacebuilding. Without addressing the ideological justifications (cultural) and systemic roots (structural) of violence, efforts to end direct violence remain incomplete and unsustainable. Structural violence is often reinforced by cultural violence, including ideologies, beliefs, and values that legitimise or normalise inequality and discrimination. Examples include media portrayals, religious doctrines, national narratives, and cultural traditions that justify or ignore harm inflicted by unjust systems.

❒ Structural violence effects and need for analysis

Structural violence is pervasive yet often invisible. Its effects, poverty, ill health, political exclusion, and inequality, are as damaging as direct violence, even though there may be no single identifiable perpetrator. Understanding and addressing structural violence requires systemic analysis and a sustained commitment to equity, justice, and institutional transformation.

1.3.3 Importance of Understanding Structural and Cultural Violence in Peace Studies

❒ Moves beyond visible conflict

Understanding structural and cultural violence is a cornerstone of modern peace studies because it expands the focus of analysis beyond visible, direct forms of conflict to the deeper, often hidden mechanisms that sustain inequality, oppression, and harm. Traditional approaches to peace and conflict tend to prioritise immediate, observable acts of violence, such as wars, assaults, or riots, while overlooking the underlying social, political, and economic structures that create conditions for such violence to occur. Structural violence, embedded in institutions, policies, and social systems, systematically disadvantages certain groups, restricting access to essential resources like healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Cultural violence, on the other hand, operates through societal norms, beliefs, and ideologies that legitimise or normalise these inequalities, making them appear acceptable or even natural. Without understanding these less visible forces,

efforts to resolve conflicts risk addressing only the symptoms of violence rather than its root causes, leaving societies vulnerable to recurring harm.

Proactive Peacebuilding: Transforming systems and attitudes

By identifying and confronting the underlying sources of structural and cultural violence, peacebuilding can shift from a reactive to a proactive approach. Instead of merely suppressing or managing overt conflict, interventions can focus on transforming the systemic arrangements and societal attitudes that perpetuate injustice. For example, addressing structural violence might involve reforming discriminatory laws, ensuring equitable access to public services, and dismantling economic barriers that sustain cycles of poverty. Addressing cultural violence requires challenging dominant ideologies and social narratives that normalise oppression, such as sexist, racist, or nationalist beliefs, and promoting alternative frameworks that value equality, inclusion, and human dignity. Such comprehensive strategies enable peace efforts to target the foundational causes of conflict, increasing the likelihood of sustainable outcomes rather than temporary cessation of hostilities.

Moreover, tackling structural and cultural violence aligns peacebuilding with the promotion of social justice and human rights. By exposing and reforming the systems and cultural norms that marginalise certain groups, peace efforts become inseparable from broader struggles for equity and inclusion. This approach recognises that lasting peace is not merely the absence of direct violence but the presence of justice, fairness, and societal well-being. It underscores the importance of systemic reform, including changes in governance, legal frameworks, education, and social policy, alongside cultural transformation that reshapes beliefs, values, and behaviours. In essence, understanding and addressing structural and cultural violence equips peacebuilders with the tools to create environments where human potential can flourish, societal relationships are equitable, and violence is less likely to recur. This holistic perspective makes peace both a goal and a process, emphasising prevention, justice, and the long-term cultivation of harmonious societies.

❒ Equity and inclusion for peace and holistic approach

1.3.4 Contributions of Other Scholars

In peace studies, structural violence and cultural violence are foundational concepts introduced by Johan Galtung, which

help explain how violence extends beyond direct physical harm to become embedded in social systems and cultural beliefs. While Galtung provided the initial framework, numerous scholars from different disciplines have expanded, applied, and critiqued these ideas, enriching our understanding of how violence operates in complex and often hidden ways.

❒ Influence of Galtung's framework

❒ Structural violence in global health

Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist and physician, applied Galtung's idea of structural violence to global health. In Pathologies of Power (2003), he argued that poverty, racism, and political marginalisation are not simply disadvantages but forms of violence rooted in institutional structures. These inequalities produce preventable illness and suffering, particularly among the poor, vividly showing how social injustice becomes embodied in physical and mental health outcomes.

❒ Everyday violence and normalised suffering

Nancy Scheper-Hughes, another leading anthropologist, explored structural violence in her influential study Death Without Weeping (1992), which investigated maternal and infant mortality in Brazil. She introduced the concept of "everyday violence" to describe how inequality and suffering are normalised in daily life, particularly among marginalised groups. Along with Philippe Bourgois, she further examined how cultural practices and beliefs can legitimise violence, especially against women and vulnerable populations, showing the close relationship between structural oppression and cultural norms.

❒ Symbolic violence through norms, education

Pierre Bourdieu, though not explicitly engaging with Galtung, contributed to the idea of cultural violence through his concept of symbolic violence. He explained how dominant groups impose their values and norms as legitimate, leading subordinated groups to internalise feelings of inferiority. This subtle but pervasive form of violence operates through education, language, and institutions, reinforcing hierarchies and structural inequality.

❒ Colonialism as structural and cultural violence

Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and political philosopher, powerfully critiqued colonialism and racism as structural and cultural violence. In works such as Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon revealed how colonialism inflicted deep psychological and social harm by dehumanising colonised peoples and undermining their cultures. For Fanon, violence was not only physical but also epistemic and symbolic, shaping identity and consciousness.

❒ Intersection of race, gender, class

Bell Hooks, a renowned feminist thinker, examined how structural violence operates at the intersections of race, gender, and class. Her work emphasised how cultural ideologies, reproduced through media, education, and family structures, perpetuate sexism and racism. By highlighting the role of cultural systems in legitimising oppression, Hooks underscored the interconnected nature of structural and cultural violence.

❒ Gendered violence in Guatemala

Cecilia Menjívar directly employed Galtung's framework in her book Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala. She showed how normalised gender roles, economic marginalisation, and weak legal protections sustain violence against women. Her work demonstrated how structural and cultural factors intertwine, producing environments where violence is both pervasive and invisible.

❒ Patriarchy as structural violence in apartheid

Jacklyn Cock, in her study of militarised apartheid South Africa (1989), applied Galtung's theory to argue that patriarchy itself functioned as structural violence. She revealed how gender hierarchies were institutionalised and reinforced by the political regime, showing how oppression operated not only through militarism but also through deeply embedded social expectations.

❒ Violence absorbed into everyday life

Veena Das, in Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary (2007), explored how communal and political violence in India became absorbed into everyday life. She argued that episodic violence is not exceptional but seeps into memory, social practices, and relationships, blurring the boundary between extraordinary and ordinary violence.

❒ Structural injustice and collective responsibility

Iris Marion Young, a political theorist, introduced the concept of structural injustice in Justice and the Politics of Difference (1990). She emphasised how institutions systematically disadvantage people along lines of race, class, and gender. Expanding on Galtung, she focused on the responsibility to address injustice collectively, arguing that structural harm requires systemic transformation rather than individual blame.

❒ Emerging Themes: Intersectionality, embodiment, normalisation, resistance

Across these contributions, several themes emerge. Many scholars highlight intersectionality, showing how violence operates at the crossroads of race, gender, class, and other identities. Another recurring theme is embodiment, structural and cultural violence are not abstract but lived, shaping physical health, psychological well-being, and daily experiences. Moreover, such violence often becomes normalised or legitimised

through cultural mechanisms, making it difficult to recognise and challenge. At the same time, scholars also emphasise resistance and agency, illustrating how individuals and communities contest and transform oppressive structures.

Broader Applications: Across health, education, environment, gender

These ideas have been applied across diverse fields, including public health, education, environmental justice, conflict studies, and gender-based violence. Collectively, they demonstrate both the adaptability and the enduring relevance of Galtung's concepts, while underscoring the importance of critically engaging with the often hidden dimensions of violence in modern societies.

1.3.5 Prospects

Addressing structural and cultural violence is crucial for building sustainable and meaningful peace. By uncovering the hidden mechanisms of harm embedded in societal institutions and cultural norms, peace studies move beyond short-term conflict management to proactive systemic reform. Efforts to reduce structural violence, through equitable access to resources, legal protections, and social inclusion, must be complemented by initiatives that challenge cultural violence, such as education, awareness, and the promotion of inclusive ideologies. Together, these approaches not only reduce direct violence but also cultivate conditions for justice, equality, and human flourishing. Recognising the interconnectedness of direct, structural, and cultural violence underscores the importance of a holistic approach to peacebuilding, one that emphasises prevention, equity, and long-term societal transformation. Ultimately, understanding structural and cultural violence equips policymakers, scholars, and practitioners with the tools to create societies where oppression is minimised, human potential is nurtured, and peace is both enduring and just.

❒ Holistic peace needs systemic reform

Summarised overview

Structural and cultural violence are forms of harm that go beyond visible acts of physical aggression, encompassing systemic inequalities and deeply embedded societal norms. Structural violence occurs when social, political, and economic systems prevent individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs, creating conditions of long-term harm such as poverty, discrimination, and restricted access to essential services. Direct violence, by contrast, is immediate and observable, including acts such as assault, war, or abuse, but often receives the majority of attention in public discourse. Johan Galtung's framework emphasises that understanding all forms of violence is essential for comprehensive peacebuilding.

Cultural violence operates subtly, embedding harmful ideologies, traditions, and beliefs into the moral and symbolic fabric of society. It legitimises and normalises both structural and direct violence, making social hierarchies, discrimination, and oppression appear acceptable or natural. Examples include racism, sexism, caste discrimination, religious fundamentalism, and media narratives that reinforce inequality. By influencing values and social norms, cultural violence ensures that structural injustices persist and that direct violence is more likely or socially tolerated. Scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Frantz Fanon, and Bell Hooks have further explored how cultural and symbolic mechanisms perpetuate oppression and inequality.

Understanding the interplay between structural and cultural violence is critical in peace studies, as interventions addressing only direct violence fail to resolve the underlying causes of harm. Addressing structural violence requires systemic reforms in law, governance, and access to resources, while tackling cultural violence involves challenging discriminatory ideologies and promoting inclusive values. Together, these approaches foster sustainable peace, social justice, and human flourishing. The study of these concepts equips scholars and practitioners with the tools to analyse and transform societies in ways that reduce oppression, promote equity, and prevent recurring cycles of violence.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How do structural and cultural violence expand the traditional understanding of violence beyond physical harm?
2. What role did Johan Galtung play in developing the concepts of structural and cultural violence?
3. Why is direct violence easier to recognise and address than structural or cultural violence?
4. How can poverty be understood as a form of structural violence?
5. Describe how discriminatory laws contribute to structural violence.
6. Why is cultural violence considered more difficult to identify than direct violence?
7. How does the violence triangle illustrate the relationship among direct, structural, and cultural violence?
8. Why is addressing cultural violence necessary for achieving sustainable peace?

Assignments

1. Define direct, structural, and cultural violence with examples.
2. How does Galtung's "violence triangle" explain the interconnection between different forms of violence?
3. What is the significance of understanding structural violence in peace studies?
4. How does cultural violence legitimise structural and direct violence?
5. What is the relationship between symbolic violence (Bourdieu) and cultural violence?
6. How does intersectionality help us understand structural and cultural violence?
7. Explain the role of political institutions in perpetuating structural violence.
8. Discuss strategies for addressing cultural violence in society.
9. How do colonial legacies contribute to ongoing cultural and structural violence?
10. How can peacebuilding initiatives integrate interventions against both structural and cultural violence?

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1. Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research, 27*(3), 291-305.
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3. Farmer, P. (2003). Pathologies of power: Health, human rights, and the new war on the poor. University of California Press.
4. Farmer, P. (2004). On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below. *Daedalus*, 133(1), 45-66.

Suggested Reading

1. Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
2. Kent, G. (n.d.). Structural Violence. In *StructuralViolenceFestschrift* (University of Hawai‘i).
3. Revisiting Galtung's Framework: Paulson & Tikly (2022). *Working Paper, University of Bristol*.
4. Sharp, G. (1973). *The politics of nonviolent action*. Porter Sargent.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

BLOCK 2
Anatomy of Conflict

UNIT 1

Meaning and Definition of Conflict

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the broad meaning and definition of conflict in human society
- explain the origin and etymology of the term "conflict."
- identify the causes and sources of conflict at personal, social, and structural levels
- describe the nature, characteristics, and dynamics of conflict in human interactions
- classify types and forms of conflict, including direct, structural, cultural, competitive, and disruptive conflicts
- apply knowledge of conflict to real-life scenarios to promote constructive dialogue and social cohesion

Background

Conflict is a fundamental and universal aspect of human interaction, arising whenever individuals or groups perceive their goals, needs, values, or interests to be incompatible. Its roots can be traced to the Latin word conflictus, signifying a clash or collision, which highlights its essence as a meeting of opposing forces. Conflict is not limited to physical confrontation; it encompasses a wide spectrum of disagreements, tensions, and struggles across personal, social, structural, national, and global levels. Influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural factors, conflict can emerge from individual behaviour, identity differences, unequal access to resources, or systemic injustice, reflecting both subjective perceptions and objective realities. Scholars view conflict as dynamic and relational, capable of escalation but also of constructive transformation when addressed through dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and non-violent approaches. While often associated with disruption and violence, conflict can contribute positively to societies by encouraging reform, innovation, and better understanding. Recognising its multidimensional nature allows peace practitioners to manage and transform disputes, paving the way for justice, cooperation, and sustainable peace.

Keywords

Conflict, Peacebuilding, Structural causes, Interpersonal conflict, Escalation, Constructive resolution

Discussion

This unit explores the meaning, origins, and dynamics of conflict as a fundamental aspect of human interaction. It explains that conflict is not limited to violence but includes disagreements, tensions, and perceived incompatibilities between individuals, groups, or nations. The study highlights its causes, ranging from individual behaviour to deep-rooted structural inequalities, and examines different levels and types of conflict, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, national, and international, as well as direct, structural, and cultural forms. It also discusses the dual role of conflict, showing how it can be both destructive and constructive, disrupting relationships or fostering dialogue, reform, and social growth. Drawing from various scholarly perspectives, the unit emphasises that understanding conflict is essential for peacebuilding, enabling the use of strategies like negotiation, mediation, and nonviolent dialogue to transform disputes into opportunities for justice, equity, and sustainable peace.

❒ General background to the concept of conflict

Conflict is a central concept in peace and conflict studies, encompassing far more than just physical fighting or overt violence. It refers to the tensions, disagreements, and incompatibilities that emerge in human interactions, whether between individuals, groups, or entire nations. Conflict arises when parties perceive that their values, interests, needs, or goals are incompatible and when they are unable to find mutually acceptable solutions. These tensions can manifest across social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions, reflecting disparities in power, identity, or access to resources. For instance, conflicts may occur between rich and poor (economic), different religious or caste groups (identity), linguistic or ethnic communities (cultural), political ideologies (right vs. left), nationalistic versus anti-nationalistic sentiments, or racial groups (social). Importantly, conflict is not inherently destructive; it is a dynamic and ongoing process that can escalate into violence if left unaddressed or mismanaged, but it can also be transformed constructively. Peace and conflict studies focus on understanding

the root causes of conflict, analysing the complex interplay of structural and interpersonal factors, and developing strategies such as dialogue, mediation, and nonviolent resistance to resolve disputes and promote sustainable peace. This broad understanding allows scholars and practitioners to approach conflict not merely as a problem to eliminate, but as a phenomenon that, if properly managed, can lead to growth, social justice, and strengthened relationships.

❒ Etymology of the term

The term "conflict" has its roots in the Latin word conflictus, which literally means a collision or clash. This etymology captures the essence of conflict as a situation in which two or more forces meet in opposition, producing tension or struggle. In the context of human society, conflict is an inherent and unavoidable aspect of social interaction. It emerges whenever individuals or groups encounter differences in values, goals, interests, needs, or perspectives, and seek to assert or defend their positions. Such differences are a natural consequence of human diversity, as no two people or groups are ever perfectly aligned in their expectations or priorities. Conflict can manifest in a variety of forms, ranging from verbal disagreements and ideological debates to economic competition and large-scale social or political disputes. While often associated with confrontation or hostility, conflict is not inherently negative; it can serve as a catalyst for change, innovation, and growth when managed constructively. Understanding the origin and nature of conflict is therefore crucial for analysing social dynamics, addressing disputes effectively, and designing strategies for peaceful resolution.

❒ Individual behaviour as a trigger of conflict

Conflict can arise from a variety of sources, ranging from individual behaviour to broader structural issues within society. Defiant behaviour is one such cause, where an individual challenges authority through obstinate or intransigent actions, either verbally or non-verbally. This behaviour can provoke guilt, frustration, or tension in others and undermines rational dialogue and acceptable norms of adult interaction. In such cases, the responsibility for the conflict is often attributed to the person displaying defiance.

❒ Structural and proximate causes shaping conflict

Beyond individual behaviour, conflicts often have structural or systemic roots. Structural causes, also called root or underlying causes, are long-term factors embedded within the norms, policies, and institutions of a society, such as social inequalities, discrimination, or unequal access to resources. Proximate or immediate causes are more recent, situational triggers that can exacerbate underlying structural issues and escalate tensions into

overt conflict. Fundamentally, conflict emerges from incompatible goals, interests, or needs among individuals, groups, or societies. It is a natural and dynamic aspect of human interaction, occurring at personal, social, or political levels. While conflict is not inherently negative, it becomes problematic when left unresolved or addressed through violence. Effective conflict resolution requires acknowledging disagreements, confronting differences constructively, and seeking nonviolent solutions. Conflict and peace are closely linked: achieving sustainable peace involves managing and transforming conflicts in ways that promote justice, equity, and harmonious relationships.

2.1.1 Meaning and Definition

❒ Conflict as clash of divergent perceptions and goals

Broadly speaking, conflict can be defined as a clash between individuals or groups resulting from divergent thought processes, perceptions, attitudes, understandings, needs, or objectives. It is a dynamic and evolving process that can occur at various levels, ranging from personal disputes to group tensions, and from national unrest to international confrontations. While it often emerges from competition over resources, power, or recognition, it can also stem from misunderstandings and incompatible worldviews.

❒ Universal aspect of conflict across all societies

Conflict is a natural and universal aspect of human social interaction. It emerges across all societies and at every level of human relationships, from interpersonal disagreements to large-scale international disputes. At its core, conflict represents a form of opposition between individuals or groups, typically arising from differences in opinion, values, interests, or goals. It often reflects an absence of agreement and can serve as a means of addressing deeper social contradictions. Rather than being solely destructive, conflict is a normal process through which individuals and groups navigate competing needs, expectations, and worldviews.

❒ Scholarly definitions highlighting complexity of conflict

Scholars have provided varied and nuanced definitions of conflict, reflecting its complexity across social, political, and psychological dimensions. Galtung and Webel describe conflict as a condition of perceived incompatibility between parties, a dynamic process, and a relational phenomenon involving interactions that can be either cooperative or adversarial. Lewis Coser emphasises competition over scarce status, power, and resources, highlighting the structural inequalities that underlie many conflicts. Thomas Schelling frames conflict as a strategic bargaining situation in which outcomes depend on the choices of others, while Max Weber focuses on intentional action

within social relationships to impose one's will against resistance. Gillin and Gillin underscore the aggressive nature of conflict, describing it as a process in which parties pursue goals by challenging opponents, sometimes through violence or threats. James Wall points to interdependence, differences in goals, and differing perceptions as underlying factors of conflict. Morton Deutsch offers a behavioural perspective, viewing conflict as arising whenever incompatible activities occur. Edward Azar's theory of Protracted Social Conflicts emphasises struggles by communal groups for security, recognition, and political access, particularly in identity-based disputes. Christopher Mitchell highlights the perception of incompatibility, noting that belief in conflicting goals can itself fuel conflict.

❒ Historical and sociological perspectives on conflict

Historical and sociological perspectives further enrich the understanding of conflict. George Simmel sees conflict as a source of both discord and cohesion within groups, while Kenneth Boulding defines it as competition between parties with mutually incompatible goals. Park and Burgess distinguish conflict from competition, emphasising its personal and intermittent nature, often accompanied by intense emotion and concentrated effort. Robert C. North stresses that conflict emerges when parties seek the same resource, space, or exclusive position or pursue mutually incompatible means to achieve objectives. Mack and Snyder identify characteristics of conflict, including the involvement of multiple parties, opposing actions, and observable behaviours intended to damage or frustrate the other party.

❒ Different contexts and interpretations of conflict

Different contexts also shape the understanding of conflict. In international relations, for example, Singer and Small define conflict narrowly as violent disputes involving at least one state and a minimum of 100 battle-related deaths, focusing primarily on military actors and often excluding civilian victims. Mahatma Gandhi, in contrast, emphasises the internal dimension of conflict, interpreting it as a struggle between truth and untruth within oneself, a perspective informed by the Bhagavad Gita.

2.1.2 Nature and Characteristics of Conflict

❒ Conflict as dynamic, relational, multifaceted phenomenon

Conflict is a central concept in peace and conflict studies, understood as a dynamic, multifaceted, and inherently relational phenomenon that goes far beyond mere physical violence or fighting. It emerges whenever individuals, groups, or nations perceive incompatible goals, values, interests, or needs and attempt to assert or defend their positions. Conflict is a natural and inevitable feature of human interaction, arising from the diversity of perspectives, priorities, and expectations within societ-

ies. It occurs at multiple levels: personally, between individuals who know each other; socially, among groups, organisations, or institutions; and internationally, between states. Often, conflict involves deliberate and conscious efforts to challenge, resist, or dominate others, but it can also arise subtly through disagreements or competition over resources, status, or recognition.

Conflict is best understood as a process rather than a single event. It evolves over time, influenced by communication patterns, power relations, social structures, and external interventions. Conflicts may exist latently, as tension, dissatisfaction, rivalry, or structural inequalities, and may become overt when specific issues are openly contested. Once initiated, conflicts tend to escalate cumulatively, as each aggressive or oppositional act can provoke stronger reactions, making resolution more difficult. Unlike animal aggression, human conflict is moderated by social mechanisms such as negotiation, accommodation, or assimilation, though it remains emotionally charged and sometimes involves violent passions. Conflict is inherently relational, expressed through verbal, behavioural, or structural forms, but can also remain hidden beneath the surface of social interactions.

❒ Conflict as evolving process influenced by structures

The structure of conflict is defined by several core elements. At its foundation is the perceived incompatibility of goals, values, needs, or interests. Even when objectives are not objectively contradictory, conflict may arise if parties perceive them to be incompatible. Scarcity of resources, such as wealth, land, political representation, or economic opportunities, often intensifies disputes. Perceived interference, where one party believes another is obstructing their path to success or fulfilment, can also trigger conflict. From a theoretical perspective, conflict can be analysed through multiple lenses. The objectivist approach attributes conflict to tangible structural factors such as inequalities in social, political, or economic systems, while the subjectivist approach emphasises perceptions, values, and individual goals. Conflicts may also arise from differences in identity, ideology, religion, culture, ethnicity, or race, highlighting the layered and complex nature of human disputes.

❒ Core elements of conflict

Conflict is not inherently negative; it has both disintegrative and integrative effects. While it can disrupt social harmony, create divisions, and escalate tensions, conflict can also foster problem-solving, cooperation, reform, and group solidarity. Functional conflict promotes dialogue, surfaces underlying issues, and encourages constructive solutions, whereas dysfunctional conflict escalates stress, hinders communication, and

❒ Conflict's dual role

often results in destructive win/lose outcomes. Shared goals or external threats may even unite previously conflicting parties, demonstrating the potential of conflict to build cohesion and collaboration.

Conflict is also recognised as a natural and dynamic process in human interaction. Conceptually, it can be seen as a form of opposition between parties, an absence of agreement or alignment, and a mechanism for resolving social contradictions. Attitudinal mindsets toward conflict within groups vary: some view conflict as inevitable and believe agreement is impossible; others see conflict as not predetermined, yet difficult to resolve; while a proactive perspective recognises that conflict, though it may arise, can be addressed constructively through conscious engagement, negotiation, and dialogue.

❒ Attitudinal perspectives on managing conflict constructively

Conflict is present in all aspects of life and across organisations due to the complexity of human interactions and interdependence among individuals or groups. It arises from differences in ideas, values, actions, or feelings, often leading to increased stress between parties. Importantly, the presence of conflict does not inherently signify a negative process. In fact, when managed effectively, conflict can serve as a catalyst for problem-solving, growth, and social cohesion.

❒ Conflict present across all aspects of life

The characteristics of conflicts can be summarised as follows:

- Personal and Direct: Often involves participants who know each other and engage consciously in opposing actions.
- Deliberate and Conscious: Arises from intentional efforts to assert, dominate, or resist.
- Universal and Inherent: Present in all societies; a natural aspect of human life.
- Intermittent and Temporary: May be short-lived but tends to escalate; resolution or accommodation may follow.
- Emotionally Charged: Involves human emotions, impulsiveness, and sometimes violent passions.
- Latent or Overt: Can exist hidden as tension or dissatisfaction, or manifest through open confrontation.
- Cumulative: Each act of aggression can provoke further hostility, complicating resolution.

❒ Characteristics of conflict summarised

- Layered in Binary Perceptions: Often arises from dichotomies such as insider/outsider, us/them, or patriotic/unpatriotic.
- Disintegrative and Integrative: Can disrupt social unity but also stimulate interaction, cooperation, and reform.
- Functional or Dysfunctional: Constructive conflict aids problem-solving and development, while destructive conflict escalates stress and hinders communication.

❒ Conflict as inherent, multidimensional, essential for peacebuilding

In summary, conflict is an inherent, dynamic, and relational aspect of human life, ranging from overt aggression to subtle opposition or structural inequality. Recognising its multidimensional nature is essential for effective peacebuilding, enabling societies and organisations to address both visible manifestations and underlying causes, fostering constructive resolution, social reform, and sustainable harmony.

2.1.3 Levels and Types of Conflict

Conflict is a key concept in peace and conflict studies, occurring at various levels, from the individual to the international stage. Intrapersonal conflict takes place within a person, involving internal struggles, competing desires, or frustrations related to personal goals, values, or moral dilemmas. It can appear as motivational conflict, where making a decision is challenging; moral conflict, an inner confrontation between right and wrong; or as tension between one's aspirations and reality. Intrapersonal conflict can also be categorised into three types: approach–approach conflict, requiring a choice between two equally appealing options; avoidance–avoidance conflict, involving a choice between two undesirable options; and approach–avoidance conflict, where a single option has both positive and negative aspects. These internal conflicts are natural and can foster self-reflection and personal growth.

❒ Intrapersonal conflict: internal struggles and dilemmas

Interpersonal conflict arises between two or more individuals, often due to differences in personality, opinions, values, or decision-making. While such conflicts are normal and can promote stronger relationships or personal development, unresolved tensions may escalate, necessitating mediation or conflict management to prevent harmful outcomes.

❒ Interpersonal conflict: differences between individuals

Intragroup conflict occurs within a team or organisation, stemming from misunderstandings, differing goals, personality clashes, or competition for influence. Intergroup conflict

❒ Intragroup conflict within teams or organisations

emerges between separate groups, driven by competition over resources, conflicting priorities, or divergent objectives. For instance, disputes between departments in an organisation, such as sales versus customer support, illustrate intergroup conflict, which can worsen if not resolved through dialogue, negotiation, or collaborative problem-solving.

❒ National and international conflict dimensions

'At broader levels, national conflicts involve tensions within a country, such as civil unrest, political disputes, or social movements challenging authority. International or global conflicts occur between states or across regions and often involve disputes over resources, territorial claims, ethnic or religious differences, armed interventions, or struggles for independence and sovereignty. These conflicts can have far-reaching effects, including casualties, displacement, and prolonged instability.

❒ Forms of conflict: direct, structural, cultural violence

Conflicts can also be understood by their nature and form. Direct violence refers to physical harm or threats, while structural violence is embedded in social, political, and economic systems, creating inequality and oppression, such as poverty, discrimination, or institutionalised racism. Cultural violence involves societal norms, values, and beliefs that justify or normalise both direct and structural violence, perpetuating injustice.

❒ Functional distinction: competitive vs. disruptive conflict

Functionally, conflicts can be competitive or disruptive. Competitive conflicts follow established rules, focus on winning, and involve minimal hostility, with outcomes defined by success for one party and loss for the other. Disruptive conflicts, on the other hand, occur in highly charged environments, driven by fear, anger, or stress, and aim to dominate, harm, or eliminate the opposing party.

❒ Conflict types and levels guide peacebuilding

In summary, conflict arises whenever two or more opposing ideas, goals, interests, or actions interact. Understanding its levels, types, and forms, from intrapersonal to global, from direct to cultural, and from competitive to disruptive, is crucial for effective conflict resolution, management, and peacebuilding. Awareness of these distinctions allows for tailored strategies that address both the underlying causes and visible manifestations of conflict across different contexts.

2.1.4 Positive and Negative Aspects of Conflict

Although often associated with disruption and harm, conflict can also lead to positive outcomes. That means conflict can be neutral and its results can be constructive or destructive. On the

beneficial side, conflict can serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging entrenched power structures and prompting necessary reforms. It can foster innovation and problem-solving by encouraging diverse viewpoints and stimulating critical thinking. Successfully navigating conflict may strengthen group cohesion and trust, enhance communication skills, and promote empathy and understanding among parties. It also brings hidden issues to the surface, allowing for clarity and more targeted solutions.

❒ Conflict as catalyst for reform and growth

Conversely, unmanaged conflict can have serious negative consequences. It can escalate into violence, causing physical harm, death, and destruction. The psychological toll includes stress, anxiety, trauma, and damaged relationships. Economically, conflict can cripple communities and nations by disrupting infrastructure, deterring investment, and misallocating resources. Socially, it can deepen divisions, foster mistrust, and reduce cooperation and productivity across groups and institutions.

❒ Unmanaged conflict causes harm and instability

In essence, conflict is a complex and multi-dimensional aspect of human and social life. It arises from the interplay of human diversity, structural inequalities, and interpersonal dynamics, reflecting differences in values, interests, goals, and perceptions. Conflict is neither inherently good nor bad; while it carries the potential for escalation, tension, and harm, it also offers opportunities for constructive change, dialogue, learning, and social growth. Its dynamic nature, manifesting at personal, social, organisational, and global levels, requires careful understanding of both visible and underlying causes to manage it effectively. Peace and conflict studies emphasise this complexity by examining the origins, processes, and outcomes of conflict, highlighting how perception, power structures, communication patterns, and socio-cultural factors shape disputes. By analysing conflicts from multiple perspectives, structural, relational, and attitudinal, peace studies seek strategies to transform conflict constructively. These strategies include negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and nonviolent interventions that aim not merely to suppress conflict but to address its root causes, reconcile differences, and foster collaboration. Ultimately, understanding conflict in all its dimensions enables societies to convert potential crises into opportunities for justice, equity, social cohesion, and sustainable peace, paving the way for harmonious coexistence and long-term development.

❒ Conflict's complexity demands constructive transformation strategies

Summarised Overview

Conflict is an inherent and dynamic aspect of human interaction, arising whenever individuals or groups perceive incompatible goals, values, or interests. Its manifestations range from personal disagreements to global disputes and may be overt, such as violence, or latent, existing as tension or dissatisfaction. While often associated with hostility, conflict is not inherently destructive and can serve as a catalyst for dialogue, problem-solving, and social growth when managed constructively.

The causes of conflict are multifaceted, including individual behaviour, structural inequalities, and situational triggers. Differences in culture, identity, ideology, resources, and social power often escalate tensions. Conflict occurs at multiple levels, within oneself (intrapersonal), between individuals (interpersonal), within groups (intragroup), between groups (intergroup), within nations (national), and between nations (international). Its nature can be competitive, disruptive, direct, structural, or cultural, reflecting both tangible and perceptual dimensions.

Understanding the characteristics and dynamics of conflict is crucial for effective resolution and peacebuilding. Conflicts can be functional or dysfunctional, disintegrative or integrative, and are shaped by perception, communication, and relational patterns. Scholars provide diverse theoretical perspectives to explain conflicts, emphasising its relational, strategic, structural, and psychological aspects. By recognising conflict as an opportunity for constructive change rather than mere disruption, societies can employ negotiation, mediation, and nonviolent strategies to address root causes, promote justice, and foster long-term social cohesion.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Why is conflict considered an inevitable element of social life?
2. How can individual behaviour act as a catalyst for conflict?
3. Explain how conflict may be both a problem and an opportunity within society.
4. Why is conflict seen as a dynamic rather than a static process?
5. Describe how identity-based tensions can develop into wider group conflict.
6. In what ways can conflict foster cooperation and social reform?
7. Explain the difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict.
8. What is meant by the term “relational phenomenon” in the context of conflict?

Assignments

1. Define conflict and explain why it is considered a natural aspect of human interaction.
2. What is the origin of the term "conflict" and how does it relate to its meaning?
3. How does conflict differ from mere disagreement or competition?
4. Identify and explain the structural and immediate causes of conflict.
5. What are the key characteristics of conflict, and how do they influence escalation?
6. Compare intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflict with examples.
7. How can identity, culture, and ideology contribute to conflicts?
8. Summarise the contributions of at least three scholars mentioned in the study.
9. What strategies can be employed to transform conflict constructively?
10. Explain how conflict can simultaneously disintegrate and integrate social groups.

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 2

Theories of Conflict

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the multidimensional nature of conflict across micro, meso, and macro levels
- identify and analyse structural and socio-economic factors contributing to conflict
- examine critical and cultural perspectives, including power, ideology, and identity, in sustaining conflicts
- distinguish between direct, structural, and cultural violence and their implications for peace
- critically assess the strengths and limitations of various conflict theories in real-world applications

Background

Theories of conflict have evolved to explain why disputes arise, how they unfold, and the conditions under which they may be resolved or transformed. Early scholarship, strongly influenced by Karl Marx, emphasised class struggle and structural inequality, arguing that conflict is embedded in economic and political systems. Later thinkers broadened the scope to consider multiple sources of division, including identity, culture, gender, race, and global power hierarchies. Psychological and socio-biological perspectives highlight innate human drives and group dynamics, offering micro-level explanations for aggression and hostility. Structural and critical theorists focus on systemic forces, such as economic exploitation, bureaucratic dominance, unmet human needs, and cultural hegemony, which produce both overt and latent conflict. With globalisation and modernity came new pressures linked to migration, resource competition, security dilemmas, and unequal development, contributing to global and interstate tensions. International relations theories, particularly realism, liberalism, and constructivism, explain conflict as the product of power struggles, institutional cooperation, or constructed identities. Formal models, including game theory, provide analytical tools for examining strategic interactions.

Keywords

Conflict theory, Structural violence, Cultural hegemony, Social identity theory, Globalisation, Realism

Discussion

This unit examines the major theories of conflict, showing how human disputes arise and evolve across individual, social, and global levels. It explores multiple perspectives, ranging from human nature theories that emphasise biological drives and psychological processes, to structural and critical approaches that highlight inequality, power, and ideology, to global and international relations theories that focus on modernity, globalisation, and systemic transformations. It also introduces formal and analytical models, such as game theory, which provide strategic tools for understanding negotiation and cooperation. By comparing these frameworks, the unit shows that conflict is multi-dimensional and cannot be explained by any single theory. Instead, it highlights the importance of integrating diverse insights to understand root causes, processes, and consequences of conflict, and to design holistic strategies for peacebuilding, justice, and sustainable resolution.

❒ Conflict as universal human phenomenon

Conflict is an inherent and pervasive feature of human societies, manifesting at all levels, from interpersonal disputes to large-scale wars, whenever individuals or groups compete to assert their needs, values, or interests. Understanding the causes, dynamics, and resolution of conflict has been a central focus across sociology, political science, psychology, and peace studies. Conflict theory provides a framework for analysing why conflicts arise, who benefits or suffers from them, and how they shape social structures. Its roots lie in Karl Marx's analysis of class struggle, which views society as divided between the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labour. For Marx, exploitation, structural inequality, and ideological coercion make conflict a natural and inevitable feature of social and economic arrangements.

While Marxist theory forms the foundation, contemporary conflict scholarship recognises that conflict is multi-dimensional. Modern approaches extend beyond economic class to include struggles over identity, race, ethnicity, gender, culture,

❒ Marxist roots and beyond class

and global power structures. Thinkers such as Max Weber, C. Wright Mills, Antonio Gramsci, John Burton, Edward Azar, Johan Galtung, and Cornel West have examined different facets of power, inequality, and social tension. These perspectives share the view that society is inherently conflictual and that power struggles, rather than consensus, drive social change.

❒ Structural and cultural violence in PCS

In peace and conflict studies, the analysis also emphasises structural, historical, and cultural factors that perpetuate conflict. For example, Galtung's concepts of structural and cultural violence demonstrate how indirect oppression embedded in institutions can be as harmful as direct physical violence, while Burton's human needs theory highlights how unmet basic needs, such as security, identity, recognition, and participation, fuel protracted conflicts.

2.2.1 Different Theories of Conflict

❒ Causes, dynamics, and resolutions of conflict

The study of conflict has generated a wide array of theoretical perspectives that seek to explain why conflicts arise, how they develop, and the mechanisms through which they can be managed or transformed. Theories of conflict span multiple levels of analysis, from individual psychological and biological predispositions to structural inequalities, social institutions, and global systems, and incorporate diverse disciplinary insights, including sociology, political science, psychology, economics, and peace studies. These perspectives explore conflict as a product of human nature, social and economic structures, cultural and ideological frameworks, and international dynamics, offering both explanatory models and practical strategies for resolution. By examining conflict through these theoretical lenses, scholars and practitioners gain a deeper understanding of its causes, processes, and consequences, allowing for more effective interventions across personal, organisational, societal, and global contexts. This comprehensive approach highlights that conflict is not merely an aberration or a destructive force but a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, shaped by interacting biological, psychological, social, structural, and cultural factors, and subject to transformation through conscious engagement, negotiation, and systemic reform.

2.2.1.1 Human Nature Theories

❒ Conflict as an inherent aspect of human existence

Human Nature Theories view conflict as an inherent aspect of human existence, rooted in biological instincts, psychological drives, and social-psychological processes. These perspectives emphasise the "nature" side of the nature-versus-nurture debate,

suggesting that aggression, competition, and group identity are intrinsic to individuals and groups. By examining innate predispositions, unconscious motivations, and intergroup dynamics, human nature theories provide foundational insights into why conflict persists even in the absence of systemic inequalities. While often critiqued for being reductionist or deterministic, these approaches remain essential for understanding the internal drivers of conflict and their interaction with broader social and cultural environments.

❒ Biological and Socio-Biological Perspectives

Biological approaches argue that humans possess innate aggressive drives, shaped by evolutionary pressures and adaptive functions. Instinct theory suggests that aggression is a natural response, activated under conditions such as threat, competition, or frustration. Ethology, the study of animal behaviour, reveals that territoriality, dominance hierarchies, and competition for mates or resources are essential for survival, providing analogies for human social behaviour. Social Darwinism extends evolutionary principles to societal structures, framing human competition and conflict as inevitable outcomes of "survival of the fittest."

❒ Instincts shaped by context

Socio-biology integrates these innate tendencies with environmental and social contexts. Human predispositions toward aggression, cooperation, or dominance interact with cultural norms, resource availability, and group structures to generate complex patterns of conflict. For instance, resource scarcity may amplify pre-existing competitive drives, while cooperative norms can mitigate aggression.

❒ Critiques: reductionism and misuse of biology

Critiques of biological approaches highlight their reductionism and deterministic tendencies. Critics argue that they often neglect culture, social learning, and nonviolent forms of conflict. Historically, these theories have been misused to justify inequality or oppression, emphasising the need to contextualise biological insights within broader social frameworks.

❒ Psychological Approaches

Psychological theories explore intrapsychic processes, motivation, and cognition as sources of conflict. Freudian psychoanalytic theory suggests that conflict emerges from the projection of unconscious drives and unresolved internal tensions. Aggression, repressed desires, or personality conflicts can manifest externally, triggering interpersonal disputes.

❒ Cognitive dissonance sparks conflict behaviour

Cognitive theories, including cognitive dissonance, posit that conflicts arise when individuals experience inconsistencies in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours. The discomfort from cognitive dissonance motivates actions to resolve perceived con-

tradictions, sometimes resulting in confrontation or competitive behaviour.

❒ Social-Psychological Approaches

Social-psychological frameworks emphasise intergroup dynamics. Frustration-aggression theory posits that blocked goals or unmet needs increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. Individuals may displace frustration onto scapegoats or compete for limited resources, explaining phenomena such as labor strikes, social unrest, or ethnic violence. Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, shows that individuals derive self-esteem from group membership. In-group favoritism, out-group derogation, and efforts to achieve positive distinctiveness contribute to persistent and emotionally charged conflicts. Realistic conflict theory further demonstrates that competition over scarce resources fosters intergroup hostility, negative stereotypes, and distrust.

❒ Contact, attribution, and structural factors shape conflict

Positive social contact, as proposed by Allport's Contact Hypothesis, can mitigate prejudice and hostility under conditions of shared goals and equal status. Attribution theory highlights how internal versus external explanations for conflict events shape perceptions and misperceptions, which can escalate disputes. Integrating these micro-level insights with macro-level structural and social frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of conflict emergence and escalation.

2.2.1.2 Structural and Critical Perspectives on Conflict

❒ Power, inequality, domination

Structural and critical perspectives on conflict shift the focus from individual tendencies to the broader systems, institutions, and ideologies that shape collective life. These approaches argue that conflict is not an abnormal disruption but an inherent feature of social arrangements, arising from persistent inequalities, power struggles, and cultural narratives that sustain dominance and exclusion. Rooted in Marxist, Weberian, and later critical traditions, they highlight how economic exploitation, political authority, social stratification, and cultural hegemony create conditions for both overt and latent conflict. Thinkers such as Johan Galtung, John Burton, Edward Azar, Antonio Gramsci, and C. Wright Mills have expanded this perspective by emphasising concepts like structural violence, unmet human needs, and cultural domination. Together, these theories provide insight into how systemic inequalities and ideological frameworks sustain protracted conflicts while also offering pathways toward social justice, positive peace, and transformative change.

❒ Marxist thought as structural and socio-economic approaches

Building on Marxist thought, socio-economic theories argue that economic inequalities, class structures, and modes of production are central to conflict. The capitalist system, according to Marx, inherently generates exploitation, as the ruling class (bourgeoisie) controls the means of production and extracts surplus labour from the working class (proletariat). Modern adaptations extend these insights to global inequalities, linking poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion to structural conflict. Examples include labour strikes, anti-Globalisation protests, and social movements demanding redistribution of wealth.

❒ Weber: class, status, power, and bureaucracy

Max Weber extended conflict analysis by introducing multiple sources of stratification, class (economic), status (social prestige), and power (political authority), arguing that conflict arises not only over material wealth but also over legitimacy, bureaucratic authority, and social recognition. Central to his perspective is the concept of bureaucracy as a rational-legal system characterised by impersonal rules, hierarchical authority, specialisation, and formal procedures. For Weber, the rise of rationalisation and bureaucracy is a defining feature of modern society and capitalism, linking economic life, social action, and cultural values—such as the Protestant ethic—to explain how society organises itself. While bureaucracy can enhance efficiency and stability, Weber also critiqued its limitations, highlighting how hierarchical systems may generate alienation, inefficiency, inflexibility, and decision-making paralysis, particularly when rapid adaptation is required.

❒ Galtung: structural violence and peace models

Johan Galtung, a foundational figure in peace and conflict studies, introduced the concept of structural violence to describe indirect forms of harm embedded in social structures and institutions that prevent people from meeting basic needs. Unlike direct violence, which involves physical harm, structural violence manifests through poverty, inequality, discrimination, and lack of access to resources such as education or healthcare, and while less visible, it can be equally destructive. Galtung's Conflict Triangle further distinguishes between direct violence (physical harm), structural violence (institutionalised inequality), and cultural violence (beliefs and norms that legitimise harm), emphasising that conflict must be understood in its multiple dimensions. Closely linked to this is his distinction between negative peace, the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, the presence of social justice, equity, and harmonious relationships. Together, these ideas demonstrate how conflict is sustained not only through overt acts of aggression

but also through systemic and cultural processes that normalise inequality and hinder sustainable peace.

John Burton's Human Needs Theory argues that conflicts emerge when fundamental needs such as security, recognition, identity, participation, control, and belonging are denied. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, from physiological and safety needs to belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation, Burton adapts the framework to highlight social and political dimensions rather than purely individualistic concerns. When such needs remain unmet, protracted conflicts often arise, particularly around identity, recognition, and security. Edward Azar extends this perspective to explain long-term ethnic and social conflicts sustained by systemic inequalities, while relative deprivation theory and resource-based approaches emphasise how perceptions of inequality and competition over scarce resources further trigger unrest. From this standpoint, effective conflict resolution requires identifying which needs are unfulfilled and addressing them through nonviolent means. Yet the theory faces critiques: human needs may vary across contexts, shift over time, and be difficult to satisfy fully, especially in unstable or chaotic social conditions.

❒ Burton & Azar: Human needs drive, deprivation, and resource-based conflict

These perspectives illuminate how structural dynamics underpin labour strikes, ethnic conflict, gender oppression, and global inequalities.

Critical and constructivist theories expand structural perspectives by highlighting the role of identity, ideology, and culture in sustaining or challenging power relations. Constructivist international relations theory argues that interests, identities, and norms are socially constructed rather than fixed, with conflicts often rooted in competing narratives, securitisation, and contested identities.

❒ Critical theories: identity, ideology, and culture

Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony emphasises how dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion but by shaping values, norms, and beliefs to legitimise their dominance. Similarly, C. Wright Mills' power elite theory shows how a small group at the intersection of political, military, and economic institutions perpetuate systemic inequalities.

❒ Gramsci: cultural hegemony legitimises dominance

Feminist, postcolonial, and other critical approaches reveal how mainstream theories often ignore the legacies of patriarchy, colonialism, and global structural oppression. By drawing attention to marginalised voices and historical injustices, they call for more inclusive and equitable forms of peacebuilding.

❒ Critical theories expose patriarchy and colonialism

❒ Galtung: cultural violence legitimises structural harm

Galtung's concept of cultural violence further illustrates how ideologies, religious beliefs, and traditions normalise and legitimise direct and structural harm, reinforcing identity-based hostilities.

❒ Structural vs. critical: material and ideational conflict

Together, structural and critical perspectives reveal how conflict is simultaneously materially embedded in social and economic inequalities and ideationally sustained through identity, culture, and ideology. Structural approaches emphasise the systemic denial of needs and the distribution of resources, while critical theories highlight how narratives, norms, and historical legacies legitimise and reproduce those structures.

❒ Integrated view: conflicts shaped by intersecting forces

An integrated perspective demonstrates that protracted conflicts, whether class struggles, ethnic disputes, or postcolonial tensions, cannot be fully explained by material conditions alone or by cultural narratives in isolation. Instead, they emerge from the intersection of economic, institutional, and cultural-ideological forces, making these perspectives indispensable for understanding and transforming enduring conflicts.

2.2.1.3 Modernity, Globalisation, and International Relations Theories

❒ Global theories: conflict in interconnected world

Modernity, Globalisation, and international relations theories provide a crucial lens for understanding conflict in an increasingly interconnected world. Unlike human nature or structural theories that emphasise individual or domestic causes, these perspectives highlight how global transformations, systemic interdependence, and shifting power relations shape patterns of cooperation and confrontation among states and societies. The rise of modernity has generated new tensions linked to industrialisation, migration, and environmental pressures, while Globalisation has deepened economic integration and, at the same time, intensified inequalities and core–periphery dynamics. Within international relations, realist, liberal, and constructivist approaches, alongside critical and postcolonial critiques, explain how states and other actors pursue security, power, and identity in an anarchic global system. Protracted social conflict frameworks further underscore the persistence of identity-based disputes rooted in structural inequalities and unmet human needs. Together, these theories illuminate the global dimensions of conflict, showing how systemic changes both generate risks of violence and create opportunities for cooperation and peacebuilding.

❒ Modernity and globalisation create new tensions

Modernity and Globalisation introduce new forms of conflict through resource competition, environmental risks, migration pressures, and economic interdependence. Global inequalities, core-periphery dynamics, and transnational disputes highlight how interconnected systems can exacerbate conflict while providing channels for cooperation.

❒ International Relations and Realism

Realist Theory asserts that states are rational actors in an anarchic international system, constantly competing for security and power. Core concepts include the security dilemma, balance of power, and the inevitability of conflict. Variants include offensive realism, where states seek maximum power, and defensive realism, focusing on sufficient power for survival. Realism explains historical conflicts such as the Cold War but often neglects norms, non-state actors, and cooperation.

❒ Liberalism: cooperation through democracy and institutions

Liberal and Neo-Liberal Institutionalism highlight opportunities for cooperation under anarchy. Democratic peace theory posits that democracies rarely fight each other due to shared norms and institutional checks. Economic interdependence raises the costs of conflict, while international institutions monitor compliance, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate negotiation.

❒ Constructivism: identities and narratives shape conflict

Constructivist IR emphasises the social construction of state interests and identities, showing that conflicts emerge from contested narratives and securitised issues. Critical, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives underscore historical injustices, structural inequalities, and gendered dimensions in global conflicts.

❒ Azar - Unmet needs and inequalities

PSC frameworks highlight long-term, identity-based disputes rooted in unmet human needs and structural inequalities. These conflicts persist across generations and are resistant to resolution via traditional diplomacy. Addressing them requires problem-solving, mediation, and institutional reform. Examples include Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts, post-Soviet separatist movements, and regional disputes exacerbated by historical grievances.

2.2.1.4 Formal and Analytical Theories

❒ Formal theories: models and rational interactions

Formal and Analytical Theories approach conflict through structured, model-based analysis, drawing on mathematics, logic, and game theory to explain strategic interactions between individuals, groups, or states. These perspectives emphasise rational decision-making, payoff maximisation, and interdependence, offering predictive tools for negotiation, deterrence, and conflict management. By abstracting complex dynamics into simplified models, formal theories highlight patterns of cooper-

ation and competition, providing clarity and precision in analysing how actors behave under different scenarios.

❒ Principles: rationality, equilibrium, sero-sum dynamics

Formal theories assume rational actors who maximise payoffs and make decisions in interdependent contexts. Key concepts include equilibrium, strategic interaction, and differentiation between sero-sum and non-sero-sum scenarios. Models often abstract complex social dynamics into quantifiable variables.

❒ Game theory: dilemmas, brinkmanship, bargaining

Game theory provides useful tools for analysing conflict and cooperation by modelling strategic interactions between actors. The Prisoner's Dilemma illustrates the difficulty of achieving cooperation when individuals or states act on self-interest, often leading to suboptimal outcomes. The Chicken Game captures high-stakes brinkmanship scenarios, such as nuclear deterrence, where neither side wants to yield but mutual escalation risks catastrophic consequences. Bargaining models further extend these applications by formalising negotiation strategies that account for power asymmetries, risk preferences, and information gaps, offering insights into how agreements can be reached—or break down—in conflict situations.

❒ Strengths and limits of formal approaches

Formal approaches offer precision, logical rigor, and predictive insight. They facilitate scenario simulations and strategy optimisation. However, they abstract away cultural, emotional, and identity-driven factors, assuming rational behaviour that may not align with real-world complexities.

❒ Integrating formal with other perspectives

Combining formal models with human needs, structural, psychological, and constructivist approaches provides multi-layered conflict analyses. For example, while game theory predicts strategic negotiation outcomes, human needs theory identifies essential requirements for sustainable resolution, and constructivism accounts for norms and identity.

2.2.2 Multi-Dimensional and Holistic Aspects of Conflict Theory

❒ Multi-dimensional conflicts across all levels

Conflict is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon shaped by biological predispositions, psychological processes, social structures, cultural norms, identity, and global systems. Four main frameworks help explain it across micro, meso, and macro levels. Human Nature Theories focus on individual motivations, intrapsychic drives, and group dynamics. Structural and Critical Perspectives emphasise systemic inequalities, resource competition, institutional arrangements,

ideology, norms, and historical legacies. Modernity, Globalisation, and International Relations Theories highlight global systemic transformations, interdependence, and protracted social conflicts. Formal and Analytical Theories provide strategic, model-based tools for predicting outcomes and optimising negotiation or deterrence. Integrating these perspectives allows scholars and practitioners to address both immediate triggers and underlying causes of conflict. Effective resolution requires attention to individual motivations, social structures, identity, norms, human needs, and global interdependencies. By combining these insights, policymakers, peacebuilders, and researchers can develop multi-dimensional strategies to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts at local, national, and international levels.

❒ Role of theories in peace building

In sum, the study of conflict theories reveals that no single explanation can fully capture the depth and complexity of human disputes. From biological drives and psychological processes to structural inequalities, cultural narratives, and global systemic transformations, conflict emerges through the interplay of multiple forces at different levels of society. The diversity of theoretical perspectives not only enhances analytical understanding but also enriches practical approaches to peacebuilding. By integrating insights from human nature, structural, critical, international, and formal frameworks, scholars and practitioners can better diagnose the roots of conflict and design holistic strategies for resolution and transformation. Ultimately, the value of these theories lies not merely in explaining conflict but in guiding efforts toward creating more just, inclusive, and sustainable forms of peace.

Summarised Overview

Conflict is an inherent feature of human society, arising from individual, group, and systemic competition over resources, needs, and power. Early conflict theories, rooted in Marxism, emphasised class struggle, structural inequalities, and economic exploitation. Modern scholars have expanded this framework to include identity, culture, gender, race, and global power dynamics, illustrating that conflicts are multidimensional and deeply embedded in social structures. Human nature theories further explain conflict through biological, psychological, and social-psychological lenses, highlighting innate drives, group dynamics, and cognitive processes that fuel interpersonal and intergroup disputes.

Structural and critical perspectives shift focus from individual tendencies to systemic and institutional sources of conflict. Socio-economic inequality, bureaucratic authority,

unmet human needs, and cultural narratives sustain protracted conflicts across labor, ethnic, and global contexts. Thinkers like Galtung, Burton, and Gramsci illuminate how structural and cultural forces normalise oppression, creating long-term societal tensions. Addressing these conflicts requires a combination of systemic reform, recognition of human needs, and engagement with cultural and ideological narratives.

Globalisation, modernity, and international relations frameworks demonstrate that conflicts extend beyond domestic arenas to global systems, influenced by interdependence, migration, resource competition, and state security dilemmas. Formal and analytical approaches, such as game theory, provide predictive and strategic tools for understanding actor behaviour in conflicts, complementing human needs and constructivist perspectives. Overall, integrating biological, psychological, structural, cultural, and global frameworks enables scholars and practitioners to design holistic strategies for conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. In what ways do conflict theories help us understand how disputes emerge and escalate?
2. How do human nature theories differ from structural theories in explaining the roots of conflict?
3. How did Marx conceptualise conflict within capitalist systems?
4. In what ways do later theorists expand Marx's focus beyond class division?
5. How do structural theories account for the persistence of inequality?
6. What role does ideology play in sustaining conflict, according to critical perspectives?
7. What are the main claims of realism in understanding interstate conflict?
8. How does liberal theory propose that cooperation can reduce conflict?

Assignments

1. How does conflict manifest at different levels of society?
2. What are the main tenets of Marxist conflict theory?
3. Explain the concept of structural violence and its societal impact.

4. Discuss Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle and its implications for peacebuilding.
5. What insights do feminist and postcolonial theories provide in conflict analysis?
6. How do globalisation and modernity create new forms of conflict?
7. How does game theory help in understanding strategic interactions in conflicts?
8. What are the differences between positive and negative peace?
9. Evaluate the challenges of applying formal, structural, and cultural theories to real-world conflicts.

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UNIT 3

Issues and Stages of Conflict

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the fundamental nature and inevitability of conflict in human interactions
- recognise the stages of conflict, from latent tensions to post-conflict peacebuilding
- assess the impact of structural, cultural, and direct violence on societies and individuals
- examine the role of power dynamics, governance, and global factors in shaping conflict trajectories
- develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills to design contextually appropriate interventions for sustainable peace

Background

Conflict is an inherent and dynamic element of human society that emerges when individuals or groups perceive incompatibilities in their needs, interests, values, or access to power and resources. While some conflicts remain hidden in their early phases, long-standing social, political, and economic inequalities often form the foundation for deeper tensions that may surface as overt disputes. Modern conflict studies emphasise that disputes are seldom caused by a single factor; rather, they arise through an interaction of structural inequalities, identity-based divisions, historical grievances, governance failures, and resource pressures. These underlying conditions shape how conflicts develop, often moving from latent tension to escalation, stalemate, de-escalation, resolution, and post-conflict recovery. Importantly, this progression is rarely linear, as conflicts may regress or shift unpredictably depending on context, power dynamics, and external influences. Understanding these stages is essential for designing meaningful interventions that not only resolve overt violence but also address the structural

and cultural conditions that sustain grievance. Ultimately, sustainable peace requires holistic post-conflict strategies, including institutional reform, reconciliation, and social reconstruction, ensuring that societies move beyond mere cessation of violence towards long-term justice, equity, and inclusive coexistence.

Keywords

Latent Conflict, Escalation, Stalemate, Structural Inequalities, Peacebuilding, Identity based Conflict

Discussion

This unit examines the key issues and stages of conflict, showing how disputes emerge from structural inequalities, resource scarcity, identity-based differences, and unmet human needs, and how they evolve through stages such as latent tensions, escalation, stalemate, resolution, and post-conflict peacebuilding. It presents different models of conflict development, highlighting that real-world conflicts are often cyclical and unpredictable, with parties experiencing stages differently. The study also emphasises that peace is more than the absence of violence, it requires justice, equity, reconciliation, and systemic transformation. By exploring conflict causes, trajectories, and post-conflict strategies like reconciliation, institutional reform, and social reconstruction, the unit provides a comprehensive framework for understanding conflict dynamics and designing sustainable peacebuilding interventions.

❒ A general background for issues and stages of conflict

Conflict is a natural and pervasive aspect of human interaction, arising whenever individuals or groups have competing needs, interests, or values. Understanding conflict involves identifying the key issues that drive disputes and examining how conflicts evolve over time. Common issues include structural inequalities, socio-economic disparities, and imbalances of power, which create underlying tensions that can escalate if left unaddressed. Conflicts typically progress through a series of stages, beginning with latent conflict, where tensions exist but remain hidden, moving to perceived conflict, where parties recognise differences, and felt conflict, where emotions such as frustration or resentment intensify. As disagreements become

openly expressed, they enter the manifest stage, which may include verbal disputes, protests, or other forms of confrontation, and eventually reach the aftermath, where resolution, settlement, or post-conflict processes take place. While different theoretical models describe these stages in slightly varying ways, understanding this progression is essential for effectively managing, intervening in, or transforming conflicts.

2.3.1 Understanding Conflict: Contributing Factors and Key Issues

- Conflict studies seek peace beyond absence of war

Conflict studies, as an interdisciplinary field, examines the complex factors that give rise to disputes and explores ways to achieve sustainable peace. A central principle is that peace is more than the absence of war (negative peace); it also requires justice, equity, and harmonious social relationships (positive peace). Understanding both dimensions is essential for meaningful conflict analysis and intervention.

- Disputes stem from political, economic, social, cultural factors

A key focus of conflict studies is identifying the underlying issues that fuel disputes. These issues can be political, economic, social, or cultural and often intersect in complex ways. Unmet human needs, such as security, identity, recognition, and participation, play a critical role in sustaining conflict. When these needs are denied, tensions escalate and the risk of violence increases.

- Structural inequalities and grievances and unrest

Structural inequalities are a major concern, including disparities in wealth, unequal access to resources, and imbalances in political power. Such inequalities create grievances that, if unaddressed, may lead to violence. Closely related is the concept of structural violence, which refers to systemic harm embedded in social institutions that prevents individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs.

- Resource scarcity and exclusionary governance intensify conflicts

Resource scarcity, over essentials such as water, land, or energy, can intensify conflicts, particularly when economic inequality and competition for power are present. Weak or exclusionary governance, political struggles, and marginalisation further exacerbate tensions. Historical injustices, human rights violations, territorial disputes, and legacies of colonisation or oppression also remain persistent sources of conflict.

- Identity differences and conflicts

Identity-based differences, including ethnicity, religion, language, and ideology, frequently underpin conflicts and are often resistant to resolution. Addressing these requires inclusive dialogue, mutual understanding, and efforts to promote respect across groups. Conflict studies also examines violence and non-

violence, emphasising not only direct physical harm but also cultural violence, where societal norms and beliefs legitimise oppression. Nonviolent strategies, such as mediation, negotiation, and dialogue, are central to sustainable conflict resolution.

❒ Conflict transformation addresses deeper systemic dynamics

Another critical area is conflict transformation, which goes beyond dispute resolution to address the deeper relational, structural, and cultural dynamics that sustain conflict. This involves reconciliation, trust-building, empathy, and addressing psychosocial impacts such as trauma and mistrust. Post-conflict justice and reconciliation mechanisms, including truth commissions and reparations, help repair societal fractures and promote healing.

❒ Power dynamics and conflict trajectories

Conflict studies also highlights the role of power dynamics, recognising that shifts in authority within and between groups influence conflict trajectories. Additionally, local conflicts are often shaped by global factors, including international actors and systems, which must be considered in designing effective interventions. Ethical concerns, such as the neutrality of interveners and fairness of outcomes, are also central to the field.

❒ Conflict studies and sustainable peace strategies

In summary, conflict studies address a wide range of interconnected issues, including structural and cultural violence, identity, human needs, power, justice, and nonviolence. By critically analysing these dimensions, the field aims to develop comprehensive strategies for preventing, transforming, and sustainably resolving conflicts.

2.3.1 Understanding Conflict: Stages and Key Models

❒ Models tracing conflict development and intervention opportunities

Conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, arising from differences in values, interests, needs, or power. To understand how conflicts develop, and how they can be effectively addressed, scholars and practitioners have outlined stages and models that trace their progression. These frameworks not only highlight the ways in which conflicts emerge, escalate, and sometimes resolve, but also emphasise that the process is rarely linear or uniform. By examining the stages of conflict and comparing key models, we can better identify opportunities for intervention, anticipate challenges, and design strategies that promote resolution, peacebuilding, and long-term stability.

Conflict is an inevitable and multifaceted aspect of human societies, shaped by structural inequalities, identity dynamics, historical grievances, and unmet human needs. Understanding its causes, stages, and consequences requires an interdisci-

❒ Conflict shaped by structures, identities, and needs

plinary perspective that integrates political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Theoretical insights from scholars such as Marx, Weber, Burton, Azar, and Galtung highlight how systemic structures, human needs, and cultural norms interact to sustain or mitigate conflict.

❒ Stages guide intervention and societal transformation

Examining conflicts through their stages, from latent tensions to escalation, stalemate, resolution, and post-conflict peacebuilding, offers practical guidance for intervention, mediation, and long-term societal transformation. Models like Kriesberg's expanded lifecycle, Alker, Gurr, and Rupesinghe's six-phase framework, and initiatives such as CERTI or Health as a Bridge for Peace demonstrate the complexity and variability of real-world conflicts, emphasising that conflict rarely follows a linear trajectory.

❒ Peacebuilding and transformation ensure sustainable peace.

Post-conflict peacebuilding and conflict transformation are critical for achieving sustainable peace. By addressing root causes, reforming institutions, fostering reconciliation, and promoting justice and equity, these approaches go beyond merely ending violence to create conditions that prevent recurrence. Integrating structural, critical, cultural, and human needs perspectives enables scholars and practitioners to design interventions that are contextually appropriate, comprehensive, and equitable.

❒ Lasting peace requires justice and equity

Ultimately, peace and conflict studies show that lasting peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, equity, and functional social systems. A thorough understanding of conflict, its underlying issues, developmental stages, and resolution mechanisms, is therefore essential for building resilient societies capable of transforming disputes into opportunities for reconciliation, development, and sustainable harmony.

2.3.1.1 Stages of Conflict

Conflicts typically progress through a series of stages, although the process is not always linear or predictable. Understanding these stages can aid in identifying opportunities for intervention, resolution, and lasting peace.

❒ No Conflict stage masks hidden tensions

The initial stage is No Conflict, where relationships or systems appear harmonious, and there are no visible signs of disagreement. However, this stage may mask underlying issues or tensions that have not yet surfaced. These underlying issues form the basis of the next phase, Latent Conflict. At this point, differences in needs, values, interests, or power dynamics exist but have not yet been acknowledged or acted upon. While the

conflict has not become visible, the potential for discord is already present.

The conflict becomes more explicit during the Emergence stage, when a triggering event or a gradual increase in tensions brings these latent issues to the surface. This stage can be divided into two closely related components: perceived and felt conflict. In the Perceived Conflict phase, parties begin to recognise that they have opposing goals or incompatible interests. As the conflict becomes more personal, Felt Conflict arises, often accompanied by emotional responses such as frustration, anxiety, or resentment.

❒ Latent Conflict arises from unacknowledged differences

Once the conflict is openly expressed, it enters the Manifest Conflict stage. At this point, actions are taken and positions are voiced, making the conflict visible to those involved and possibly to outside observers. Manifest conflict may include protests, verbal disputes, strikes, or other forms of direct confrontation. If these expressions are not resolved constructively, the situation may progress to Conflict Escalation.

❒ Emergence reveals latent issues through triggers.

During Escalation, the intensity of the conflict increases. Communication may break down, parties may become entrenched in their positions, and hostilities may rise, potentially leading to violence. This phase can be highly destructive, characterised by a growing sense of polarisation and urgency. As escalation continues without resolution, the conflict may reach a Stalemate, specifically what is known as a "hurting stalemate." At this stage, neither side believes it can prevail through continued confrontation, and the costs—whether emotional, physical, economic, or social, become intolerable. This deadlock often opens a window for negotiation or change.

❒ Manifest Conflict: disputes become openly visible

Following the stalemate, the conflict may enter a de-escalation or negotiation phase. Here, tensions begin to subside, and the parties may become more open to dialogue and compromise. This shift can be initiated internally or facilitated by a third party, such as a mediator or peace envoy. The goal in this phase is to reduce hostility and begin addressing the core issues in a constructive manner.

❒ Escalation increases hostility and polarisation

The next phase is Settlement or Resolution, where the conflicting parties reach an agreement, either formally or informally, that resolves the primary sources of disagreement. This may involve negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or other methods suited to the nature of the conflict. A successful resolution addresses the interests of all parties and lays the foundation for lasting peace.

❒ Stalemate leads to "hurting" deadlock situation

Finally, once a resolution has been achieved, the conflict may transition into the Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Reconciliation stage. This is a long-term process aimed at rebuilding relationships, restoring trust, and addressing the structural and emotional damage caused by the conflict. Peacebuilding may include institutional reform, truth and reconciliation processes, reparations, and initiatives to promote social cohesion and prevent the re-emergence of conflict.

❒ Resolution achieved through settlement agreements

Although these stages offer a useful framework, it is important to note that real-world conflicts often do not follow a neat, linear path. They may skip stages, cycle back and forth, or stall at a particular point for extended periods. Recognising the fluid nature of conflict progression is essential for effective analysis and intervention.

❒ Post-conflict stage focuses on peacebuilding

2.3.1.2 Key Models of Conflict and Stages

While there is a general consensus around core stages of conflict, such as emergence, escalation, stalemate, de-escalation, and resolution, various scholars and organisations have developed alternative or expanded models to better reflect the complexity and diversity of real-world conflicts. These models are particularly insightful when analysing intractable conflicts, where progress is uneven and prolonged.

❒ Alternative models highlight complexity of conflicts

Louis Kriesberg adds depth to the standard model of conflict stages by identifying two additional phases: failed peace making efforts and institutionalisation of destructive conflict. These occur after escalation and reflect situations where peace initiatives do not succeed, and conflict dynamics become entrenched within social and political systems. The latter phase is often closely linked with the hurting stalemate, where the conflict continues without meaningful progress due to deeply embedded hostilities and power structures. Kriesberg also emphasises that conflict stages are experienced differently by subgroups within conflicting parties. For example, moderates, hardliners, spoilers, and other internal factions may occupy different stages simultaneously. As such, shifts in the relative influence of these subgroups can alter the overall trajectory of the conflict, sometimes accelerating it or, alternatively, opening paths toward de-escalation and resolution.

❒ Kriesberg's Additions to the Conflict Lifecycle

Alker, Gurr, and Rupesinghe propose a six-phase model of conflict development that reflects a continuum of violence and resolution. The phases include: Dispute, where parties become aware of their incompatible goals; Crisis, marked by rising ten-

❒ Alker, Gurr, and Rupesinghe's Six Phases

sions and potential violence; Limited Violence, involving initial outbreaks of organised conflict; Massive Violence, characterised by full-scale warfare or widespread conflict; Abatement, a period of de-escalation where violence begins to subside; and Settlement, where resolution efforts are formalised and agreements are reached. This model emphasises the intensity and scale of violence as central markers in the trajectory of conflict.

❒ CERTI Project's Conflict Stages

The Complex Emergency Response and Transition Initiative (CERTI) outlines a five-stage model illustrating how conflict can evolve into broader humanitarian crises. The stages include: Conflict, representing active hostilities between parties; Crisis, characterised by governance breakdown and growing humanitarian needs; Chaos, involving total disruption of civil order and systems; Complex Emergency, combining armed conflict, displacement, and societal breakdown requiring large-scale humanitarian intervention; and Recovery, where efforts focus on rebuilding governance, services, and social cohesion. This model highlights the humanitarian and systemic dimensions of conflict, particularly in fragile or failed states.

❒ Health as a Bridge for Peace (HBP) Model

The Health as a Bridge for Peace (HBP) project frames conflict in five stages, emphasising health, stability, and long-term resilience. The stages are: Impending Crisis, identifying early warning signs of conflict and instability; Outbreak of Violence, marking initial confrontations and clashes; War, representing sustained and organised violent conflict; Post-Crisis, a period of reduction in violence and movement toward stabilisation; and Stable Peace, which goes beyond traditional resolution to ensure sustained peace and resilience. This model integrates health and peacebuilding, suggesting that achieving stability requires more than merely ending hostilities.

❒ Tailored strategies needed for specific conflict stages

These models underscore the importance of recognising conflict stages for effective intervention, as strategies must be tailored to the specific dynamics and intensity of the conflict at each stage.

2.3.2 Real World Conflict Analysis: Issues and Stages

❒ Real conflicts cycle unpredictably, not linearly

Although theoretical models of conflict stages are useful, real-world conflicts rarely follow a neat or linear progression. Instead, they often develop unpredictably, with repeated cycles of escalation and de-escalation. A conflict may temporarily reach a stalemate and then flare up again, or negotiations might occur without a formal ceasefire or recognition of the deadlock. This unpredictability contributes to the perception that long-term

conflicts are intractable. Additionally, parties involved may perceive the stage of the conflict differently, one group might see tensions rising, while the other believes progress toward resolution is occurring. Similarly, one side may feel trapped in a hurting stalemate, while the opposing side remains confident in its ability to prevail. Such subjectivity highlights the importance of understanding each party's perceptions and assumptions when designing effective strategies for conflict management, transformation, or resolution.

2.3.3 Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

❒ Peacebuilding rebuilds societies after conflict ends

Post-conflict peacebuilding refers to the comprehensive efforts carried out after a conflict has ended, aiming to rebuild societies, address the root causes of violence, and prevent future conflicts. It is a long-term process focused not only on repairing the immediate damage caused by war or violence but also on establishing a foundation for a more just, inclusive, and peaceful society.

❒ Moves from resolution to sustainable long-term peace

After the immediate aftermath of conflict, which may involve ceasefires, peace agreements, or military victories, societies enter a critical phase that shifts focus from merely resolving the conflict to achieving sustainable peace. This phase includes both physical and social reconstruction, such as rebuilding infrastructure, implementing justice mechanisms, and initiating reconciliation programs. The overarching goal is to restore trust, repair relationships, and foster healing in communities affected by violence.

❒ Conflict transformation addresses structural and cultural roots

A central element of post-conflict peacebuilding is Conflict Transformation, a holistic approach that goes beyond stopping violence or settling disputes. It seeks to address the deeper structural, relational, and cultural factors that triggered the conflict. This involves four main areas: addressing root causes by tackling historical, economic, social, and political injustices; transforming relationships by fostering empathy, trust, and understanding between former adversaries; reforming institutions and structures to ensure they are inclusive, accountable, and equitable; and cultivating a culture of peace, tolerance, and nonviolence through education and public engagement.

❒ Peacebuilding activities include security, justice, development

Alongside conflict transformation, peacebuilding includes a wide range of activities to promote security, justice, and development. Key measures include Security Sector Reform, ensuring that police and military institutions operate under democratic oversight with respect for human rights; Disarmament,

Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, assisting former combatants to reintegrate into civilian life; Political Development, strengthening democratic governance and inclusive participation; Economic Recovery, rebuilding livelihoods and infrastructure while promoting equitable development; Social Reconstruction, rebuilding community networks and addressing trauma; and Rule of Law and Justice, establishing effective legal systems and ensuring accountability for human rights violations through mechanisms such as truth commissions and war crimes tribunals.

Importantly, lasting peace cannot be achieved through agreements alone. Continuous investment in transforming the societal conditions that allowed violence to occur is essential. In this context, conflict management, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding are interconnected: while conflict management addresses immediate containment and resolution, conflict transformation and peacebuilding aim for deep, systemic change to sustain long-term peace.

❒ Lasting peace requires systemic transformation, not agreements

In conclusion, post-conflict peacebuilding is a multidimensional and inclusive process. It combines reconstruction, reconciliation, institutional reform, and resilience-building to address both visible damages and the underlying legacies of conflict. By transforming attitudes, institutions, and structures, peacebuilding seeks not only to end violence but also to prevent its recurrence, fostering societies grounded in justice, equity, and lasting peace.

❒ Peacebuilding combines reconstruction, reform, and reconciliation

Summarised Overview

Conflict is an inherent part of human societies, arising from competing needs, interests, and values. Key issues that fuel conflict include structural inequalities, resource scarcity, historical grievances, and identity-based differences. Understanding these underlying causes requires a multidisciplinary approach that considers political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors. Conflict escalates when human needs such as security, recognition, and participation are unmet, leading to tensions that may manifest in violence or systemic oppression.

Conflicts progress through identifiable stages, from latent tensions to escalation, stalemate, and resolution. Theoretical models, including Kriesberg's lifecycle, Alker, Gurr, and Rupesinghe's six phases, CERTI, and Health as a Bridge for Peace, provide frameworks to understand these stages and design interventions. These stages highlight the importance of perceiving conflicts from multiple perspectives, as parties may expe-

rience different phases simultaneously. Effective management relies on strategies such as negotiation, mediation, and inclusive dialogue.

Post-conflict peacebuilding and conflict transformation are crucial for sustainable peace. Beyond immediate resolution, these processes aim to rebuild relationships, reform institutions, promote justice, and address structural and cultural factors that caused the conflict. Activities such as reconciliation programs, disarmament, political development, economic recovery, and social reconstruction create conditions for long-term stability. Ultimately, sustainable peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, equity, and functioning social systems capable of preventing future disputes.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Why is conflict considered an inevitable part of human interaction?
2. How do unmet human needs contribute to the emergence of conflict?
3. In what ways do structural inequalities shape the nature of conflict?
4. How can escalation increase hostility and reduce communication?
5. How might third-party intervention support de-escalation?
6. What distinguishes conflict settlement from deeper transformation?
7. How does exclusionary governance exacerbate social tensions?
8. Why is reconciliation essential after formal conflict settlement?

Assignments

1. What are the main causes of human conflict in societies?
2. How do structural inequalities contribute to conflict escalation?
3. Explain the difference between latent, perceived, and felt conflict.
4. Describe the stages of conflict and their characteristics.
5. How does identity-based conflict differ from resource-based conflict?
6. How can conflict escalation be prevented or managed effectively?
7. Discuss the difference between conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation.
8. How can power dynamics affect the trajectory of a conflict?
9. Explain the role of mediation, negotiation, and dialogue in conflict resolution.

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BLOCK 3
Conflict Handling Mechanism

UNIT 1

Conflict Suppression and Conflict Management

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define and differentiate between conflict suppression and conflict management.
- examine the rationale and motivations behind conflict suppression strategies.
- assess the short-term and long-term impacts of conflict suppression on political stability and social order.
- evaluate major theoretical perspectives on conflict management, including Realist, Liberal, and Constructivist approaches.

Background

Conflict suppression and conflict management represent two central approaches in the spectrum of conflict-handling mechanisms used by states, institutions, and societies. Rooted in the recognition that conflict is an unavoidable dimension of political and social life, both approaches seek to prevent disputes from escalating into destructive violence, yet they differ markedly in orientation, methods, and outcomes. Conflict suppression relies primarily on coercive, top-down measures to halt overt hostilities, preserve order, and maintain systemic stability. Through tools such as military intervention, sanctions, peacekeeping, and legal restriction, suppression prioritises short-term control over justice or reconciliation. While it can provide temporary calm, it leaves underlying grievances unresolved, often producing fragile negative peace. Conflict management, by contrast, accepts the persistence of conflict but seeks to regulate and channel it constructively. Emphasising negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and institutional mechanisms, it favours inclusive, dialogical, and problem-solving approaches that address behaviour and relationships rather than simply quelling dissent. Its goal is not necessarily to resolve all root causes, but to prevent escalation, build mutual trust, and create environments conducive to long-term settlement or transformation. Together, suppression and management reflect the tension between safeguarding immediate stability and pursuing

sustainable peace, illustrating the complex calculus states must navigate in balancing power, legitimacy, and coexistence.

Keywords

Conflict Suppression, Conflict Management, Coercion, Containment, Negotiation, Mediation, Peacekeeping

Discussion

Conflict is an inherent feature of human interaction, arising from divergent interests, needs, and perspectives within societies and between states. This unit, Conflict Suppression and Conflict Management, explores two primary approaches to dealing with disputes: one centred on control and containment, and the other on regulation and constructive engagement. Both represent immediate, pragmatic, and control-oriented strategies that focus primarily on containment rather than deep transformation. Conflict suppression seeks to halt or subdue open hostilities through coercive means such as military force, sanctions, or authoritarian control, prioritizing order and stability over justice or understanding. Conflict management, while less coercive, emphasises dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and institutional mechanisms to regulate and contain conflict dynamics, maintaining peace without necessarily addressing underlying structural or psychological causes. Both approaches operate on the premise that conflict is an inevitable aspect of social and political life that must be managed to prevent escalation. Together, they reveal the persistent tension between maintaining immediate stability and pursuing long-term peace in both domestic and international contexts.

3.1.1 Conflict Suppression

❒ Halting conflict without resolving underlying issues

Conflict suppression refers to strategies and actions aimed at halting or controlling conflict without addressing its underlying causes or fundamental disagreements. It focuses on limiting the visible expression of conflict rather than achieving a genuine and lasting resolution. In practice, suppression often involves the use of power, coercion, or authoritative measures,

ranging from an individual avoiding confrontation to a governing body imposing a ceasefire or demanding compliance. The primary goal is to prevent disputes from escalating and to maintain stability or order, even though the underlying issues remain unresolved.

Conflict suppression is characterised by its emphasis on containment and control rather than transformation or reconciliation. It seeks to halt overt conflict behaviour and maintain order, often through top-down approaches imposed by authority figures, governments, or dominant power structures. Measures of suppression may include military intervention, legal restrictions, political pressure, economic sanctions, or institutional enforcement designed to compel parties to cease hostilities or avoid confrontation. These methods can be effective in providing short-term stability and preventing immediate escalation, yet they rarely eliminate the grievances or inequalities that gave rise to the conflict. As a result, suppressed conflicts often persist beneath the surface as latent tensions that may resurface in the future, sometimes with greater force.

❒ Control-focused measures maintain order temporarily

In essence, conflict suppression is the reduction of visible or active conflict through coercive, legal, economic, or structural control rather than through genuine understanding or resolution. It can create a temporary peace that allows for safety, order, and the restoration of normality, but it does not resolve the deeper disputes or divisions at the heart of the problem. By prioritising order over justice, it risks perpetuating the conditions that caused the conflict in the first place. The calm it achieves is therefore fragile, dependent on continued control and enforcement rather than mutual agreement or reconciliation, and vulnerable to collapse once that control weakens.

❒ Suppressed conflicts remain fragile and latent

3.1.1.1 Conflict Suppression in International Relations and Politics

In the realm of international relations and politics, conflict suppression refers to top-down, non-reconciliatory strategies employed by dominant actors, such as powerful states, coalitions, or international organisations, to maintain order and stability in the global system. Rather than addressing the root causes of disputes or pursuing justice and reconciliation, this approach prioritises the preservation of negative peace, the mere absence of direct violence, through control and containment. Conflict suppression is therefore concerned with halting or limiting the visible manifestations of conflict, such as violence or open hos-

❒ Maintaining Order through Negative Peace

tility, without resolving the underlying political, social, or economic grievances that drive it. Its primary objective is to prevent disputes from escalating into large-scale wars or crises by maintaining systemic stability and order.

❒ Coercive Tools for Short-Term Stability

Conflict suppression often manifests through coercive or authoritative measures, including military deterrence, economic sanctions, peacekeeping interventions, and legal or political restrictions. These tools are designed to manage behaviour and constrain conflict actors within acceptable limits, thereby avoiding immediate escalation. For instance, international peacekeeping operations are commonly structured to separate warring factions and enforce ceasefires, reducing violence without addressing the fundamental issues at stake. Similarly, sanctions, embargoes, and diplomatic isolation are employed to compel compliance from states or groups, while strategies such as deterrence and military containment aim to suppress confrontation through the threat of overwhelming retaliation. Although these measures can produce short-term stability and limit immediate human suffering, they rarely offer long-term solutions, as the structural sources of conflict remain unresolved. Consequently, suppressed conflicts often persist as latent tensions, prone to resurfacing later in more volatile forms.

❒ Suppression as a Tool for Preserving Power and Order

Historically, conflict suppression has been a central feature of political governance and international order. States, empires, and ruling elites have long relied on suppression to preserve sovereignty, hierarchy, and territorial integrity. Ancient empires, for example, maintained control through military conquest and the harsh repression of resistance, ensuring dominance across vast territories. Medieval monarchies similarly used coercion and punitive measures to silence revolts, prioritising stability over social reform. During the colonial era, European powers extended this practice on a global scale, using military and administrative force to subdue indigenous populations and stifle anti-colonial movements. The pattern continued into the modern age, as states employed suppression to manage ideological, nationalistic, or revolutionary challenges. Even in international systems, mechanisms such as collective security arrangements and deterrence doctrines were developed to control unrest and prevent systemic instability. These historical patterns reveal that suppression has been less about solving conflicts than about sustaining authority and maintaining the balance of power.

❒ Modern Applications and Consequences of Conflict Suppression

In the contemporary world, conflict suppression remains an integral aspect of global governance and statecraft. Modern states and international institutions frequently employ it to contain unrest, enforce compliance, and avert the escalation of crises. Authoritarian regimes exemplify suppression at the domestic level, using security forces, censorship, surveillance, and restrictive laws to suppress dissent, separatist movements, or demands for political reform. While such tactics may preserve surface stability, they often entrench resentment and inhibit meaningful change. Events such as the Syrian Civil War or the suppression of mass protests in Hong Kong illustrate how reliance on coercive control and punitive enforcement can contain conflict temporarily but at the expense of genuine reconciliation and social harmony.

❒ Peacekeeping and Sanctions as Instruments of Controlled Stability

At the international level, conflict suppression is evident in the use of peacekeeping missions, ceasefire monitoring, and sanctions. Organisations such as the United Nations often intervene to prevent violence from escalating, maintaining an environment of relative calm while deeper political, ethnic, or territorial disputes remain unresolved. This creates what are often described as "frozen conflicts", where open hostilities are reduced but the potential for renewed violence endures. Economic and diplomatic forms of suppression, such as sanctions imposed on states that threaten global stability, serve a similar function: they seek to constrain behaviour through pressure and isolation rather than negotiation or reform. Such measures are instrumental in maintaining international order but frequently perpetuate a cycle of dependency and resentment that undermines prospects for long-term peace.

❒ Limits of Suppression: Stability Without Resolution

Across both historical and contemporary contexts, conflict suppression provides short-term stability and preserves existing power structures, but it does so at a significant cost. By prioritising control over resolution, it allows grievances to fester beneath the surface, often leading to the re-emergence of conflict when coercive pressure weakens. While suppression can prevent the immediate outbreak of violence and maintain international order, it is ultimately a pragmatic and limited tool of crisis management rather than a pathway to sustainable peace. Its effectiveness lies in maintaining calm and averting catastrophe, but its limitations stem from its inability to address the root causes of discord. As such, conflict suppression remains an enduring but imperfect feature of international politics, a means of preserving order in the absence of genuine resolution.

3.1.1.2 Why Conflict Suppression?

Conflict suppression is often employed as a pragmatic strategy when immediate control is prioritised over long-term resolution. It represents a practical rather than idealistic approach to managing disputes, focusing on restoring order and preventing escalation rather than addressing the root causes of conflict. One of the primary reasons for its use is immediacy. Suppression offers a rapid means of halting violence and its immediate consequences, such as loss of life, destruction, and social or political destabilisation. By swiftly containing hostilities, governments, coalitions, or international organisations can prevent situations from spiralling out of control and spreading instability to neighbouring regions. In contexts where time and resources are limited, suppression provides an expedient method of re-establishing basic order, even if it does so only temporarily.

❒ Top-down control maintains order, not justice

Another key rationale lies in the pursuit of systemic stability. Conflict suppression serves to preserve the existing domestic or international order by preventing disputes from escalating into wider crises or wars. In an interconnected global system, instability in one area can quickly generate regional or even global repercussions, threatening security and economic interdependence. By containing violence and maintaining the appearance of stability, suppression protects the broader system from collapse or contagion. This logic of preservation is especially prevalent in international politics, where maintaining balance and predictability is often deemed more important than achieving justice or transformation.

❒ Coercive measures limit conflict, not causes

Self-interest also plays a significant role in the adoption of suppression strategies. Dominant actors, including powerful states, ruling elites, or international institutions, frequently intervene to control outcomes that threaten their authority, security, or strategic interests. Such interventions may involve silencing dissent, safeguarding territorial integrity, protecting allies, or ensuring continued access to vital resources and markets. In these cases, suppression functions not only as a stabilising mechanism but also as a means of power maintenance, reinforcing existing hierarchies and preventing challenges to the prevailing order.

❒ Historical use preserved authority and power

Conflict suppression is also favoured in situations where genuine resolution is politically or practically unfeasible. Deep-rooted disputes often lack the trust, cooperation, or political will required for meaningful settlement. In such cases,

pursuing comprehensive resolution may be too costly, too slow, or too divisive to achieve in the short term. Suppression thus becomes a form of crisis management, a necessary measure to contain volatility when long-term solutions are unattainable. It provides an immediate, albeit temporary, form of control that can reduce casualties and restore a semblance of peace while deferring more difficult political questions to the future.

❒ Modern suppression contains unrest, blocks reform

In essence, the rationale for conflict suppression is grounded in pragmatism and the imperative of control. It is a strategy of damage limitation, aimed at preventing disorder rather than fostering reconciliation. While suppression can offer short-term stability and protect existing structures of power, it does so at the cost of perpetuating unresolved tensions. By focusing on containment rather than transformation, it provides a fragile peace, one that endures only so long as the mechanisms of control remain in place.

❒ Short-term stability, underlying issues remain

3.1.1.3 Impact of Conflict Suppression

The impact of conflict suppression is complex, producing a mixture of short-term benefits and long-term drawbacks. On the positive side, suppression can bring an immediate cessation of violence, halting bloodshed and preventing further destruction of lives, infrastructure, and communities. By stabilising volatile situations, it creates space for the delivery of humanitarian aid and helps protect vital state or international interests, including sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional order. It can also provide a breathing space for diplomacy or the negotiation of temporary settlements, preventing crises from escalating further. In some contexts, suppression helps keep rivalries manageable, ensuring that disputes do not spiral into full-scale wars or systemic collapse. These short-term effects make suppression an attractive tool for actors seeking immediate stability in highly volatile or high-stakes environments.

❒ Short-term stability, violence temporarily halted

However, the long-term consequences of suppression are often negative. Because it rarely addresses the underlying causes of conflict, tensions tend to persist beneath the surface. Suppressed groups or communities may harbour resentment, feeling that their legitimate grievances have been ignored or silenced, which can foster hostility towards the authority responsible for suppression and erode its legitimacy. Once the mechanisms of control weaken, conflicts often re-emerge, sometimes with greater intensity, producing what can be described as a "rebound effect." Furthermore, suppression often entrenches struc-

❒ Long-term resentment and inequalities persist

tural inequalities by prioritising the interests of powerful actors over marginalised populations. This can perpetuate injustice and delegitimise the authorities or institutions that rely on coercive control rather than inclusive, participatory approaches to conflict resolution.

Overall, conflict suppression tends to manage the symptoms of conflict rather than its causes. While it can provide immediate order, reduce casualties, and prevent escalation, it does not resolve the deeper political, social, or economic grievances that drive disputes. As a result, the stability it creates is often fragile and temporary, leaving suppressed tensions to fester and potentially re-emerge in the future. In this sense, suppression is a pragmatic tool for short-term crisis management, but it carries significant risks for long-term peace and the legitimacy of those who employ it.

❒ Fragile order; root causes unresolved

3.1.2 Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to the strategies and processes used to handle, regulate, and mitigate open disputes with the aim of preventing their escalation and minimising potential damage. It encompasses both military and non-military measures, focusing on controlling the dynamics of conflict or reaching workable compromises rather than immediately resolving underlying causes. This approach emphasises constructive engagement, encouraging cooperation, dialogue, and the establishment of systems that allow opposing sides to manage their differences productively. Unlike conflict resolution, which seeks to address the structural and attitudinal roots of disputes, conflict management is often viewed as a pragmatic, short-term approach that prioritises containment and coexistence. It recognises that not all conflicts can or should be eliminated; some may even yield positive outcomes, such as innovation, reform, or social progress. The overarching goal is not merely to suppress conflict but to channel it in constructive directions, creating the groundwork for future resolution or transformation.

❒ Channel conflict constructively, enable future resolution

At its core, conflict management is a structured process that regulates how disagreements unfold, ensuring they remain within peaceful and productive limits. It prioritises cooperation, mutual understanding, and problem-solving over control and coercion. Common techniques include negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, which provide fair and inclusive frameworks for addressing disputes. By identifying sources of tension and

❒ Regulates disputes through cooperation and problem-solving

directing them through systematic strategies, conflict management not only reduces immediate hostilities but also fosters conditions for long-term stability and sustainable relationships.

Conflict management is distinguished by its focus on resolution and transformation rather than mere containment. Unlike suppression, which primarily seeks to silence or control conflict, management emphasises addressing underlying issues and guiding disputes toward constructive outcomes. This approach reduces immediate tensions while also creating opportunities for the long-term transformation of relationships and systems. Another defining characteristic is the emphasis on participation and dialogue. Conflict management encourages active engagement between conflicting parties, allowing them to express their concerns, negotiate interests, and collaboratively search for mutually acceptable solutions. Dialogue builds trust and understanding, which are essential for reducing hostility and fostering sustainable peace.

❒ Focuses on transformation, dialogue, and participation

Furthermore, conflict management is versatile and applicable across different levels of human interaction. At the intra-state level, it addresses disputes within organisations, communities, or domestic politics. At the inter-state level, it deals with tensions between sovereign states. At the international level, it plays a vital role in managing global conflicts involving multiple actors, alliances, or institutions. This multi-level applicability makes conflict management a crucial tool in both domestic governance and international relations, providing a means to contain disputes constructively while laying the foundations for long-term resolution and systemic improvement.

❒ Applicable across local, national, international levels

3.1.2.1 Conflict Management as a Practice in International Relations and Politics

In the field of International Relations (IR) and politics, conflict management refers to the range of processes, mechanisms, and institutions designed to prevent the escalation of inter-state or intra-state disputes into violence, or to reduce the destructive effects of ongoing conflicts. Unlike conflict suppression, which prioritises control, or conflict resolution, which seeks to permanently end disputes by addressing root causes, conflict management emphasises functional and acceptable co-existence. It often serves as a middle ground, aiming to stabilise relationships and contain disputes within non-violent, manageable bounds, while creating space for eventual resolution or transformation.

❒ Conflict management prioritises coexistence, not control

❒ Diplomacy and negotiation reduce escalation risks

Conflict management in IR relies heavily on diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and the use of international institutions to de-escalate tensions. These mechanisms provide structured platforms for dialogue, encourage compromise, and promote cooperation between conflicting parties. The ultimate goal is not necessarily to solve every underlying issue immediately, but rather to establish stability, reduce violence, and foster conditions for more sustainable peace.

❒ Examples limit destruction, maintain dialogue frameworks

There are several notable examples of conflict management in international politics. The Camp David Accords (1978), brokered by the United States, managed long-standing tensions between Egypt and Israel and led to a peace treaty that remains a cornerstone of Middle Eastern stability. The Good Friday Agreement (1998) in Northern Ireland exemplifies successful conflict management at the intra-state level, bringing together opposing communities and institutions in a framework of power-sharing and cooperation. Similarly, repeated UN mediation efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reflect attempts to manage, rather than fully resolve, one of the world's most enduring disputes. Thus, in international relations, conflict management is less about eliminating conflict altogether and more about limiting its destructive potential, maintaining stability, and enabling dialogue until deeper solutions can be pursued.

❒ 19th-century Vienna established collective dispute management

The practice of formal conflict management in international relations developed significantly during the 19th and 20th centuries as states and great powers sought institutionalised ways to stabilise relations and prevent wars. Early efforts can be seen in the Congress of Vienna (1815), which, following the Napoleonic Wars, established a balance-of-power system and mechanisms of great-power consultation to prevent large-scale conflict in Europe. While largely focused on preserving monarchical stability, the Vienna settlement marked one of the first attempts at a collective framework for managing disputes.

❒ League of Nations promoted institutionalised conflict management

The 20th century witnessed a major evolution with the creation of the League of Nations after World War I. Designed to promote collective security through institutionalised diplomacy, arbitration, and sanctions, the League represented an early experiment in formalised global conflict management, though its weaknesses became apparent in the 1930s when it failed to prevent aggression by major powers.

During the Cold War, conflict management became a central focus of international politics due to the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons. The United States and the Soviet Union

developed mechanisms to manage rivalry and avoid catastrophic escalation. These included arms control treaties such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I and II) and later the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), as well as crisis management mechanisms like the Washington–Moscow "hotline," established to allow direct communication and reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war. At the same time, multilateral diplomacy in institutions such as the United Nations played a growing role in mediating regional conflicts and promoting peacekeeping operations.

❒ Cold War mechanisms prevented nuclear escalation

Taken together, these historical cases illustrate how states and international systems have shifted from ad hoc, power-based containment toward more structured, institutionalised conflict management. The emphasis moved from simply suppressing disputes to actively creating mechanisms that could stabilise international relations, reduce the risks of escalation, and preserve systemic order.

❒ Shift from suppression to structured management

Conflict management remains a central tool in contemporary international relations, as states and international organizations seek to prevent disputes from escalating into violence and to maintain global stability. A primary example is United Nations peacekeeping operations, which deploy forces to monitor ceasefires, enforce buffer zones, and implement peace accords. These missions do not necessarily resolve the underlying causes of conflict but provide structured mechanisms to de-escalate violence, protect civilians, and create the conditions necessary for political negotiations.

❒ UN peacekeeping maintains stability, monitors ceasefires

Institutionalised mechanisms such as the World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute settlement system illustrate another dimension of contemporary conflict management. By shifting disagreements over trade from political confrontation to a legal and arbitral framework, the WTO provides a structured process for resolving disputes, reducing the likelihood of escalation between member states. Similarly, preventive diplomacy, which includes early warning systems, mediation, and diplomatic initiatives, aims to identify nascent disputes and intervene before they develop into full-scale crises.

❒ WTO and preventive diplomacy reduce disputes

Specific contemporary cases highlight the practical application of conflict management. The Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA, 2015) represents a multilateral effort to prevent nuclear escalation through negotiation and oversight. The African Union has played a key role in mediating conflicts in South Sudan and Somalia, fostering dialogue among warring parties and facilitating

❒ Iran Nuclear Deal and regional mediation examples

interim governance arrangements. Bilateral and multilateral mediation efforts in Kashmir similarly demonstrate attempts to manage long-standing territorial disputes, emphasizing negotiation and compromise over coercion or unilateral action.

❒ Modern management stabilises relationships, fosters long-term peace

Overall, these contemporary examples underscore how conflict management in the modern era relies on institutionalised mechanisms, diplomacy, and multilateral engagement. Rather than seeking immediate resolution or total control, these efforts aim to reduce violence, stabilise relationships, and create conditions for longer-term peace.

3.1.2.2 Conflict Management Theories in International Relations and Politics

❒ Theories guide states in managing conflict

Conflict management theories in international relations provide comprehensive frameworks for understanding how states, international organisations, and political actors handle disputes, prevent escalation, and sustain peace. Unlike psychological or individual-level conflict models, these theories operate at systemic, state, and international levels, emphasising strategies for managing rather than merely suppressing or resolving conflict. They focus on controlling conflict dynamics, mitigating potential damage, and creating conditions for coexistence and constructive engagement, providing both theoretical guidance and practical tools for addressing complex disputes.

❒ Evolution from Idealism to Constructivism explained

The origin and evolution of conflict management theories reflect significant shifts in the understanding of conflict and the most effective ways to address it. Early Idealist thought after the First World War emphasised law, morality, and collective security, advocating for international norms and institutions as a means to achieve lasting peace, exemplified by the League of Nations. Following the Second World War, Realist and Neorealist perspectives became dominant, focusing on the inevitability of conflict in an anarchic international system and the necessity of power, deterrence, and balance of power to control violence rather than achieving permanent peace. During and after the Cold War, Liberal Institutionalism gained prominence, highlighting cooperation, negotiation, and multilateral norms as tools for managing disputes and preventing escalation. More recently, Critical and Constructivist approaches have expanded the field beyond state-centric perspectives, recognising the importance of identity, social norms, and non-state actors in both the perpetuation and management of conflict. Insights from

psychology, organisational behaviour, and negotiation studies have further informed practical strategies, emphasising the relevance of behavioural, relational, and cultural dimensions in effective conflict management.

Psychological and management theories contribute significantly to conflict management in international relations by offering structured models for understanding behaviour, communication, and negotiation dynamics. Frameworks such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which identifies assertiveness and cooperativeness as key dimensions of conflict handling, provide models for interpreting state behaviour in terms of competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, or accommodating strategies. Concepts derived from distributive and integrative bargaining highlight the importance of moving beyond zero-sum approaches towards interest-based, mutually beneficial solutions. Diagnostic tools such as the Organisational Conflict Inventory emphasise situational awareness and adaptive strategies. These principles enable diplomats, international organisations, and states to design negotiation, mediation, and dispute resolution mechanisms that are systematic, flexible, and responsive to the complexities of contemporary international conflicts.

❒ Psychological models inform negotiation and strategies

Realist and neorealist approaches posit that conflict is inevitable due to the anarchic nature of the international system. From this perspective, conflict management is predominantly coercive and strategic, relying on the balance of power, deterrence, military strength, and alliances to prevent any single actor from achieving dominance. Historical examples include Cold War nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union and the formation of NATO to counterbalance Soviet influence in Europe. Within this framework, managing conflict is fundamentally about controlling behaviour through power, credible threats, and strategic positioning, ensuring that rival actors are constrained and escalation is avoided.

❒ Realist approaches use power, deterrence, control

In contrast, liberal institutionalist theories emphasise the role of international institutions, treaties, and norms in fostering cooperation and reducing uncertainty. Conflict management under this approach relies on multilateral dialogue, predictable behaviour, and rules that regulate state actions. Initiatives such as United Nations peacekeeping operations and the European Union's processes of integration illustrate how institutions and legal frameworks can mediate disputes, mitigate tensions, and encourage cooperative behaviour without coercion. Here, conflict management operates through dialogue, negotiation, and

❒ Liberal institutionalism emphasises cooperation, rules, dialogue

structured mechanisms that facilitate compromise, coordination, and shared expectations, promoting stability and predictability in international relations.

Constructivist approaches argue that conflict is socially constructed, shaped by identities, norms, and perceptions. Managing conflict from this perspective involves transforming relationships through the promotion of shared norms, communication, and legitimacy-building rather than relying solely on material power. Post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa and the European Union's identity-driven peace initiatives demonstrate how reshaping perceptions and fostering common norms can reduce hostility, build trust, and support long-term stability, highlighting the importance of ideas, identity, and social structures in conflict management.

❒ Constructivism focuses on norms, identities, perceptions

Game-theoretic and rational choice approaches conceptualise states as rational actors seeking to maximise utility. Conflicts are managed through strategic calculation, credible commitments, signalling, and bargaining to prevent escalation. The Cuban Missile Crisis exemplifies how strategic brinkmanship and signalling can avert catastrophic outcomes, while arms control negotiations illustrate the use of incentives and deterrence in managing high-stakes disputes. This perspective underscores the importance of foresight, strategic planning, and the anticipation of opponents' responses in maintaining stability and mitigating risks of open conflict.

❒ Game theory uses strategic calculation, signalling

Conflict transformation theory adopts a systemic and long-term perspective, prioritising the resolution of underlying structures, relationships, and causes of conflict rather than merely containing violence. This approach emphasises reconciliation, dialogue, and inclusive participation as tools for creating sustainable peace. The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and post-genocide reconciliation and institution-building in Rwanda exemplify how addressing identity, structural issues, and social grievances can produce durable solutions, foster societal healing, and establish long-term stability.

❒ Conflict transformation targets underlying structures, reconciliation

Multi-level and Track II diplomacy theories highlight the significant role of non-state actors, non-governmental organisations, and informal negotiation channels alongside formal diplomatic processes. Approaches such as Human Needs Theory and Ripeness Theory stress the importance of addressing human needs, social grievances, and relational factors to complement political negotiations. Initiatives such as Israeli-Palestinian Track II dialogues and peacebuilding efforts in Liberia

❒ Multi-level diplomacy integrates formal and informal actors

and Sierra Leone illustrate the effectiveness of combining formal and informal mechanisms to achieve durable and inclusive outcomes. These approaches demonstrate that sustainable conflict management requires engagement across multiple levels, incorporating both official and unofficial actors, and addressing social, political, and relational dimensions.

Overall, conflict management theories in international relations present a diverse and interconnected set of perspectives and tools. Whether coercive, institutional, social, strategic, transformational, or multi-layered, all approaches share the common objectives of preventing escalation, mitigating destructive consequences, and creating conditions for sustained stability and cooperation. By integrating insights from political theory, institutional design, psychology, and behavioural studies, these frameworks provide states, diplomats, and international organisations with practical strategies to manage disputes constructively, reduce immediate hostilities, and lay the foundations for long-term peace and systemic improvement.

❒ Diverse theories aim for stability and peace

3.1.2.5 Impact of Conflict Management in International Relations and Politics

The impact of conflict management in international relations is generally positive, as it facilitates functional coexistence and reduces the destructive consequences of disputes. One significant effect is the reduction of violence. By creating structures such as ceasefires, demilitarised zones, and monitored peace agreements, conflict management contains hostilities and prevents escalation into full-scale wars or mass violence.

❒ Reduces violence, prevents escalation of conflicts

Conflict management also promotes institutionalisation of dispute handling. By providing reliable diplomatic channels, multilateral forums, and organizational mechanisms, it shifts conflicts from battlefields into negotiation spaces, allowing dialogue, mediation, and arbitration to resolve differences in a structured manner. Institutions like the United Nations, the African Union, and the European Union serve as prime examples of frameworks that facilitate sustained conflict management and maintain international stability.

❒ Institutionalises disputes through structured negotiation channels

Moreover, effective conflict management lays the foundation for deeper resolution or transformation. By improving communication, fostering dialogue, and building trust among parties, it creates conditions for addressing underlying grievances over time. This can lead to long-term reconciliation, cooperative ar-

rangements, and structural peacebuilding, even if immediate resolution is not possible.However, conflict management also has limitations. It is often time-consuming and resource-intensive, requiring sustained attention, skilled mediation, and significant institutional support. Its success depends heavily on the commitment of the involved parties and can be constrained by power asymmetries, where stronger actors dominate the process, potentially limiting fairness or sustainability.

❒ Builds trust, enables long-term reconciliation

Overall, conflict management in IR and politics serves as a crucial mechanism for reducing violence, institutionalizing negotiation and dialogue, and setting the stage for long-term peace, even though it requires patience, resources, and cooperative engagement to achieve lasting impact.

3.1.3 Difference between Conflict Suppression and Conflict Management

Conflict suppression and conflict management represent two distinct approaches to dealing with disputes, differing fundamentally in their goals, methods, focus, and outcomes. The primary goal of conflict suppression is to stop or prevent the overt expression of conflict, often through coercive measures, without addressing its underlying causes. In contrast, conflict management aims to contain the destructive effects of a conflict while keeping it within constructive bounds, creating opportunities for resolution, cooperation, or transformation over time.

❒ Suppression and management have distinct goals

Their approaches also differ. Conflict suppression is typically top-down, unilateral, and coercive, relying on power, force, or authority, whether military, political, or economic, to maintain control. Conflict management, on the other hand, is structured, interactive, and participatory, relying on dialogue, negotiation, institutional rules, and diplomacy to mediate disputes and foster mutual understanding. In terms of focus, conflict suppression targets the behaviours and visible symptoms of conflict, such as violence, protests, or public dissent. Conflict management focuses on the processes, interactions, and structures that generate or sustain the conflict, including communication, bargaining positions, and institutional mechanisms.

❒ Suppression is coercive; management is participatory

The outcomes of the two approaches are markedly different. Conflict suppression often produces negative peace, the mere absence of overt violence, without addressing root causes, which can result in latent tensions or a frozen conflict state. Conflict management, by contrast, aims for functional coexistence and stability and can establish the foundations for positive peace by resolving structural and relational issues over time.

❒ Suppression yields negative peace; management builds stability

❒ Suppression risks recurrence; management seeks sustainability

Sustainability also varies: suppression carries a high risk of conflict re-eruption due to unresolved grievances, while conflict management seeks medium- to long-term sustainability through mutually acceptable arrangements. Similarly, the power dynamics differ: suppression tends to reinforce existing power asymmetries, allowing the powerful to dictate terms, whereas conflict management attempts to balance power or shift the focus from dominance to shared interests and needs.

❒ Suppression uses force; management uses negotiation

In practical terms, conflict suppression often employs military, legal, or economic coercion, sanctions, and forceful intervention. Conflict management utilises tools such as mediation, negotiation, dialogue, diplomacy, and institutional frameworks, including peace agreements and multilateral mechanisms. In international relations, suppression may be seen in military deterrence, enforced ceasefires, or sanctions, while conflict management is exemplified by diplomacy, peacekeeping, multilateral negotiations, and conflict resolution frameworks.

❒ Suppression prioritises control; management fosters transformation

In sum, conflict suppression prioritises short-term stability and control, often at the cost of long-term peace, whereas conflict management prioritises constructive engagement, resolution, and transformation, aiming for sustainable outcomes and improved relationships among parties.

Summarised overview

Conflict suppression and conflict management are two foundational approaches to controlling and addressing disputes within political and international contexts. Conflict suppression emphasises coercive control, prioritising order, stability, and the cessation of violence rather than resolving root causes. States and powerful actors employ suppression through military intervention, legal restrictions, or sanctions to maintain authority and prevent escalation. Historically, empires and modern regimes alike have used suppression to maintain dominance, from Rome's conquests to colonial and Cold War interventions. While suppression can achieve short-term peace, it often produces "negative peace", the absence of open violence without reconciliation, leaving underlying grievances unresolved and prone to resurface as renewed conflict.

In contrast, conflict management seeks to regulate disputes constructively, focusing on negotiation, mediation, and institutional engagement rather than coercion. It operates on the principle that conflict is inevitable but manageable through dialogue and structured mechanisms. In international relations, this is achieved through diplomacy, peacekeeping, arbitration, and multilateral institutions. Historical milestones such as the Congress of Vienna, the Camp David Accords, and the Good Friday Agreement

exemplify how management frameworks can transform destructive tensions into stable coexistence. Theories of conflict management, ranging from Realism's emphasis on power balance to Liberal Institutionalism's focus on cooperation, and Constructivism's attention to norms and identity, provide varied lenses to interpret and guide global conflict-handling practices.

Modern conflict management further integrates insights from psychology and organizational behaviour, adapting interpersonal negotiation and leadership principles to state-level diplomacy. Frameworks such as Thomas-Kilmann's conflict-handling styles and Pruitt's integrative bargaining highlight the importance of communication, flexibility, and mutual gain. These perspectives reinforce that successful conflict management is not about the elimination of conflict but its transformation into constructive engagement. Ultimately, while suppression may bring immediate calm, sustainable peace depends on inclusive and participatory conflict management that addresses the structural and relational roots of disputes, ensuring long-term stability, legitimacy, and cooperation among actors in the international system.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How does conflict suppression differ conceptually from conflict management?
2. Why is conflict suppression often described as producing "negative peace"?
3. In what circumstances might conflict suppression be seen as the most practical option?
4. Why are suppressed conflicts considered fragile and prone to re-emergence?
5. How does conflict management seek to regulate disputes without imposing unilateral control?
6. How does conflict management contribute to conditions that enable long-term peace?
7. Why might conflict management be more compatible with democratic governance than suppression?
8. Why does conflict management not necessarily aim to eliminate conflict altogether?

Assignments

1. Why do states often prefer suppression over resolution in times of crisis?
2. How does conflict suppression maintain order but undermine justice?
3. What are the long-term consequences of suppressing rather than resolving conflict?
4. How do contemporary examples demonstrate the limits of suppression?
5. What role does coercion play in maintaining temporary stability?
6. In what ways does conflict management differ from conflict resolution?
7. What are the major theoretical perspectives on conflict management in international relations?
8. How does conflict management promote "positive peace" compared to suppression's "negative peace"?
9. What challenges limit the effectiveness of conflict management in global politics?
10. Why is balancing coercion and cooperation essential for sustainable peacebuilding?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 2

Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- define conflict resolution and conflict reconciliation in both general and international contexts.
- explain the distinction between resolving disputes and restoring relationships.
- identify the main theories of conflict resolution, including Human Needs Theory,
- evaluate the interplay between conflict resolution and reconciliation in achieving positive peace.

Background

Conflict resolution and reconciliation are two interlinked yet distinct pillars of peacebuilding that aim to manage, reduce, and ultimately transform conflict within and between societies. Conflict resolution focuses on peacefully addressing the immediate causes of disputes through negotiation, mediation, dialogue, arbitration, and institutional reform in order to achieve mutually acceptable solutions and prevent violence. It emphasises the need to address practical, structural, and political issues and aims to move societies from negative peace, the absence of direct violence, toward positive peace, marked by reduced structural and cultural inequalities. Reconciliation, by contrast, goes beyond the termination of hostilities to heal fractured relationships and restore trust, dignity, and moral legitimacy between former adversaries. It involves a long-term process of truth-seeking, justice, forgiveness, reparation, and narrative reconstruction, addressing the emotional, psychological, and ethical consequences of violence. While conflict resolution deals with problem-solving and institutional change, reconciliation engages with memory, identity, trauma, and moral repair. Together, they form a comprehensive conflict-handling mechanism, as successful peace requires not only negotiated agreements but also the rebuilding of social fabrics, making both resolution and reconciliation indispensable to sustainable peace, stability, and human security.

Keywords

Conflict Resolution, Conflict Reconciliation, Positive Peace, Transitional Justice, Conflict Transformation, Structural Violence

Discussion

Conflict resolution and reconciliation are essential pillars in understanding and managing human, social, and international disputes. Conflict resolution involves processes and strategies aimed at peacefully ending or significantly reducing conflict through negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and problem-solving, focusing on structural and immediate issues. Reconciliation, by contrast, is a deeper, long-term process that addresses the psychological, emotional, and moral dimensions of conflict, restoring trust, dignity, and social cohesion among previously divided parties. Both concepts are critical in international relations and politics, where disputes among states, communities, and non-state actors require holistic approaches that combine diplomatic, institutional, and societal mechanisms. Together, these processes not only seek to end violence but also aim to build sustainable peace grounded in justice, equality, and positive transformation of relationships and social structures.

3.2.1 What is Conflict Resolution?

- Meaning of conflict resolution

Conflict Resolution (CR) is a comprehensive process and term encompassing various methods and strategies used for peacefully ending or significantly reducing conflict. It aims at achieving a mutually acceptable and sustainable solution by systematically addressing the conflict's root causes, underlying interests, and structural factors, rather than simply suppressing the symptoms. As succinctly put by John Burton, "Conflict resolution means eliminating the causes of conflict and not merely suppressing its symptoms." CR involves a range of peaceful means, including negotiation, mediation, dialogue, arbitration, and problem-solving, often requiring formal third-party intervention and facilitation. The ultimate goal of CR is to move beyond mere negative peace, the absence of physical violence, towards positive peace, which entails the presence of social justice, the absence of structural violence, and a fundamental

transformation of the relationships, attitudes, institutions, and structures that originally generated the conflict.

3.2.1.1 Practice of Conflict Resolution in International Relations and Politics

In international relations and politics, conflict resolution refers to the diplomatic and political efforts undertaken to end disputes among states, ethnic groups, or political actors through non-violent and negotiated means. It focuses on both interstate and intrastate conflicts, aiming to prevent, de-escalate, or terminate hostilities between state and non-state actors. Conflict resolution represents a shift from confrontational, zero-sum approaches to a problem-solving perspective that seeks mutually beneficial or "win–win" outcomes. In political contexts, it may involve processes such as power-sharing arrangements, constitutional reforms, federal structures, or peace agreements designed to accommodate diverse interests and ensure stability within or between states.

❒ Conflict resolution seeks peaceful dispute settlement.

The mechanisms employed in conflict resolution include negotiation (Track I diplomacy), involving direct talks between official state representatives; mediation or good offices, where third-party states or international organisations such as the United Nations or the African Union facilitate dialogue; and problem-solving workshops (Track II diplomacy), which bring together influential non-state individuals, academics, journalists, or community leaders from opposing sides to explore creative alternatives and build mutual understanding. Historical examples of such efforts include the Camp David Accords (1978), which led to a resolution between Egypt and Israel; the Good Friday Agreement (1998), which ended the Northern Ireland conflict; and the India–Sri Lanka Accord (1987), which sought a political settlement to the Tamil issue.

❒ Uses negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy mechanisms.

Historically, conflict resolution was often understood in terms of conflict settlement—that is, the imposition of temporary peace agreements or treaties by powerful states following warfare. In the ancient and classical periods, diplomacy was already a recognised tool for managing disputes, as seen in the practices of the Greek city-states and the Mauryan Empire, notably articulated in Kautilya's Arthashastra. The Westphalian Era (1648) marked the emergence of modern state sovereignty and the institutionalisation of diplomacy as a means of maintaining order among states. During the nineteenth century, mechanisms such as the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the doctrine of the balance of power sought to prevent large-scale wars in Europe.

❒ Early diplomacy maintained order among states.

In early international relations theory, particularly within the realist tradition, conflict was viewed as an inevitable aspect of state behaviour, with resolution achieved primarily through deterrence or power balancing rather than genuine reconciliation. The twentieth century brought a more systematic and institutionalised approach: after the First World War, the League of Nations attempted (though ultimately failed) to provide a framework for peaceful conflict prevention. The aftermath of the Second World War and the adoption of the United Nations Charter transformed conflict resolution by embedding collective security and peaceful dispute settlement under Chapter VI, signalling a shift towards multilateralism. During the Cold War, formal conflict resolution was constrained by bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, yet significant developments occurred through the use of good offices, mediation, and back-channel diplomacy, notably exemplified by the peaceful de-escalation of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).

❒ UN and multilateralism shaped modern resolution.

Over time, conflict resolution evolved from ad hoc settlements imposed by dominant powers to an institutionalised and cooperative process embedded in international law and multilateral diplomacy. In contemporary international relations and politics, it has become increasingly complex, often involving a mix of interstate and intrastate dimensions as well as the active participation of non-state actors and international organisations. Modern conflicts are rarely confined to state boundaries and frequently require multi-track diplomacy, combining official negotiations with informal and community-based efforts.

❒ Evolved into institutionalised cooperative process.

For instance, the Middle East Peace Process, particularly the Oslo Accords (1993) between Israel and Palestine, represented a significant attempt at negotiated settlement, although enduring structural and identity-based issues have hindered its full realisation. In Rwanda, following the 1994 genocide, both the United Nations and local justice mechanisms, such as the Gacaca courts, played crucial roles in rebuilding governance and promoting reconciliation. The South Sudan peace process illustrates the regionalised nature of contemporary conflict resolution, with mediation facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and supported by international partners such as the UN and the Troika (United States, United Kingdom, and Norway). Similarly, the Colombia Peace Accord (2016) stands as a landmark example of a state negotiating with a non-state armed group, the FARC, to end a protracted civil war through mechanisms for political inclusion, transitional justice, and rural reform.

❒ Modern examples illustrate diverse resolution efforts.

❒ Persistent conflicts show ongoing mediation challenges.

Meanwhile, long-standing conflicts such as Kashmir and Israel–Palestine continue to demonstrate the limitations of traditional state-level negotiations, underscoring the necessity for sustained multi-track diplomacy and the resolution of deeper structural, identity, and justice-related grievances. Ongoing crises, including the Ukraine–Russia conflict (2014–present), also highlight the continued relevance of international mediation through organisations like the OSCE and the United Nations, reflecting both the challenges and evolution of conflict resolution in the contemporary global order.

3.2.1.2 Conflict Resolution Theories in IR and Politics

❒ Origins of conflict resolution as discipline.

The origin and evolution of conflict resolution theories can be traced to the mid-twentieth century, when the field began to consolidate as a distinct area of study, drawing insights from international relations, psychology, sociology, and management studies. In the 1950s and 1960s, conflict resolution emerged partly as a critique of traditional realist thought in international relations, which regarded war and conflict as inevitable outcomes of power politics. Scholars such as John Burton pioneered the use of Problem-Solving Workshops, small-group dialogues that applied psychological and behavioural science to analyse and address deep-rooted conflicts. This period also marked the beginnings of peace research, with the establishment of institutions such as the Peace Research Institute Oslo and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which helped to institutionalise the study of peace and conflict.

❒ Expansion through negotiation and mediation theories.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the field expanded with the development of mediation techniques and the formalisation of negotiation theory, most notably through the Harvard Negotiation Project, which introduced principles of cooperative problem-solving and interest-based negotiation. The concept of Track II Diplomacy also gained prominence during this period, encouraging unofficial and informal dialogues between influential individuals or groups to complement formal diplomatic efforts. Conflict resolution theory during this time increasingly drew upon insights from management studies, emphasising effective negotiation, communication, and mediation skills to address disputes constructively within and between groups. Integrative bargaining and interest-based negotiation models encouraged mediators and negotiators to move beyond rigid positions and focus instead on underlying interests that could be reconciled through creative and cooperative solutions.

Psychological theories, particularly from social psychology, contributed significantly to understanding the cognitive and emotional dimensions of conflict. Concepts such as attribution error, dehumanisation, in-group/out-group bias, and perspective-taking explained how misperceptions and stereotyping sustained hostility between parties. Interventions such as Herbert Kelman's Interactive Problem-Solving model and John Burton's Problem-Solving Workshops drew directly from these insights, aiming to transform adversarial attitudes by fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and trust. Behavioural science further highlighted the role of human motivation, leadership, and trust-building in de-escalating tensions and sustaining cooperation, thereby shifting the focus of conflict resolution from purely structural or political factors to the interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive processes that shape how conflicts emerge, persist, and can ultimately be resolved.

❒ Psychological insights shape conflict understanding.

From the 1990s onwards, particularly after the end of the Cold War, conflict resolution theory evolved further to incorporate ideas of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, driven by the proliferation of intrastate conflicts and civil wars. Thinkers such as John Paul Lederach and Johan Galtung advanced models linking conflict resolution to broader social change, justice, and reconciliation. In the 2000s and beyond, these approaches became embedded within global governance frameworks, influencing United Nations peacebuilding policies and international development agendas. Overall, the evolution of conflict resolution theories reflects a shift from traditional state-centric and issue-based negotiations towards a holistic, interdisciplinary, and transformative understanding of peace and conflict.

❒ Post–Cold War focus on transformation.

Conflict resolution in international relations and politics is underpinned by several key theories and models that explain the origins of conflict and propose methods for its peaceful settlement or transformation. One of the most influential frameworks is Human Needs Theory, developed by John Burton, which argues that protracted conflicts arise from the denial of fundamental human needs such as security, identity, recognition, and autonomy. According to Burton, these needs are non-negotiable and non-zero-sum, meaning that lasting resolution can only occur when such needs are genuinely addressed rather than suppressed or traded off. Another major contribution is Integrative Negotiation or Problem-Solving Theory, advanced by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their seminal work Getting to Yes (1981). They advocate for "principled negotiation," which

❒ Human Needs Theory emphasises basic needs.

focuses on separating people from the problem, identifying underlying interests rather than fixed positions, and seeking mutually beneficial outcomes through creative solutions.

Building upon these approaches, Conflict Transformation Theory, associated with Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach, views conflict not merely as a problem to be resolved but as a potential catalyst for constructive social change. This perspective emphasises addressing the structural and relational dimensions of conflict, transforming the systems, attitudes, and power relations that sustain violence rather than merely ending hostilities. In parallel, Game Theory, developed by thinkers such as Thomas Schelling and Robert Axelrod, applies mathematical models to strategic interactions, such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, to explain why rational actors might choose cooperation or defection in conflict situations. These insights have been particularly useful in understanding arms control negotiations, deterrence, and crisis bargaining during the Cold War and beyond. Complementing these, Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory highlights that true peace, or "positive peace," requires the removal of injustices embedded within social, economic, and political systems.

❒ Transformation, Game, and Structural Violence theories.

Collectively, these theories have shifted the study and practice of conflict resolution from mere dispute settlement to a broader, multidimensional process aimed at achieving sustainable and just peace in international and political contexts. By integrating insights from psychology, management, sociology, and strategic theory, contemporary conflict resolution in international relations addresses not only immediate disputes but also the deeper structural and relational factors that underlie protracted conflicts, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding and promoting peace in a complex, interconnected world.

❒ Shift toward holistic, sustainable peacebuilding.

3.2.1.3 Relevance of Conflict Resolution in IR and Politics

The relevance of conflict resolution in international relations and politics lies in its central role in promoting diplomacy, dialogue, and negotiation as alternatives to warfare and coercion. In an era characterised by complex, transnational, and intrastate conflicts, conflict resolution provides essential frameworks for maintaining international peace, security, and stability. It serves as a practical mechanism for implementing the United Nations Charter's principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes (Chapter VI), thereby reinforcing multilateral coopera-

❒ Promotes diplomacy, dialogue, and global stability.

tion and reducing reliance on military intervention. Moreover, it contributes to the strengthening of global governance institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU), which play vital roles in facilitating negotiation, mediation, and peacebuilding efforts. Conflict resolution also promotes human security and sustainable development by addressing the root causes of violence, reducing humanitarian crises, and curbing refugee flows.

The impact of conflict resolution has been both practical and transformative in shaping contemporary international politics. Successful conflict resolution initiatives have prevented the escalation of interstate disputes and brought an end to major civil wars, as seen in the Good Friday Agreement (1998) in Northern Ireland and the transition from apartheid in South Africa. These efforts have also led to the institutionalisation of third-party mediation, incorporating international organisations and non-state actors as legitimate agents in global peace making. Additionally, conflict resolution has fostered the creation of peace agreements and ceasefires, strengthened the foundations of international law and mediation mechanisms, and contributed to the growth of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. Its influence extends beyond immediate conflict termination, supporting democratic transitions in post-conflict societies such as those in the Balkans and Southern Africa. Overall, conflict resolution remains a cornerstone of international diplomacy and a crucial pathway toward achieving sustainable and positive peace in the modern global order.

❒ Transforms politics and fosters sustainable peace.

3.2.2 What is Conflict Reconciliation?

❒ Meaning of conflict reconciliation

Conflict reconciliation is a deeper, long-term process aimed at restoring broken relationships between former adversaries through truth-telling, forgiveness, justice, and healing. It moves beyond the immediate resolution of disputes to address the psychological, emotional, and moral injuries caused by violence, seeking to rebuild trust, dignity, and moral legitimacy within societies. As John Paul Lederach defines it, "Reconciliation represents the point of meeting where truth, mercy, justice, and peace converge." In this sense, reconciliation is not simply the cessation of conflict but the transformation of relationships and social structures that sustained division. It represents the process through which a society transitions from a deeply divided and violent past toward a shared and peaceful future, grounded in mutual acknowledgement of suffering, the recog-

nition of wrongdoing, and, where possible, forgiveness. The ultimate goal of conflict reconciliation is to establish "right relationships" among individuals, communities, and institutions, relationships built on respect, dignity, and a commitment to coexistence, thereby laying the foundation for sustainable peace and social harmony.

3.2.2.1 Practice of Conflict Reconciliation in IR and Politics

In international relations and politics, conflict reconciliation refers to the post-conflict reconstruction of relationships between states, communities, or social groups, addressing not only the structural and institutional dimensions of conflict but also its psychological and moral aspects. Its primary aim is to transform previously hostile or negative relationships into constructive and cooperative ones, forming a foundation for sustainable peacebuilding. This process is often societal in scope and may involve multiple complementary mechanisms. Truth-telling is central, requiring the acknowledgement of facts and historical narratives of injustice. Justice, in the form of transitional measures, whether retributive, restorative, or a combination of both, seeks to address wrongdoing and establish accountability.Reparation or restitution, whether symbolic or material, acknowledges past harms and contributes to healing. Additionally, institutional reform ensures that political and social structures are reshaped to prevent the recurrence of conflict. Historical examples of such reconciliation processes include South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) under Desmond Tutu, the post-World War II reconciliation between Germany and France through European integration, and Rwanda's Gacaca courts, which provided community-based mechanisms for justice and social healing. Together, these efforts illustrate how reconciliation in IR and politics goes beyond mere conflict resolution to foster enduring trust, social cohesion, and moral legitimacy.

❒ Rebuilding trust through truth and justice.

Conflict reconciliation in the context of state and international relations gained significant prominence largely after the Cold War, often emerging in the aftermath of mass violence and systemic injustices. Following the Second World War, early efforts such as the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials represented state-led attempts at retributive justice, yet broader societal reconciliation processes were often limited. In post-colonial Africa, nation-building efforts frequently struggled with reconciliation due to unresolved ethnic and political grievances rooted in both

colonial and post-independence conflicts. By the late twentieth century, the rise of transitional justice mechanisms, including truth commissions and international tribunals in regions such as Latin America, the Balkans, and Africa, brought reconciliation to the forefront of post-conflict international relations. Notable examples include the Marshall Plan and Franco-German cooperation in post-war Europe, which facilitated not only economic recovery but also political rapprochement; South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1994–2000), which promoted national healing following apartheid; the community-based justice and truth-telling processes in post-genocide Rwanda; and the establishment of truth commissions in Argentina, Chile, and Guatemala after civil wars and authoritarian regimes. These historical experiences demonstrate that conflict reconciliation is not merely the resolution of disputes but a comprehensive societal process aimed at rebuilding trust, restoring justice, and fostering sustainable peace.

❒ Post–Cold War rise of reconciliation mechanisms.

Contemporary examples of conflict reconciliation illustrate the diverse mechanisms through which societies and states seek to restore relationships and build sustainable peace. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) remains the most prominent case, where the state implemented a non-judicial truth commission granting conditional amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of politically motivated human rights abuses under apartheid, prioritising truth and moral accountability over conventional retributive justice. In contexts such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, a combination of international tribunals (e.g., the ICTY) and national mechanisms (e.g., Rwanda's Gacaca courts) were employed to address massive war crimes and genocide, highlighting the challenges of achieving deep societal reconciliation while pursuing justice. Long-term, non-state-driven initiatives, such as Germany–Poland joint historical commissions and civic exchanges, have facilitated the overcoming of historical enmities and fostered enduring cooperation. More recent examples include the 2016 Colombia Peace Accord, which addressed FARC reintegration and transitional justice; ongoing reconciliation efforts in post-2009 Sri Lanka; the anticipated need for national and regional reconciliation in Ukraine following conflict; and the diplomatic normalization between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2018, which ended decades of hostility. Collectively, these cases demonstrate that contemporary conflict reconciliation encompasses a combination of truth-telling, justice, institutional reform, and long-term relationship-building, tailored to the historical, political, and social contexts of each conflict.

❒ Modern examples show diverse reconciliation approaches.

3.2.2.2 Conflict Reconciliation Theories in IR and Politics

Theories of conflict reconciliation in international relations and politics emphasise the restoration of relationships, moral repair, and structural transformation following violence or injustice. John Paul Lederach's Reconciliation Framework positions reconciliation at the intersection of truth, mercy, justice, and peace, advocating a holistic approach that addresses both emotional and institutional dimensions of healing. Similarly, Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Model, rooted in the South African experience, foregrounds truth-telling and forgiveness as pathways to both individual and national healing. Johan Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory extends the concept of reconciliation beyond the resolution of immediate disputes, viewing it as part of a deeper process of structural and cultural change necessary for sustainable peace. Howard Zehr's Restorative Justice Theory emphasises the repair of harm and the restoration of relationships, shifting the focus from punishment to accountability and healing. In the Truth and Justice Paradigm, Ruti Teitel explores the interplay between legal and moral repair through transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions and reparations.

❒ Key theories emphasise healing and justice.

Returning to Lederach, his concepts of the Purity of the Past and Moral Imagination underscore the importance of acknowledging collective trauma and moral injury, fostering a long-term, relationship-centred process that enables societies to envision a shared and peaceful future. Expanding this psychological dimension, scholars such as Brandon Hamber and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela propose the concept of social healing and collective memory, focusing on how societies can address the psychological aftermath of violence through therapeutic interventions, educational reforms, and the reconfiguration of public memory in monuments and history. Together, these theories illustrate that reconciliation in international relations and politics is not merely a political act but a transformative process of moral, social, and structural renewal.

❒ Lederach and others highlight moral imagination.

The evolution of conflict reconciliation theories reflects the practical challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and peace implementation, highlighting the growing awareness that formal peace agreements alone are insufficient to secure lasting peace. The intellectual and practical roots of reconciliation theory can be traced to the post–Second World War period, particularly through early developments in restorative and transitional jus-

tice, which sought to balance accountability with social repair. It was, however, in the 1980s and 1990s that reconciliation theory gained significant momentum, largely influenced by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which demonstrated the importance of integrating truth-telling, justice, and forgiveness in national healing. During this period, scholars and practitioners recognised that merely signing peace treaties or achieving conflict resolution often failed to prevent renewed violence if underlying trauma, mistrust, and structural inequalities were not addressed. Consequently, transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reforms became central to linking accountability with emotional and societal healing. From the 2000s onward, the field expanded further, shifting from predominantly state-led frameworks to bottom-up approaches involving civil society, victims, and community leaders. This evolution brought the social-psychological dimensions of reconciliation, including trust, empathy, identity, and narrative reconstruction, into sharper focus. By the twenty-first century, reconciliation theory had become institutionalised within United Nations peacebuilding and post-conflict frameworks, notably through the UNDP and the World Bank, embedding reconciliation as a core component of sustainable peace and inclusive development.

❒ Evolution from justice to holistic reconciliation.

The study and practice of conflict reconciliation are profoundly interdisciplinary, drawing extensively from psychological and management theories to understand and facilitate processes of healing, trust-building, and institutional reform. From the field of psychology, particularly clinical and social psychology, come crucial insights into dealing with trauma, grief, collective identity, and victimisation. These perspectives underpin therapeutic interventions and community-based psychosocial support, which are central to the healing of individuals and societies emerging from violence. Social psychology contributes further by illuminating the dynamics of forgiveness, empathy, and trust reconstruction, offering theoretical foundations for addressing hostility and rebuilding social cohesion.

❒ Psychological insights aid societal healing.

In parallel, ideas from organisational management, particularly concerning institutional culture change and trust-building, inform post-conflict efforts to reform critical state institutions such as the security sector, judiciary, and civil service, ensuring they operate in a non-discriminatory and accountable manner. The Human Relations approach emphasises the transformative power of communication, dialogue, and empathy in mending divided communities. Meanwhile, leadership studies highlight

❒ Management and leadership enhance reconciliation processes.

the role of transformational leadership and moral authority, as exemplified by figures such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, whose personal integrity and vision helped guide entire societies toward reconciliation. Collectively, these interdisciplinary influences enrich reconciliation theory by combining emotional, relational, and structural dimensions, making it a holistic process of individual and societal transformation.

3.2.2.3 Relevance of Reconciliation in IR and Politics

In international relations and politics, reconciliation holds profound relevance as a prerequisite for stable and positive peace. Without genuine reconciliation, processes of conflict resolution risk producing only temporary ceasefires that leave underlying animosities, injustices, and divisions unresolved and vulnerable to resurgence. Reconciliation is therefore essential for nation-building, democratisation, and the protection of human rights in societies emerging from violent conflict. Its importance lies in addressing both structural and emotional dimensions of division, restoring trust, dignity, and moral legitimacy among citizens and between states. Successful reconciliation processes contribute to the legitimisation of new political systems, foster democratic consolidation, and support economic recovery by rebuilding social capital and promoting cooperation. Furthermore, reconciliation ensures sustainable peace beyond ceasefires, preventing cycles of revenge and enabling societies to develop shared narratives of history and identity that strengthen unity.

❒ Reconciliation builds trust and lasting peace.

In practical terms, reconciliation enhances social cohesion, reinforces democratic governance, and leads to institutional reforms within justice, education, and administrative systems. On a broader international scale, it improves relations between states through the cultivation of forgiveness, moral accountability, and cooperative diplomacy. Ultimately, reconciliation restores the human dignity of victims and communities, laying the moral and political foundations for a just and enduring peace.

❒ Enhances cohesion and fosters just governance.

3.2.3 Difference Between Conflict Resolution and Conflict Reconciliation

Conflict resolution and conflict reconciliation are closely related yet distinct concepts within the study and practice of peace and conflict management. Conflict resolution refers to the process of finding a mutually acceptable solution to a dispute, typically through mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation,

and diplomacy. Its primary focus lies in addressing the immediate issues at stake, such as power-sharing, territory, resources, or political representation, with the goal of ending violence and achieving a formal agreement or peace settlement. The approach is largely behavioural and structural, aiming to change policies, institutions, or political arrangements to reduce conflict. It is generally a short- to medium-term process, culminating in specific, time-bound outcomes such as ceasefires, treaties, or power-sharing accords. Thinkers such as John Burton, Johan Galtung, and Fisher and Ury have been instrumental in shaping this field through their emphasis on problem-solving and principled negotiation.

❒ Conflict resolution addresses immediate disputes.

In contrast, conflict reconciliation is a deeper, long-term process that focuses on healing relationships, restoring moral trust, and rebuilding social harmony after violence or injustice. It seeks to address the psychological, emotional, and moral dimensions of conflict, going beyond settlements to promote forgiveness, empathy, and justice. Reconciliation involves mechanisms such as truth-telling, forgiveness, reparations, memorialisation, and psychosocial healing, aiming to transform the underlying relationships and collective narratives that perpetuate hostility. This process is inherently attitudinal and moral, requiring shifts in perception, emotion, and identity that may unfold over decades or generations. Leading thinkers like John Paul Lederach, Desmond Tutu, and Howard Zehr have contributed profoundly to this understanding, linking reconciliation to truth, mercy, justice, and peace.

❒ Reconciliation focuses on healing relationships.

In essence, conflict resolution focuses on issues and structures, whereas conflict reconciliation concentrates on relationships and context. Resolution seeks to end violence; reconciliation seeks to ensure it does not return. The two are therefore mutually reinforcing, resolution provides the political and structural framework for peace, while reconciliation ensures its psychological and moral sustainability, enabling societies to move from mere coexistence toward genuine social harmony and shared humanity.

❒ Resolution ends conflict; reconciliation sustains peace.

Conflict resolution and conflict reconciliation represent two complementary pillars of peacebuilding, each addressing distinct yet interrelated dimensions of conflict transformation. While conflict resolution seeks to end violence by addressing the immediate causes of disputes through negotiation, mediation, and institutional reform, conflict reconciliation ensures the sustainability of peace by fostering moral, emotional, and social healing. Together, they guide societies from negative

peace, the mere absence of war or direct violence, to positive peace, characterised by the presence of justice, equality, and harmony. In essence, conflict resolution is concerned with solving the problem, whereas conflict reconciliation focuses on healing the wound. Resolution provides the structural and political framework for peace, but without reconciliation, without trust, forgiveness, and the rebuilding of relationships, such peace remains fragile. Thus, while resolution is often a necessary precursor, it is never sufficient on its own; a peace agreement may end hostilities, but reconciliation transforms relationships, ensuring that peace is not only achieved but also endured and internalised within the fabric of society.

❒ Both processes complement lasting peacebuilding.

Summarised overview

Conflict resolution is a systematic process aimed at ending disputes through peaceful means such as negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and institutional reform. In international relations, it focuses on both interstate and intrastate conflicts, seeking mutually beneficial solutions while preventing the escalation of violence. The evolution of conflict resolution has shifted from ad hoc settlements and power-based diplomacy to formal, institutionalised, and cooperative mechanisms such as the United Nations, regional organizations, and multi-track diplomacy. Theoretical frameworks like John Burton's Human Needs Theory, Fisher and Ury's principled negotiation, and Johan Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory have expanded the scope from mere dispute settlement to addressing underlying structural and relational causes of conflict. Psychological and management theories further enhance understanding by highlighting cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions that shape conflict dynamics and resolution outcomes.

Conflict reconciliation goes beyond immediate dispute resolution, focusing on repairing damaged relationships, restoring moral trust, and promoting social cohesion. It involves truth-telling, forgiveness, justice, reparations, and institutional reforms to address the psychological, emotional, and moral injuries caused by conflict. Reconciliation is essential for the sustainability of peace, ensuring that agreements and settlements are internalised and respected by society over the long term. Historical and contemporary examples, including South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda's Gacaca courts, and post-war European integration, illustrate how reconciliation mechanisms can complement conflict resolution by addressing past injustices and rebuilding trust between adversaries.

Together, conflict resolution and reconciliation provide a comprehensive framework for peacebuilding. Resolution addresses structural and political causes of conflict, offering a framework for cooperation and stability, whereas reconciliation nurtures social,

moral, and emotional repair, ensuring enduring harmony and preventing the recurrence of violence. The two processes are mutually reinforcing: resolution alone may achieve temporary cessation of hostilities, but reconciliation ensures long-term positive peace. In the international and political spheres, their combined application supports democracy, human security, transitional justice, and sustainable development, offering societies a pathway from negative peace to positive peace characterised by justice, equality, and shared humanity.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Why are conflict resolution and reconciliation considered complementary processes?
2. How does conflict resolution contribute to the achievement of positive peace?
3. Why might negotiated conflict settlements be insufficient without reconciliation?
4. How does reconciliation help societies rebuild trust after violence?
5. Why are long-term strategies important in post-conflict reconciliation?
6. What role do community-level actors play in supporting reconciliation?
7. Why is conflict reconciliation considered more relationship-centred than resolution?
8. In what ways can mistrust undermine peace agreements if reconciliation is neglected?

Assignments

1. Define conflict resolution and its main objectives.
2. How does conflict reconciliation differ from conflict resolution?
3. Explain the concept of positive peace and how it relates to conflict resolution.
4. Discuss the relevance of Human Needs Theory in conflict resolution.
5. What is the role of multi-track diplomacy in international conflict resolution?
6. Analyse the role of mediation and third-party intervention in resolving interstate conflicts.

7. Explain the difference between Track I and Track II diplomacy.
8. Explain the contributions of Johan Galtung to conflict transformation and reconciliation.
9. Discuss contemporary challenges in achieving reconciliation in protracted conflicts.
10. How can economic and institutional reforms support reconciliation efforts?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 3

Role of Civil Society Groups in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain the concept and multidimensional nature of post-conflict reconstruction (PCR).
- identify key stakeholders involved in PCR and their respective roles.
- analyse the significance of civil society groups in rebuilding post-conflict societies.
- examine how civil society fosters legitimacy, participation, and accountability in governance reforms.

Background

Civil society groups (CSGs) occupy a central position in post-conflict reconstruction (PCR), functioning as critical intermediaries between the state, international actors, and local communities. In societies emerging from violent conflict, where state institutions are frequently weakened, social cohesion fractured, and trust eroded, civil society provides organisational capacity, moral authority, and grassroots legitimacy to peacebuilding efforts. Unlike peacekeeping missions or state led reform, which can be perceived as distant or externally imposed, civil society organisations foster community centred approaches grounded in local needs, culture, and priorities. Their contribution spans multiple dimensions: they support humanitarian assistance, advocate for human rights and democratic governance, mobilise communities in economic recovery, promote reconciliation and trauma healing, and provide platforms for inclusive participation. They play a particularly significant role in creating accountability, serving as watchdogs that monitor service delivery, corruption, and the performance of state and international actors. Through facilitating dialogue, rebuilding social capital, and strengthening participatory governance structures, civil society helps address the root causes of conflict and supports long-term peace. Although their impact may be constrained by political pressure, insecurity, resource dependency, and limited technical capacity, CSGs remain indispensable agents of transformation, helping to institutionalise peace, restore citizen confidence, and ensure that reconstruction is locally legitimate and sustainable.

Keywords

Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR), Civil Society Groups (CSGs), Peacebuilding, State-Building, Disarmament, Reconciliation

Discussion

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) represents a critical and comprehensive process aimed at rebuilding societies that have experienced violent conflict. It extends beyond physical reconstruction to encompass political, social, economic, and security dimensions essential for sustainable peace and development. Central to this process are civil society groups (CSGs), which serve as both stakeholders and agents of transformation. They connect citizens to governance structures, promote accountability, foster reconciliation, and ensure that reconstruction initiatives reflect local needs and values. In a landscape where state institutions are often fragile and external actors dominate, civil society plays a crucial bridging role, fostering inclusivity, legitimacy, and resilience in post-conflict recovery.

3.3.1 Understanding Post-Conflict Reconstruction

❒ Meaning of PCR

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) refers to a comprehensive and multifaceted process of rebuilding a country, its institutions, and its society following the cessation of large-scale violent conflict. It extends far beyond mere peacekeeping or physical rebuilding and seeks to establish the foundations for sustainable peace, socio-economic development, and democratic governance. The primary goal of post-conflict reconstruction is to restore stability, legitimacy, and normalcy by addressing the political, economic, social, and security dimensions of a society emerging from conflict.

❒ Post-conflict reconstruction establishes sustainable peace

From a security perspective, PCR involves the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, as well as Security Sector Reform (SSR) to ensure that security forces are professional, accountable, and responsive to civilian authority. Mine clearance and the restoration of basic safety are also essential to enabling the return of displaced populations and the resumption of normal economic and social life.

- Political reforms restore governance and trust

Politically, post-conflict reconstruction focuses on building legitimate governance structures through constitutional reform, the establishment or strengthening of democratic institutions, and the promotion of the rule of law and human rights. It includes organising free and fair elections, fostering political participation, and rebuilding public trust in government institutions to prevent a relapse into conflict.

- Economic reconstruction revitalises infrastructure and livelihoods

The economic dimension of PCR entails revitalising war-torn economies by rebuilding infrastructure, generating employment, restoring livelihoods, and addressing war-related debts and economic imbalances. Economic reconstruction aims to create equitable opportunities and reduce poverty, thereby contributing to long-term stability.

- Social healing fosters reconciliation and cohesion

The social or humanitarian dimension of reconstruction is equally crucial. It encompasses the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the promotion of reconciliation and psycho-social healing, and the rebuilding of social capital and community trust. Addressing trauma, fostering social cohesion among divided communities, and strengthening civil society are key to creating a durable peace.

- Holistic transformation of societies toward lasting peace

In essence, post-conflict reconstruction represents a holistic endeavour to transform societies from conflict and fragility towards peace, stability, and sustainable development, ensuring that the causes of conflict are addressed and that the foundations for lasting peace are firmly established.

3.3.2 Post-Conflict Reconstruction in International Relations and Politics

- PCR as critical phase in peacebuilding

In the field of International Relations and Political Science, post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is understood as a critical phase in the broader processes of peacebuilding and state-building. It represents the strategic and normative framework through which international actors, such as states, intergovernmental organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), engage in rebuilding war-torn societies. PCR marks the transition from the anarchy and disorder of war to a stable and functioning political order, often facilitated and supported by the international community. It embodies the intersection of humanitarian intervention, development policy, and international security, reflecting both practical and ideological dimensions of global governance.

❒ State-building and liberal peace strategies emphasised

A central aspect of PCR in international relations is state-building, which focuses on reconstructing the capacity and legitimacy of the state to provide essential public services, security, and governance. This process is often heavily supported by international aid, technical expertise, and institutional reforms aimed at restoring sovereignty and public trust. Closely related is the liberal peace model, which has long dominated Western approaches to post-conflict recovery. This model promotes democratisation, market liberalisation, and institutional reform as the principal means to achieve and sustain peace. The cases of Bosnia and Kosovo, for instance, illustrate efforts to embed liberal-democratic values and market economies within post-war societies under international supervision.

❒ Critiques of top-down reconstruction and local ownership

However, the liberal peace approach has faced increasing criticism for its top-down and externally driven nature, which can undermine local legitimacy and fail to account for indigenous political and cultural contexts. As a result, there has been a growing emphasis on local ownership, advocating for reconstruction strategies that are designed, implemented, and led by local actors to ensure sustainability, authenticity, and long-term success. This shift reflects a broader rethinking within peacebuilding theory, recognising that durable peace must be rooted in local realities and social structures rather than externally imposed models.

❒ Sovereignty and intervention tensions in PCR

PCR also raises complex questions surrounding sovereignty and intervention. While the international community often justifies its involvement under the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), such interventions inevitably provoke debates over the legitimacy of external influence in domestic political and economic affairs. The tension between respecting state sovereignty and promoting global norms of human rights and good governance remains at the heart of international political discourse on post-conflict reconstruction.

❒ UN framework and human security approach highlighted.

The United Nations Framework for Peacebuilding provides a formalised approach to coordinating these efforts. Outlined in foundational documents such as the Agenda for Peace (1992) and the Peacebuilding Commission's Mandate (2005), the UN approach underscores the importance of coordination among actors, local participation, and long-term commitment to peacebuilding goals. The human security approach further broadens this perspective by shifting the focus from the state to the individual, prioritising human welfare, dignity, and community resilience as the ultimate objectives of reconstruction.

From a political science perspective, post-conflict reconstruction is thus analysed as part of a broader process of state formation, sovereignty restoration, and global governance, involving complex power relations among domestic elites, international donors, and local communities. It embodies both the challenges and the aspirations of contemporary international politics—balancing intervention and autonomy, global norms and local realities, in the pursuit of sustainable peace and development.

❒ PCR analysed through state formation and governance

3.3.3 Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Stakeholders and Agents

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is a complex and multidimensional process that involves a wide range of domestic and international actors, each contributing in distinct but interrelated ways to rebuilding societies emerging from violent conflict. These stakeholders and agents operate at various levels, local, national, regional, and global, and possess differing degrees of influence, resources, and legitimacy. The effectiveness of reconstruction efforts depends largely on the degree of coordination, cooperation, and mutual trust among these actors.

❒ PCR involves multiple coordinated domestic and international actors

At the national level, state actors, including national governments and local authorities, bear the primary responsibility for leading reconstruction efforts. They are tasked with governance, security provision, and the delivery of essential services. Governments also play a central role in formulating and implementing policy frameworks that guide reconstruction and reform. However, in post-conflict settings, state capacity is often severely weakened, requiring extensive support from external actors.

❒ National governments lead reconstruction and service provision

Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union (EU) play pivotal roles in providing legitimacy, coordination, and resources for reconstruction. These organisations often mandate peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions, facilitate political settlements, and provide technical and financial assistance for governance, security, and economic reforms. Their involvement ensures a degree of international oversight and alignment with global norms, although this can sometimes generate tension with local priorities.

❒ IGOs provide legitimacy, resources, and oversight

❒ Donor states supply aid and policy guidance

Donor states, through bilateral aid agencies, are also crucial stakeholders. They supply financial assistance, technical expertise, and policy guidance, often tying aid to conditions that promote particular governance or economic reforms. While such support is indispensable, donor-driven agendas can sometimes lead to dependency or distort national reconstruction priorities by aligning them with external political or strategic interests.

❒ NGOs and civil society promote inclusive reconstruction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) constitute another key category of actors. Operating at local, national, and international levels, NGOs deliver humanitarian aid, support human rights initiatives, and implement development projects in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure. In many cases, NGOs serve as intermediaries between international donors and local communities, ensuring that assistance reaches those most in need. In practice, they often overlap with civil society groups (CSGs), which encompass a broader spectrum of non-state and non-market actors, including community-based organisations, faith-based groups, advocacy networks, and grassroots movements. Civil society plays a critical role in mobilising local populations, promoting reconciliation, and ensuring that reconstruction processes are inclusive and locally legitimate. Their participation fosters bottom-up engagement, contributing to sustainable peace and community empowerment.

❒ Private sector drives economic revitalisation and stability

The private sector, both domestic and international, is an increasingly important agent of post-conflict reconstruction. Businesses contribute to economic revitalisation by investing in infrastructure, creating employment opportunities, and stimulating local markets. Economic recovery and private sector development are essential for fostering stability, reducing dependency on external aid, and laying the groundwork for long-term development.

❒ Local communities ensure grounded, participatory reconstruction

Finally, local communities themselves are fundamental stakeholders in post-conflict reconstruction. Their involvement in decision-making, reconciliation initiatives, and community rebuilding projects ensures that reconstruction is grounded in local realities and social dynamics. Community participation not only enhances the effectiveness of reconstruction but also strengthens social cohesion and resilience against future conflict.

❒ Multi-actor collaboration crucial for sustainable peacebuilding

In sum, post-conflict reconstruction is inherently a multi-actor enterprise that requires close collaboration among governments, international institutions, donors, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and local populations. The interplay among

these stakeholders determines the pace, direction, and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts, underscoring the importance of inclusivity, coordination, and local ownership in the reconstruction process.

3.3.4 Civil Society Groups as Stakeholders and Agents in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Civil society refers to the sphere of voluntary collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values that is distinct from the state, the market, and the family. It encompasses a diverse array of actors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), media outlets, women's and youth groups, trade unions, professional associations, and advocacy networks. These groups operate in the public sphere and play a crucial role in post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) by connecting citizens with the state and by ensuring that reconstruction efforts are locally legitimate, inclusive, and participatory.

❒ Civil society connects citizens with reconstruction.

As stakeholders, civil society groups are directly affected by the consequences of conflict and have inherent rights and interests in the outcomes of reconstruction processes. They represent local ownership and serve as vital conduits for expressing community needs and priorities. By articulating grassroots concerns and advocating for accountability, civil society ensures that PCR initiatives are responsive to the populations they are intended to serve. Their engagement enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of reconstruction efforts, particularly in contexts where state institutions are weakened or mistrusted.

❒ Civil society represents local ownership and interests

As agents, civil society groups actively implement, monitor, and mediate reconstruction activities. They mobilise resources, expertise, and local knowledge to support governance reforms, economic development, social cohesion, and reconciliation initiatives. Local and grassroots organisations, such as village development committees, women's groups, and youth associations, often facilitate community-driven projects, promote reconciliation, and rebuild social capital. National NGOs, including human rights watchdogs, professional associations, and national development agencies, contribute to advocacy, capacity-building, and policy guidance. International NGOs (INGOs), such as Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontieres, and Amnesty International, provide technical assistance, humanitarian aid, and global advocacy support. Faith-based organisations, including churches, mosques, and religious charities, play an important role in social reconciliation, trauma healing, and

❒ Civil society implements, monitors, and mediates activities

moral guidance. Trade unions and professional bodies represent labour and professional interests, while independent media organisations, including community radio and the press, ensure transparency, accountability, and the dissemination of vital information.

❒ Civil society ensures inclusive, durable post-conflict peace

In sum, civil society groups function simultaneously as stakeholders and agents in post-conflict reconstruction. They are indispensable in bridging the gap between the state and citizens, facilitating participation, and sustaining local ownership. By combining advocacy, service delivery, and community mobilisation, civil society helps to ensure that reconstruction processes are inclusive, contextually grounded, and capable of fostering durable peace.

3.3.5 The Role of Civil Society Groups in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

❒ Civil society ensures inclusive, responsive reconstruction

Civil society groups (CSGs) play an indispensable role in ensuring that post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is inclusive, legitimate, and responsive to the needs of affected populations. Their activities span the full spectrum of reconstruction, security, political, economic, social, and cultural, serving as both implementers and advocates.

❒ NGOs provide humanitarian aid and security support

In the realm of human security and basic needs, local and international NGOs are often among the first actors to provide immediate humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter, and medical support, particularly in areas inaccessible to governments or intergovernmental organisations. CSGs also contribute to Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) by facilitating the reintegration of former combatants through vocational training, psycho-social support, and community acceptance programmes. Faith-based organisations, such as the Quakers, frequently run mediation and trauma-healing initiatives that help ease tensions and promote social stability.

❒ CSGs promote political participation and accountability

Within political reconstruction, civil society groups foster transparency, participation, and accountability in governance reforms. For example, in Sierra Leone, the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) trained citizens in civic education and monitored elections, while in Bosnia-Herzegovina, NGOs were instrumental in implementing peace accords and documenting human rights practices. Religious and community leaders often mediate between conflicting parties, as seen in Liberia, where

the Interreligious Council played a central role in national peace dialogues. In addition, civil society acts as a watchdog, monitoring governments and international actors for corruption and human rights abuses, lobbying for pro-poor policies, supporting electoral processes through voter education and election observation, and facilitating public consultation during constitutional and legal reforms to protect marginalised groups, such as women and ethnic minorities.

In economic reconstruction, civil society groups contribute to livelihood restoration and economic empowerment. They provide vocational training, microfinance, and business support to war-affected populations, exemplified by NGOs like BRAC in Afghanistan, which facilitated women's economic reintegration. Civil society also monitors the equitable distribution of reconstruction funds to prevent corruption and exclusion, implements community-based development projects such as agricultural cooperatives, and advocates for labour rights, ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and the re-establishment of labour laws.

❒ Civil society aids economic reconstruction and empowerment

CSGs are equally vital in social and cultural reconstruction, promoting reconciliation, trauma healing, and community cohesion. They facilitate truth-telling, memorialisation, and counselling, as demonstrated in Rwanda, where the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission worked with local civil society to organise Gacaca courts. Women's and youth organisations ensure inclusivity in peacebuilding initiatives, as seen in South Sudan, where women's networks contributed to negotiations and community rebuilding. Civil society also plays a key role in education and awareness, developing civic education and peace curricula that foster reconciliation and social cohesion. Grassroots organisations further promote inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue, document atrocities, support victims, and advocate for transitional justice mechanisms, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, while providing psycho-social support critical for community healing and the prevention of intergenerational trauma.

❒ CSGs facilitate reconciliation and social cohesion

On the level of global and international politics, civil society advocacy networks, including the International Crisis Group and Amnesty International, influence international policies towards post-conflict states. Global NGOs participate in multilateral coordination mechanisms, such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund, and transnational CSOs strengthen global norms concerning human rights, accountability, and sustainable peace. By setting international agendas, lobbying intergovernmental

❒ International CSOs influence global post-conflict policies

organisations like the UN Security Council, the International Criminal Court, and donor states, CSGs highlight issues such as banning landmines or ending impunity. Furthermore, they act as bridges between local realities and global policymaking, translating grassroots needs into actionable recommendations for international actors and ensuring that global policies are adapted to the contexts of post-conflict societies.

In summary, civil society groups operate at multiple levels, from local to global, addressing the full spectrum of reconstruction needs. Their participation ensures that post-conflict processes are not only effective and sustainable but also grounded in the priorities and experiences of the communities they serve, thereby fostering legitimacy, resilience, and durable peace.

❒ Civil society ensures sustainable, community-centred peace

3.3.6 Challenges Faced by Civil Society Groups in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Despite their crucial contributions, civil society groups (CSGs) operating in post-conflict environments encounter a wide range of challenges that can significantly constrain their effectiveness. Political constraints and legitimacy issues are among the most pressing obstacles. Governments emerging from conflict may perceive civil society organisations (CSOs) as threats, rivals, or foreign agents, leading to restricted political space for independent activism. In some contexts, authorities attempt to co-opt prominent CSGs, converting them into government-funded service providers rather than allowing them to function as autonomous watchdogs. These dynamics raise serious concerns regarding accountability and representation, particularly when organisations do not genuinely reflect the interests of the communities they claim to serve.

❒ Political constraints limit civil society autonomy

Resource dependence presents another major challenge. Many local CSGs rely heavily on international donors for funding, which can compromise local priorities and autonomy. Over-reliance on short-term or project-based funding often distorts organisational agendas, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "NGO-isation" of civil society, and limits the capacity for long-term, sustainable impact. Related to this are issues of coordination and fragmentation: competition for scarce resources can create duplication of efforts, overlapping mandates, and weakened collective action, undermining the overall efficacy of reconstruction initiatives.

❒ Resource dependence undermines local priorities

❒ Security risks hinder civil society operations

The security and fragility of post-conflict environments further complicate civil society operations. CSG staff, particularly those involved in human rights monitoring or working in remote or contested areas, frequently face harassment, threats, and even physical violence from former combatants, criminal networks, or emerging state authorities. Operating in such volatile contexts not only endangers personnel but also limits access to vulnerable populations in need of assistance.

❒ Cultural and social barriers restrict participation

Cultural and social barriers may also impede the inclusivity and effectiveness of civil society efforts. Ethnic divisions, patriarchal norms, and entrenched social hierarchies can restrict the participation of women, youth, and minority groups, reducing the representativeness of reconstruction initiatives. Moreover, hostile legislation enacted by post-conflict governments, such as restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, or foreign funding, can severely constrain the operational space for independent and critical civil society organisations.

❒ Capacity limitations challenge project implementation

Finally, many CSGs face capacity limitations, including inadequate financial, technical, and administrative resources to manage large-scale projects or compete for international funding. These limitations, coupled with the pressures outlined above, create a challenging environment in which civil society must navigate competing demands, resource scarcity, and political pressures while striving to uphold accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness to local communities.

❒ Civil society impact constrained by multiple challenges

In sum, while civil society groups are indispensable actors in post-conflict reconstruction, their impact is continually shaped and constrained by political, financial, social, and security challenges, highlighting the need for careful support, coordination, and protection in fragile post-conflict settings.

Summarised Overview

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is a comprehensive process aimed at rebuilding societies emerging from violent conflict. It goes beyond mere physical rehabilitation to encompass political, economic, social, and security dimensions vital for sustainable peace. Politically, PCR focuses on establishing legitimate governance, restoring rule of law, and promoting democratic participation. Economically, it seeks to revitalise livelihoods, rebuild infrastructure, and promote equitable growth. Socially, PCR involves reconciliation, reintegration of displaced populations, and rebuilding community trust. Security efforts such as disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR), along with security sector reform (SSR), create the foundation for stability and peace.

Within international relations, PCR is understood as a transitional phase linking humanitarian intervention, peacebuilding, and state-building. International and domestic actors, including the United Nations, donor governments, NGOs, and local authorities, play crucial roles in this process. However, the liberal peace model that has traditionally dominated reconstruction efforts has faced criticism for being overly top-down and externally driven. This has prompted a shift toward "local ownership," emphasising reconstruction strategies rooted in local participation, legitimacy, and indigenous political contexts. Balancing sovereignty, intervention, and global norms remains one of the central challenges in contemporary peacebuilding.

Civil society groups (CSGs) occupy a vital position in post-conflict reconstruction, serving both as stakeholders and as agents of change. They facilitate humanitarian assistance, promote human rights, support democratic governance, and foster reconciliation through community dialogue and trauma healing. Women's and youth organisations, faith-based institutions, trade unions, and media bodies all play distinct roles in rebuilding trust, strengthening institutions, and ensuring accountability. Yet, CSGs face challenges such as political repression, financial dependency, insecurity, and limited capacity. Despite these hurdles, their involvement ensures that reconstruction is inclusive, legitimate, and sustainable. Ultimately, the active participation of civil society bridges the gap between global peacebuilding frameworks and local realities, laying the foundation for lasting peace and social resilience.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Why are civil society groups considered essential actors in post-conflict reconstruction?
2. In what ways do CSGs help rebuild trust between citizens and the state after conflict?
3. Why is community participation important in post-conflict reconstruction?
4. How can civil society complement the work of international organisations during PCR?
5. What kinds of organisations are typically included within the scope of civil society?
6. How does civil society support the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons?
7. In what ways can CSGs strengthen transparency and accountability in governance reforms?
8. How do grassroots organisations ensure that reconstruction efforts remain responsive to local needs?

Assignments

1. What are the key objectives of post-conflict reconstruction?
2. How does PCR differ from peacekeeping or humanitarian aid?
3. In what ways do civil society groups contribute to political reconstruction?
4. How does the liberal peace model influence international approaches to PCR?
5. What are the criticisms of the liberal peace model in post-conflict settings?
6. Discuss the role of NGOs in the economic reconstruction of war-torn societies.
7. What challenges do civil society groups face when engaging with governments in post-conflict states?
8. In what ways do civil society groups promote reconciliation and trauma healing?
9. How can civil society overcome capacity limitations in fragile environments?
10. What policy measures can strengthen civil society participation in future peace-building processes?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

BLOCK 4
Gandhian Approach to Peace

UNIT 1

Ahimsa: Gandhian Approach to Peace

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the meaning and philosophical roots of Ahimsa in Indian traditions.
- explain how Ahimsa extends beyond physical non-violence to thoughts, words, and deeds.
- analyse Mahatma Gandhi's interpretation of Ahimsa as a moral, social, and political principle.
- evaluate the role of Gandhian Ahimsa in India's freedom struggle and post-independence politics.
- assess the relevance of Ahimsa in contemporary conflict resolution, environmentalism, and human rights.

Background

The principle of Ahimsa, meaning non-violence or non-injury, has long been a foundational ethical concept within Indian civilisation, particularly in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. While originally practised as a spiritual discipline concerned with compassion, self-restraint, and respect for all life, Ahimsa evolved over centuries into a broader moral ideal influencing social harmony and ethical conduct. Mahatma Gandhi played the transformative role of elevating Ahimsa from a personal virtue to a dynamic public philosophy grounded in truth, love, and moral courage. Integrating traditional Indian thought with modern political realities, Gandhi developed Satyagraha, a method of non-violent resistance that redefined the struggle for justice. Through this approach, non-violence became an active force capable of mobilising the masses, challenging oppression, and inspiring moral regeneration within society. Gandhi's vision of Ahimsa extended beyond the political sphere into everyday life, advocating inner transforma-

tion, harmonious social relations, and constructive work to rebuild communities. Its influence continues to shape democratic values, social reform movements, and peace-building efforts worldwide, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Ahimsa as both a philosophical principle and a practical strategy in addressing contemporary conflicts and promoting human dignity.

Keywords

Ahimsa, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Moral Courage, Constructive Programme

Discussion

❒ Ahimsa: non-violence as ethical principle

The concept of Ahimsa, which signifies non-violence or the avoidance of harm, stands as one of the most profound and enduring ethical principles in Indian philosophical and political thought. Originating in ancient Indian traditions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, Ahimsa gradually developed from a spiritual practice into a universal moral ideal, influencing not only personal behaviour but also collective social and political conduct. Over time, the commitment to avoid causing harm in thought, speech, and action came to represent compassion, truth, and respect for all forms of life.

❒ Gandhi transformed Ahimsa into politics

Mahatma Gandhi, however, was pivotal in transforming Ahimsa from a private virtue into an active instrument of political engagement. He made it the cornerstone of his philosophy of Satyagraha and a central strategy in India's struggle for independence. Through Gandhian Ahimsa, political resistance was redefined to prioritise moral courage over physical force and love over enmity. Its impact extended far beyond India, inspiring global figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, and influencing contemporary movements for justice, peace, and human rights.

❒ Ahimsa's relevance and modern critiques

In the post-independence era, the principles of Ahimsa continue to shape India's democratic values, foreign policy, and social reform initiatives. In today's world, characterised by violence, environmental crises, and social fragmentation, the message of Ahimsa remains as relevant as ever, offering a pathway towards peace, ethical governance, and sustainability. At the same time, Gandhian Ahimsa has faced criticism for its per-

ceived impracticality and moral rigidity in addressing the complexities of modern political realities. Exploring its historical development, philosophical underpinnings, and global influence provides valuable insights into its enduring significance as both a moral and political principle in the pursuit of justice and human dignity.

4.1.1 Meaning of the Term Ahimsa

- Ahimsa: non-violence, absence of harm

Ahimsa, derived from the Sanskrit terms 'a' meaning "not" and 'himsa' meaning "injury" or "harm," literally translates as "non-injury" or "non-violence." The word originates from the Sanskrit root san, which means "to kill," with himsa signifying the desire to kill, and the prefix a- serving as a negation. Therefore, Ahimsa conveys the idea of living "without the desire to kill" or the complete absence of harm. This principle is deeply rooted in the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, where it forms a foundational ethical and moral guideline.

- Holistic non-violence in thought, speech, action

Ahimsa encompasses far more than simply refraining from physical violence. It extends to thoughts, speech, and actions, representing a holistic commitment to non-violence in all aspects of human conduct. It reflects a positive state of mind characterised by love, compassion, tolerance, and active benevolence towards all living beings. In this sense, Ahimsa is not a passive stance but an active moral force, requiring the conscious cultivation of goodwill, empathy, and the deliberate avoidance of behaviours, words, or thoughts that might cause suffering to others.

- Promotes peace, ethics, and social harmony

As both a philosophical and ethical principle, Ahimsa fosters inner strength, self-discipline, and universal respect for life. It upholds the sanctity of all forms of existence, emphasising that the wellbeing of the self is intimately linked to the wellbeing of others. In the political sphere, Ahimsa transcends personal morality to offer a method of conflict resolution, social reform, and just governance, providing a framework for achieving peace and justice through non-violent means. Ultimately, Ahimsa embodies not only a moral duty to refrain from causing harm but also a proactive commitment to cultivating harmony, compassion, and ethical conduct in personal, social, and political life.

4.1.2 Origin and Evolution of the Concept of Ahimsa

- Ahimsa: enduring Indian ethical and moral ideal

The concept of Ahimsa, or non-violence, stands as one of the most enduring and significant ethical ideals to emerge from the Indian subcontinent. Its roots lie deep within ancient religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions, and over the centuries, its meaning has expanded from a personal moral discipline to a universal social and political principle. Ahimsa encompasses not merely the avoidance of harm but also the cultivation of compassion, love, and respect for all forms of life.

- Non-violence connects diverse religious and ethical traditions

Ahimsa occupies a central position in the moral and spiritual frameworks of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, while also resonating with ethical teachings in Christianity and Islam. Across these diverse traditions, the principle of non-injury serves as a common thread connecting the pursuit of truth, self-realisation, and moral duty. The Bhagavad Gita, for instance, associates Ahimsa with self-knowledge (atma jnana) and truth (satya), presenting non-violence not as passive withdrawal but as a creative force that guides individuals toward moral and spiritual enlightenment. The practice of Ahimsa has also shaped broader social conduct, including vegetarianism, environmental stewardship, and peaceful coexistence, thereby functioning as both a personal and collective virtue.

- Jainism provides radical, disciplined Ahimsa interpretation

Among Indian traditions, Jainism offers the most thorough and radical interpretation of Ahimsa. Jain scriptures, particularly the Acaranga Sutra, assert that all living beings cherish life and seek to avoid suffering, making even unintentional harm a moral transgression. Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara, elevated Ahimsa to the highest religious duty (paramo dharma), insisting that compassion must be practiced in thought, word, and action. Jain monks exemplify this principle through extreme care in daily life—walking carefully to avoid harming insects, filtering water to prevent killing microorganisms, and adhering to strict vegetarianism. According to Jain philosophy, violence stems from passions such as anger, greed, and attachment, meaning that true Ahimsa requires inner purification and emotional restraint. This rigorous ethical discipline had a profound influence on Mahatma Gandhi, who recognised Jainism as the most systematic teacher of non-violence. Gandhi's emphasis on self-restraint, vegetarianism, and moral discipline drew heavily on Jain concepts such as Anekantavada (the doctrine of many-sided truth) and Syadvada (relativism), which informed his understanding of tolerance and non-violent resistance.

In Buddhism, Ahimsa serves as a fundamental principle of ethical conduct and spiritual growth. It is enshrined in the first of the Five Precepts (Pañca Sīla), which instructs practitioners to abstain from taking life, and forms an integral part of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha emphasised that compassion (karuṇā) and loving-kindness (mettā) are essential virtues guiding all human interactions. Violence, whether physical or verbal, is seen as arising from ignorance and craving, and liberation (nirvāṇa) can only be achieved through the cultivation of non-violence in thought, word, and deed. The Buddhist focus on empathy and compassion influenced Mahatma Gandhi's understanding of Ahimsa, leading him to view non-violence not merely as the avoidance of harm but as the active expression of love towards all beings. Gandhi considered Buddhism a reformist movement within Hinduism that universalised and deepened the ideal of Ahimsa through its emphasis on equality, mercy, and mindfulness.

❒ Buddhism emphasises compassion and mindful non-violence

The roots of Ahimsa in Hinduism trace back to the Vedic and Upanishadic periods. Although early Vedic rituals included animal sacrifices, later texts such as the Upanishads promoted restraint, self-discipline, and compassion as expressions of true dharma. The Mahabharata famously asserts, "Ahimsa Paramo Dharma" (Non-violence is the highest duty), highlighting that Ahimsa is not a sign of weakness but a manifestation of inner strength and wisdom. In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Ahimsa is listed as the first of the Yamas, or ethical restraints, forming the foundation for right living, while the Bhagavad Gita identifies it as a divine quality essential for spiritual progress. Later thinkers, including Ramana Maharshi, reinforced this perspective, emphasising that to harm others is ultimately to harm oneself, as all beings share the same divine essence. In this way, Ahimsa in Hinduism represents not merely moral restraint but the realisation of the fundamental unity of all life.

❒ Hinduism links Ahimsa to spiritual unity

Although emerging in a different cultural and historical context, Christianity has made a significant contribution to the global understanding of Ahimsa through its emphasis on love, forgiveness, and non-retaliation. Jesus Christ, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, encouraged his followers to "love your enemies" and "turn the other cheek," exemplifying the principle of non-violent resistance to evil. Gandhi often drew parallels between these Christian teachings and those of the Bhagavad Gita, regarding Christ as one of history's foremost exemplars of non-violence. The Christian ideals of universal love, self-sacrifice, and forgiveness reinforced Gandhi's belief that genuine

❒ Christianity reinforces Ahimsa through love, forgiveness

Ahimsa is grounded in love rather than fear or passive submission.

Beyond religious traditions, Ahimsa has been shaped by a rich dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophical thought. Within India, Vaishnavism inspired Gandhi's spiritual devotion and his respect for the sanctity of all life. From the West, he drew on the ethical and political writings of thinkers such as Leo Tolstoy, whose The Kingdom of God is Within You reinforced the principle of moral resistance; John Ruskin, whose Unto This Last influenced Gandhi's ideas of social equality and economic justice; and Henry David Thoreau, whose essay Civil Disobedience provided a practical model for non-violent political action. Islamic teachings on universal brotherhood further informed Gandhi's inclusive humanism, and his receptiveness to all faiths reflected his conviction that truth and non-violence are universal rather than sectarian values.

❒ Ahimsa shaped by Eastern and Western thought

Over time, Ahimsa evolved from a spiritual and religious ideal into a powerful socio-political principle. In India, it became the ethical foundation of movements for reform, justice, and independence. Gandhi's reinterpretation transformed Ahimsa into both a moral philosophy and a strategy for mass mobilisation, turning personal ethics into a tool for political change. The development of Ahimsa thus reflects a continuous process of ethical deepening and practical application. From the disciplined practices of Jain ascetics and Buddhist monks to Gandhi's Satyagraha and contemporary global peace movements, Ahimsa has remained a call to human conscience, advocating restraint, empathy, and unwavering commitment to truth across all dimensions of life.

❒ Ahimsa evolved into socio-political ethical principle

4.1.3 Gandhian Concept of Ahimsa

Mahatma Gandhi transformed the ancient and spiritual principle of Ahimsa into a dynamic ethical, social, and political philosophy, shaping it into one of the most powerful instruments of change in modern history. While Ahimsa had existed as a religious and moral ideal in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, Gandhi gave it new meaning as both a way of life and a practical method for social and political transformation. For Gandhi, Ahimsa was not passive submission or mere abstention from violence but an active force of love, courage, and truth that could transform individuals and societies alike.

❒ Gandhi transformed Ahimsa into practical philosophy

Gandhi regarded Ahimsa as the Law of Love, the highest expression of human virtue. It was not limited to refraining from physical harm but required non-violence in thought, word, and deed. True Ahimsa, he maintained, involves the complete absence of hatred, ill will, or anger, even towards those who commit injustice. To be non-violent in action while harbouring animosity in the heart was, for Gandhi, a contradiction in terms. Ahimsa, therefore, is a positive and creative force, founded upon love, compassion, and universal goodwill. It is not simply "non-killing," but a state of being that nurtures kindness, empathy, and the recognition of the divine unity of all life. Gandhi described Ahimsa as "the largest love and the greatest charity", asserting that it demanded the active cultivation of compassion even towards one's enemies. He often likened the practice of Ahimsa to walking on the edge of a sword—difficult and demanding, yet the only path to true peace and moral strength.

❒ Ahimsa embodies love, compassion, and goodwill

Contrary to popular misunderstanding, Gandhi insisted that Ahimsa is not the weapon of the weak but the strength of the brave. It requires greater courage to endure suffering than to inflict it. He famously declared that if one had to choose between cowardice and violence, he would choose violence, for cowardice was worse. True non-violence, however, arises from fearlessness, self-control, and the willingness to suffer rather than cause suffering. Ahimsa thus demands moral heroism, not passive withdrawal. It is an act of inner strength that conquers hatred with love and injustice with patience. For Gandhi, non-violence was not a retreat from conflict but a higher form of struggle, one that transforms both the oppressor and the oppressed through truth and compassion.

❒ Non-violence requires courage, self-control, and patience

At the heart of Gandhi's philosophy lies the inseparable relationship between Truth (Satya) and Ahimsa. Gandhi called them "two sides of the same coin," asserting that one cannot be realised without the other. For him, Truth was the ultimate goal, and Ahimsa the indispensable means to attain it. Non-violence was the expression of truth in action; it was the way through which truth manifests itself in human relationships. Gandhi believed that God is Truth, and since God is love, the practice of Ahimsa is the means by which one approaches the divine. In both personal and political life, Ahimsa and Satya together form the moral foundation for justice, freedom, and peace. He rejected the notion that noble ends justify violent means, insisting instead that the purity of means is essential for the legitimacy of any end. The use of non-violence ensures that the pursuit of truth remains morally untainted and spiritually ennobling.

❒ Truth and Ahimsa are inseparably linked

❒ Satyagraha applies Ahimsa in public resistance

Gandhi's most significant contribution to political thought was his development of Satyagraha, literally "holding firmly to truth", as the practical application of Ahimsa in public life. Through Satyagraha, Gandhi transformed non-violence into a powerful instrument of resistance against injustice. Unlike passive resistance, which can be motivated by weakness, Satyagraha demands active non-violence, moral discipline, and inner purity. The Satyagrahi, or practitioner of non-violent resistance, seeks not to destroy the opponent but to transform and win them over through love, truth, and self-suffering. This form of struggle rejects coercion and hatred, relying instead on moral persuasion and the awakening of conscience.

❒ Ahimsa as moral force transcends violence

Ahimsa, as the foundation of Satyagraha, thus became both a spiritual discipline and a political strategy, a means of securing justice while preserving the dignity of all parties involved. Through it, Gandhi demonstrated that moral force, or soul force, could be more effective than physical violence in achieving lasting social and political change. Gandhi viewed Ahimsa as a universal law, governing all aspects of human existence, i.e., personal, social, economic, and political. He regarded non-violence as a natural principle inherent in life itself, comparable to physical laws like gravity. For Gandhi, human progress depended on adherence to this moral law, which alone could ensure peace and harmony.

❒ Practice of Ahimsa begins with self-discipline

He tested and refined the practice of Ahimsa throughout his life, not as abstract theory but as a scientific experiment with truth. Non-violence, he argued, must begin at home, in one's relationships, before it can be effectively applied to society or politics. It demands constant vigilance, self-discipline, and sincerity of purpose. Violence may bring temporary results, but only non-violence creates enduring peace.

❒ Ahimsa guides social reform and constructive action

Gandhi's Ahimsa was not merely the negation of violence but a positive, constructive principle. It called for active engagement in social reform and upliftment through what he termed the Constructive Programme. This programme included promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, the eradication of untouchability, rural development, education through labour, and the use of Khadi (homespun cloth) as symbols of self-reliance and ethical living. Khadi, for Gandhi, was an embodiment of Ahimsa, a peaceful form of resistance against exploitation and an assertion of dignity through self-sufficiency. The spinning wheel (charkha) became a symbol of non-violent protest and economic independence, reflecting Gandhi's vision of a just and harmonious society based on equality, simplicity, and moral integrity.

At its deepest level, Gandhi's Ahimsa is synonymous with universal love. It seeks to transform relationships through compassion and understanding rather than dominance and coercion. It begins with the individual's inner transformation, the conquest of negative emotions such as anger, greed, and hatred, and extends outward to embrace all humanity as one family. Ahimsa, therefore, is both personal and universal. It begins in the purification of the self and culminates in the reconstruction of society. A truly non-violent person, Gandhi believed, fears no one and inspires no fear in others. Such a person becomes a living embodiment of peace and justice.

❒ Khadi symbolises self-reliance and non-violent protest

For Gandhi, Ahimsa was not only a moral or spiritual discipline but also the foundation of true democracy and social justice. He maintained that enduring peace could never be achieved through violence or domination; it must rest upon mutual respect and non-violent cooperation. Only a society governed by the principles of truth and non-violence could ensure freedom, equality, and human dignity for all.

❒ Ahimsa seeks universal love and societal harmony

The Gandhian concept of Ahimsa is far more than a doctrine of non-killing—it is a comprehensive philosophy of life rooted in love, truth, self-discipline, and universal compassion. It requires immense courage and inner strength, demanding that individuals confront injustice through moral force rather than violence. By transforming Ahimsa from a private virtue into a public and political principle, Gandhi gave humanity a universal framework for non-violent conflict resolution and ethical governance. His legacy endures as a timeless reminder that genuine peace and justice can only be achieved through the power of non-violence and the pursuit of truth.

❒ Ahimsa ensures democracy, justice, and ethical governance

4.1.4 Relevance of Gandhian Ahimsa in the Indian Freedom Struggle

The principle of Ahimsa, as interpreted and practised by Mahatma Gandhi, formed the ethical and strategic foundation of India's struggle for independence. Gandhi transformed non-violence from a moral virtue into an effective instrument of political action, making it the central pillar of the nationalist movement. His approach provided a powerful, morally unassailable alternative to violent revolution, redefining the dynamics of resistance against colonial oppression.

❒ Ahimsa formed ethical foundation for independence

Gandhian Ahimsa, expressed through the method of Satyagraha—the pursuit of truth through non-violent resistance—became both a moral creed and a practical strategy. It aimed not

❒ Satyagraha united masses through non-violent resistance

at destroying the oppressor but at transforming him through love, persuasion, and moral appeal. Gandhi's campaigns such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), the Salt Satyagraha (1930), and the Quit India Movement (1942) demonstrated how disciplined non-violence could unite the masses in a common struggle while maintaining ethical integrity.

❒ Non-violence gave moral superiority over Britain

One of the major contributions of Gandhian Ahimsa was its ability to provide the moral high ground in the face of British imperialism. By adopting non-violence, the Indian National Congress and its leaders projected an image of moral superiority over the colonial rulers, forcing the British Empire to confront a resistance that was ethically grounded and politically legitimate. This approach eroded the moral and political credibility of British rule both within India and internationally, gaining sympathy and support for the Indian cause across the world.

❒ Ahimsa enabled mass participation and empowerment

Equally significant was the mass mobilisation that Ahimsa enabled. Non-violent struggle made participation possible for all sections of Indian society—men and women, peasants and workers, the educated elite and the illiterate poor. Unlike violent revolutions, which depend on secrecy and limited participation, the non-violent movement was inclusive and democratic, giving millions of ordinary Indians a sense of political agency and collective strength. Ahimsa thus became not only a method of protest but also a means of social empowerment and political education.

❒ Non-violence disarmed oppressors morally and politically

Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence also disarmed the oppressor in practical terms. A violent uprising would have been ruthlessly suppressed by the British military might, but non-violent resistance rendered such force morally indefensible and politically counterproductive. The colonial state found it increasingly difficult to justify violence against peaceful protesters, as witnessed during the Salt March and subsequent civil disobedience campaigns.

❒ Ahimsa addressed social injustices within India

Moreover, Gandhi extended Ahimsa beyond political independence to address social injustices within Indian society. His campaigns against untouchability, communal hatred, and social inequality were deeply rooted in the same spirit of non-violence. Gandhi believed that true freedom required not only liberation from foreign rule but also the moral and social regeneration of the Indian people.

❒ Gandhi maintained non-violence despite setbacks

Despite occasional setbacks, such as the violence at Chauri Chaura in 1922—which led Gandhi to suspend the Non-Cooperation Movement—he remained steadfast in his faith in Ahimsa as the only path to lasting justice and peace. His insistence on non-violence even in moments of provocation transformed the freedom struggle into a moral crusade rather than a mere political contest.

❒ Ahimsa guided India and inspired global movements

In essence, Gandhian Ahimsa provided the ethical compass and strategic framework of India's national movement. It united a vast and diverse population under a shared moral vision, challenged the legitimacy of colonial domination, and inspired similar struggles for justice across the world. Through Ahimsa, Gandhi not only guided India to independence but also offered humanity a timeless model for achieving freedom through truth, courage, and love.

4.1.5 Relevance of Gandhian Ahimsa in Post-Independence Indian Politics

❒ Ahimsa shaped moral and political foundations

The principle of Ahimsa, which guided India's struggle for independence under Mahatma Gandhi, continued to shape the moral and political foundations of post-independent India. Although the practical application of Gandhian non-violence has faced challenges in a complex, diverse, and modern state, its spirit has remained integral to India's democratic ethos, social reform movements, and foreign policy orientation.

❒ Non-violence influenced foreign policy and diplomacy

At the heart of independent India's political philosophy lies a deep commitment to non-violence and peaceful coexistence. The early leadership, especially under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, consciously drew inspiration from Gandhian ideals in shaping the nation's domestic and international policies. In foreign relations, the principle of Ahimsa found expression through the policy of non-alignment and the doctrine of Panchsheel, formulated in 1954 as the basis for India-China relations. The five principles—mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, equality, and peaceful coexistence—reflected Gandhi's belief in resolving conflicts through dialogue and moral persuasion rather than coercion or violence. This approach positioned India as a moral voice for peace and disarmament during the Cold War era.

Domestically, Gandhian Ahimsa influenced social reform and conflict resolution. In the years following independence, several reform movements—such as the campaigns for the abolition of

❒ Gandhian ethics guided social reform efforts

untouchability, land redistribution, and the promotion of communal harmony—drew moral strength from Gandhian ethics. Leaders like Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan extended Gandhi's legacy through movements such as the Bhoodan and Sarvodaya Movements, which promoted voluntary land donation and the upliftment of all sections of society through peaceful means. Gandhi's vision of Ahimsa as constructive action thus found continuity in the idea of self-reliant, decentralised, and just development.

❒ Dialogue prioritised over force in conflicts

In terms of conflict resolution, India has often preferred negotiation and dialogue over military confrontation in dealing with internal disputes and social unrest. Whether in communal conflicts, regional insurgencies, or caste-based tensions, there has been an underlying belief—at least in principle—that enduring peace can only emerge through reconciliation, empathy, and understanding. This approach reflects the enduring influence of Gandhian non-violence as both a moral guide and a pragmatic tool in governance.

❒ Constitution reflects non-violence and ethical governance

Ahimsa has also left an imprint on India's constitutional and political values. The ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution resonate with Gandhian ethics, emphasising the dignity of every individual and the peaceful resolution of disputes. While the state has not always adhered perfectly to these ideals, the concept of constitutional morality, upholding ethical governance, tolerance, and human dignity, bears the imprint of Gandhian Ahimsa.

❒ Grassroots movements practise peaceful civic activism

Furthermore, Gandhian Ahimsa continues to inspire grassroots movements in post-independence India. Non-violent environmental and social campaigns such as the Chipko Movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and various struggles against displacement, exploitation, and environmental degradation embody Gandhi's philosophy of peaceful protest and civil disobedience. These movements demonstrate that Ahimsa remains a living force in Indian democracy, shaping civic activism and providing a moral framework for dissent.

❒ Ahimsa endures as moral and strategic guide

In sum, the relevance of Gandhian Ahimsa in post-independent Indian politics lies in its enduring capacity to serve as both a moral compass and a practical strategy for achieving justice, equality, and peace. While the pressures of modern governance and realpolitik have tested its limits, the ideal of non-violence continues to inform India's democratic traditions, foreign policy, and social conscience, affirming Gandhi's belief that Ahimsa is not merely a political tactic but a universal way of life.

4.1.6 Relevance of Gandhian Ahimsa in the Contemporary World

The philosophy of Gandhian Ahimsa has extended far beyond India, leaving a profound impact on global politics, social movements, and ethical thought. By converting non-violence from a purely spiritual principle into an effective means of political resistance, Gandhi provided a model for oppressed communities to pursue justice without resorting to force. His teachings on Ahimsa and Satyagraha illustrated that moral courage and peaceful action could wield greater power than violence, inspiring leaders and liberation movements throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

❒ Gandhian Ahimsa inspires global non-violent resistance

One of the most prominent followers of Gandhi's approach was Dr Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. King openly recognised Gandhi as his "guiding light" and based his campaigns against racial segregation and injustice on the principles of Satyagraha. Employing peaceful marches, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience, King mobilised millions to confront systemic racism. His leadership during pivotal events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington demonstrated the transformative potential of Gandhian non-violence in challenging deeply entrenched social and political oppression.

❒ Martin Luther King applied Ahimsa in civil rights

Similarly, Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in South Africa drew significant inspiration from Gandhian Ahimsa in their struggle against apartheid. Although Mandela initially supported limited armed resistance, his later dedication to reconciliation and forgiveness following his imprisonment reflected Gandhian ideals. The creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which prioritised truth-telling, forgiveness, and societal healing over retribution, exemplified Gandhi's belief that non-violence is not simply a strategic tool but a profound moral philosophy capable of restoring divided and damaged societies.

❒ Mandela embraced reconciliation reflecting Gandhian ideals

In Europe, Gandhian principles of non-violence significantly shaped movements for democratic reform, notably the Solidarity Movement in Poland and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Lech Walesa's leadership of Solidarity relied on strikes, negotiations, and civil disobedience to confront Communist rule, while the Velvet Revolution achieved a peaceful transition from authoritarianism through mass demonstrations, underscoring the global applicability of Gandhi's methods of non-violent resistance.

❒ European democratic movements utilised non-violent strategies

Beyond these political transformations, Gandhian Ahimsa inspired moral leaders and peace movements across the world. Figures such as Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, Cesar Chavez in the United States, and the Dalai Lama of Tibet drew upon Gandhi's teachings in their advocacy for justice and human rights. Chavez, for instance, employed peaceful boycotts and fasting to champion farm workers' rights, reflecting Gandhi's use of fasting as a moral instrument, while the Dalai Lama's commitment to non-violence embodied a Gandhian approach of confronting injustice with compassion and self-discipline. Through these examples, Gandhi's philosophy demonstrated that genuine power derives from moral authority rather than physical force, and that justice can be pursued through empathy and ethical action rather than vengeance.

❒ Global leaders adopt Ahimsa for justice, rights

In today's world, marked by conflict, inequality, environmental crises, and ethical uncertainty, Gandhian Ahimsa remains profoundly relevant. Gandhi conceived non-violence not merely as abstention from harm but as a practical and moral strategy for confronting injustice, grounded in compassion, self-restraint, and courage. Ahimsa encourages active goodwill toward all and the alignment of personal ethics with public conduct. In the realm of conflict resolution, its emphasis on dialogue, negotiation, and mutual understanding offers a viable alternative to militarism. Gandhi's broader vision, encompassing initiatives such as Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Swaraj, Swadeshi, decentralisation of power, trusteeship, communal harmony, economic equality, and Sarva Dharma Sambhava, continues to inform contemporary peacebuilding efforts and community-level interventions worldwide.

❒ Ahimsa offers moral strategy against modern injustice

The principles of Ahimsa also extend to environmental and animal ethics, inspiring movements against deforestation, climate change, and in favour of plant-based living, thereby promoting ecological awareness and sustainable practices. In the sphere of social activism, Ahimsa underpins non-violent campaigns for justice, equality, and human rights, enabling marginalised communities to assert their rights while maintaining the dignity of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

❒ Principle guides environmental and social activism

On a global scale, Ahimsa provides an ethical alternative to cycles of aggression, terrorism, and political extremism, fostering cooperation, empathy, and human security. In governance and leadership, it encourages humane, inclusive, and principled decision-making, while in business and economics, it informs corporate social responsibility, transparency, and respect for both human and environmental wellbeing.

❒ Ahimsa fosters ethical governance and human security

Ultimately, the enduring significance of Gandhian Ahimsa lies in its universal applicability and transformative power. Whether applied in diplomacy, social reform, environmental protection, or personal conduct, it offers a path towards a more compassionate, equitable, and sustainable world. Gandhi's philosophy affirms that genuine strength is found not in domination or violence, but in restraint, empathy, and the pursuit of truth through peaceful means. In a world marked by division and conflict, Ahimsa continues to serve as a timeless call to reconstruct society through love, compassion, and moral courage.

❒ Universal Ahimsa promotes compassion, equity, and peace

4.1.7 Criticisms and Limitations of Gandhian Ahimsa

Although Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Ahimsa, or non-violence, is widely revered for its profound moral and ethical value, it has faced considerable critique concerning its practicality and applicability in complex real-world situations. Scholars, political theorists, and activists have questioned whether absolute non-violence can be consistently maintained in the face of severe injustice, existential threats, or morally ambiguous circumstances.

❒ Ahimsa criticised for practical applicability issues

A key criticism centres on the practical limitations of Gandhian Ahimsa. While it proved remarkably effective against the British Empire, a state constrained by public opinion, democratic accountability, and moral norms, it may be far less effective, or even ineffectual, against totalitarian regimes that operate without ethical or political restraint, such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. In such settings, non-violent resistance may fail to protect populations from mass atrocities or systemic oppression, calling into question its universal applicability as a strategy for political action.

❒ Non-violence may fail against totalitarian regimes

Another concern is that Ahimsa can function primarily as a doctrine accessible to the morally or socially privileged. For communities facing dehumanisation, extreme oppression, or genocidal violence, a strictly non-violent response may appear impractical or even unjust. Critics argue that non-violence presupposes a certain degree of agency, visibility, and moral leverage, conditions often absent for the most marginalised. As a result, while Ahimsa is ethically admirable, it may inadvertently place a disproportionate ethical responsibility on the oppressed rather than on those committing injustice.

❒ Accessible mainly to morally or socially privileged

❒ Risk of fostering passivity or moral paralysis

Gandhian Ahimsa has also been criticised for its tendency, in some interpretations, to foster passivity or moral paralysis. Although Gandhi himself cautioned that cowardice disguised as non-violence is worse than outright violence, the principle has at times been misconstrued as inaction. Such misapplication can permit injustice or exploitation to persist unchallenged, thereby undermining the transformative potential of non-violent resistance.

❒ Absolute non-violence conflicts with state responsibilities

Another significant critique concerns the practical limitations of Ahimsa in modern statecraft. A sovereign state is tasked with maintaining law and order, upholding justice, and protecting its citizens, responsibilities that inevitably involve the legitimate use of coercive power. Critics argue that absolute adherence to non-violence is therefore incompatible with the structural realities of governance, even if Gandhian ideals can guide the moral orientation of leaders and policies.

❒ Purity of means sets high ethical benchmark

Furthermore, Gandhi's insistence on the "purity of means" has been criticised for establishing an almost unattainable ethical benchmark. Movements committed to absolute moral discipline risk alienating potential allies who cannot conform to such rigorous standards, while excessive self-scrutiny may impede decisive action, potentially delaying urgent social or political interventions.

❒ Satyagraha may blur ethical persuasion and coercion

Finally, some scholars highlight an inherent ambiguity in Gandhian practice, particularly concerning the interplay between Satyagraha and political persuasion. While Gandhi portrayed non-violence as an appeal to the conscience of the oppressor, large-scale Satyagrahas inevitably exerted psychological or moral pressure. Critics argue that this dynamic occasionally blurred the distinction between ethical persuasion and coercion, complicating the moral clarity of Gandhian tactics and underscoring the difficulties of applying Ahimsa across varied social and political contexts.

❒ Success depends on adversaries and context

In essence, while Gandhian Ahimsa constitutes a remarkable ethical and political achievement, its limitations lie in its utopian moralism and dependence on contextual factors. Its success is contingent upon the moral responsiveness of adversaries and the prevailing socio-political environment. Nevertheless, even critics recognise that Ahimsa challenges humanity to pursue higher moral ideals, urging societies to seek justice, peace, and social transformation through compassion, truth, and inner strength rather than through force or violence.

❒ Ahimsa remains ethically and politically significant

Gandhian Ahimsa represents a profound integration of ethics, politics, and humanism. It has shaped India's political culture, inspired movements across the globe, and continues to provide a framework for non-violent conflict resolution. Although its universal application presents challenges, its ethical and political significance endures, establishing it as a vital subject of study in both political science and moral philosophy.

Summarised Overview

Ahimsa, meaning non-violence or non-injury, is a central ethical principle rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Beyond merely avoiding physical harm, it encompasses non-violence in thought, word, and action, embodying compassion, tolerance, and respect for all living beings. In Jainism, Ahimsa is considered the highest religious duty, demanding extreme care in daily life and the cultivation of emotional restraint. Buddhism emphasises Ahimsa as essential to spiritual development, linking it with compassion and loving-kindness, while Hinduism regards it as a manifestation of inner strength and moral duty. Ahimsa also resonates in Christianity, with teachings of universal love and non-retaliation influencing thinkers like Gandhi. Across these traditions, Ahimsa emerges as a universal principle guiding personal morality, social harmony, and ethical governance.

Mahatma Gandhi transformed Ahimsa from a spiritual ideal into a dynamic tool for social and political action. For Gandhi, non-violence was not passive abstention but an active force rooted in love, moral courage, and truth (Satya). It became the foundation of Satyagraha, his method of non-violent resistance against injustice, exemplified in movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Salt March, and the Quit India Movement. Gandhian Ahimsa provided the ethical framework for mobilising the masses inclusively, disarming the oppressor through moral appeal, and fostering social reform alongside political struggle. Gandhi's emphasis on constructive action, such as rural development, education, communal harmony, and the promotion of Khadi, illustrated Ahimsa as a practical philosophy of life rather than a theoretical ideal.

Globally, Gandhian Ahimsa influenced leaders and movements committed to justice and human rights, including Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Solidarity Movement in Poland, and environmental activism worldwide. In the contemporary era, Ahimsa remains relevant in conflict resolution, ethical governance, environmental sustainability, and human rights advocacy. However, critics highlight its limitations, noting challenges in applying non-violence against ruthless regimes, moral burdens on the oppressed, and potential impracticality in statecraft. Despite these critiques, Ahimsa endures as a transformative moral principle, offering a pathway for peaceful resistance, social justice, and ethical leadership grounded in compassion, truth, and universal respect for life.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How does Ahimsa differ from the mere absence of physical violence?
2. Why is Ahimsa considered a holistic moral principle?
3. According to Gandhi, what is the relationship between Ahimsa and Truth (Satya)?
4. Why did Gandhi believe that non-violence required courage rather than weakness?
5. How does Satyagraha apply Ahimsa in social and political life?
6. How has Gandhian Ahimsa influenced modern social movements globally?
7. What criticisms have been made regarding the effectiveness of Ahimsa against authoritarian regimes?
8. How might strict adherence to Ahimsa place burdens on marginalised communities?

Assignments

1. How did Gandhi transform Ahimsa from a personal virtue to a political principle?
2. What is Satyagraha and how is it related to Ahimsa?
3. Give examples of Gandhian campaigns that applied Ahimsa.
4. How did Ahimsa provide moral and strategic advantages in India's freedom struggle?
5. Discuss the global influence of Gandhian Ahimsa on leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.
6. How does Ahimsa contribute to contemporary conflict resolution?
7. In what ways did Gandhi's Ahimsa influence post-independence Indian politics?
8. What are the main criticisms of Gandhian Ahimsa?
9. Discuss the limitations of Ahimsa in dealing with totalitarian regimes.
10. Evaluate the relevance of Gandhian Ahimsa in modern global politics.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 2

Satyagraha: Gandhian Approach to Peace

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain the philosophical foundations of Gandhian Satyagraha.
- analyse the ethical and political dimensions of Satyagraha as both a philosophy of life and a practical method of non-violent resistance.
- evaluate the influence of Satyagraha on global movements for civil rights, social justice, and decolonisation.
- discuss the relevance of Gandhian Satyagraha within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, including its impact on concepts such as conflict transformation and positive peace.
- apply Gandhian principles to contemporary global issues such as environmental degradation, authoritarianism, nuclear disarmament, and socio-economic injustice.

Background

The Gandhian doctrine of Satyagraha emerged in the early twentieth century as a transformative method of non-violent resistance rooted in moral conviction, spiritual discipline, and social responsibility. Developed initially in South Africa and later refined during the Indian freedom struggle, Satyagraha combined the principles of truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and self-suffering (Tapasya) to challenge injustice without resorting to coercion or violence. Unlike passive resistance, it was an active, courageous, and ethically guided practice intended to purify both the individual and society. Gandhi viewed conflict not as a destructive force but as an opportunity for personal and collective transformation through moral appeal, persuasion, and constructive action. Influenced by diverse sources, Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau, Satyagraha sought to transform the opponent's conscience while fostering self-reliance, communal harmony, and social reform. Its philosophy and methods shaped India's independence movement and inspired global struggles for civil rights,

decolonisation, environmental justice, and peacebuilding. Beyond political mobilisation, Satyagraha represents a holistic vision of ethical living, conflict transformation, and positive peace, remaining a significant paradigm within contemporary peace and conflict studies.

Keywords

Satyagraha, Non-violence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya), Civil Disobedience, Conflict Transformation, Constructive Programme

Discussion

The core of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and political method, Satyagraha, represents a distinctive blend of moral fortitude, ethical rigour, and non-violent engagement. Grounded in the doctrines of truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and voluntary suffering (Tapasya), it surpasses traditional ideas of political resistance. It achieves this by prioritising moral conviction over brute force, making peace over exacting retribution, and fundamental change over mere control. Initially developed and honed during Gandhi's time in South Africa and subsequently deployed extensively throughout India's fight for self-rule, Satyagraha successfully merges spiritual, societal, and governmental aspects. It provides a comprehensive methodology for resolving conflicts, reforming society, and fostering stability. Its continuing significance stretches far beyond historical independence struggles, having influenced worldwide human rights efforts, contemporary academic studies on peace, environmental activism, and non-violent movements across numerous cultural and political landscapes.

4.2.1 Meaning of the Term Satyagraha

❒ Satyagraha: truth-force, active non-violent power

The term Satyagraha, devised by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi whilst he was in South Africa, is a composite Sanskrit word. It stems from Satya, which means truth, and Agraha, signifying insistence, firmness, or holding steadfast. Its direct translation is therefore "truth-force" or "soul-force." Gandhi frequently identified truth with God, love, and ultimate reality, stressing that Satyagraha is emphatically not merely passive

resistance, a term which can suggest feebleness or surrender. Instead, it is an active, assertive, and non-violent approach to both political and social engagement. It embodies a type of moral and spiritual power that is grounded in truth and affection, melding ethical honesty with practical steps to achieve societal and governmental change.

❒ Aims to transform oppressor through conscience

Satyagraha operates simultaneously as a life philosophy and a practical resistance technique. Its core objective is not to vanquish, shame, or penalise the perpetrator of injustice, but rather to stir their conscience and bring about their change of heart through moral persuasion. Absolutely central to this method is the deliberate acceptance of hardship, or self-suffering, which Gandhi viewed as an extraordinarily potent moral device capable of influencing the oppressor to acknowledge and correct the wrong.

❒ Courageous, disciplined struggle for lasting peace

In contrast to passive resistance, which might arise from apprehension or expediency, Satyagraha is a courageous, disciplined, and active struggle. It is founded on inner determination, clarity of intent, and the willingness to tolerate personal adversity for the sake of truth. Through this combination of moral principle and tactical planning, Satyagraha seeks reconciliation, fundamental transformation, and enduring peace, making it both a means of protest and a route to ethical and spiritual renewal.

4.2.2 Origin and Evolution of the Concept of Satyagraha

❒ Early Satyagraha tested against South African racism

Mahatma Gandhi initially formulated and put the concept of Satyagraha to the test during his twenty-year stay in South Africa (1893–1914). Faced with the official, systemic racial bias against the Indian community, Gandhi first labelled his protest tactics as “passive resistance.” However, he quickly determined this phrase was inadequate, as it suggested weakness and failed to convey the inherently moral and proactive nature of his struggle.

❒ Term coined to emphasise truth and steadfastness

The term Satyagraha itself emerged around 1906–1907. This followed a competition published in the journal *Indian Opinion* to find a more suitable description. Gandhi's cousin, Maganlal Gandhi, proposed *Sadagraha* (steadfastness in a just cause), which Gandhi adjusted to Satyagraha, meaning 'steadfastness in truth.' This new terminology underscored that the resistance was not simply passive tolerance, but a principled, spiritual, and active pursuit of fairness founded on truth and non-violence.

❒ Principles: mass action, voluntary suffering, moral integrity

Satyagraha's evolution can be charted through Gandhi's initial campaigns in South Africa, such as the opposition to the Black Act of 1906 (which compelled Indians to register and carry identity passes) and the protests against the Poll Tax. These efforts helped him refine the practical and ethical elements of Satyagraha, which encompassed:

- Mass Action: Organising disciplined, large-scale protests to demonstrate collective moral strength.
- Voluntary Suffering: Willingly accepting imprisonment, loss of possessions, or physical hardship as a way to appeal to the adversary's conscience.
- Moral Integrity: Ensuring that all practitioners of Satyagraha remained truly committed to truth and non-violence in their thoughts, words, and actions.

❒ Expanded in India as ethical, political framework

Upon his return to India in 1915, Gandhi modified and expanded Satyagraha into a comprehensive ethical, social, and political framework. It became the cornerstone guiding principle for major popular movements, including the Champaran Satyagraha (1917), Kheda Satyagraha (1918), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), and the Quit India Movement (1942). Ultimately, Gandhi viewed Satyagraha not merely as a political instrument, but as a universal doctrine applicable to all human interactions, capable of transforming both individuals and society via moral suasion and non-violent means.

4.2.3 Gandhian Concept of Satyagraha

❒ Satyagraha links truth and non-violence universally

The Gandhian concept of Satyagraha represents a holistic approach to socio-political action and conflict resolution, deeply rooted in ethical and philosophical principles. Central to this concept is the inseparable relationship between truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa). For Gandhi, truth embodies the ultimate reality and is synonymous with God, while non-violence is not merely the absence of physical aggression but a positive expression of love, compassion, and active goodwill towards all, including adversaries. Whereas violence corrupts both the oppressor and the oppressed, non-violence purifies the soul and appeals to the moral conscience of those who perpetrate injustice.

Satyagraha is guided by several interrelated principles. Ahimsa, or non-violence, serves as both the means and the precondition of Satyagraha, functioning as a proactive moral force rather than passive avoidance of harm. Satya, or truth, constitutes the ultimate goal, requiring the Satyagrahi to pursue truth diligently in personal conduct and social action, underpinned by continuous self-purification, moral discipline, and honesty in thought, word, and deed. Tapasya, or self-suffering, involves willingly accepting hardship without retaliation, thereby demonstrating sincerity and moral strength, applying ethical pressure on the adversary, and appealing to their conscience. Brahmacharya, understood as self-control or celibacy, enables the Satyagrahi to concentrate spiritual and physical energy, endure hardships, and maintain moral discipline.

❒ Guided by Ahimsa, Satya, Tapasya, Brahmacharya

Satyagraha is both an ethical philosophy and a method of political action, demonstrating that enduring social and political change can be achieved through truth, non-violence, and moral persuasion rather than coercion or force. For Gandhi, truth was the highest moral principle, encapsulated in the maxim "Satyanasti paro dharma" ("There is no higher duty than truth"). He recognised the existence of absolute truth while acknowledging that individuals experience relative truth shaped by personal conscience and understanding. By declaring that "Truth is God," Gandhi asserted that truth transcends sectarian, cultural, or ideological boundaries. He maintained that the world rests on the foundation of truth, which, though sometimes overshadowed by untruth, remains eternal and indestructible. This metaphysical understanding forms the cornerstone of Satyagraha, which literally means "holding firmly to truth."

❒ Change achieved through truth, non-violence, moral persuasion

Ahimsa, in Gandhi's philosophy, extends beyond the avoidance of physical violence to include active love, compassion, and the refusal to cause harm in thought, word, or deed. He argued that cowardice is the worst response to injustice, violence is a lesser evil, but nonviolent resistance through Satyagraha represents the highest form of courage and moral rectitude. Hatred and enmity cannot endure in the presence of genuine non-violence, and those who endure suffering for the cause of justice can achieve remarkable results. Consequently, individual transformation is a central aspect of Satyagraha.

❒ Ahimsa embodies love, courage, and ethical action

Satyagraha operates through the application of moral pressure, or Agraha, aimed at opposing wrongdoing while respecting the wrongdoer. Gandhi distinguished it from Duragraha, which may employ similar tactics but relies on coercion or dogmatic

❒ Moral pressure targets wrongdoing while respecting adversaries

insistence, often exacerbating division and conflict. In contrast, Satyagraha is founded on humility, patience, love, and ethical steadfastness, with sacrifice, endurance, and integrity essential to its success. Even when initial enthusiasm diminishes, a small group of committed individuals can sustain the struggle.

Gandhi's philosophy is inherently holistic, extending from the personal to national and international spheres. Its distinctiveness lies in prioritising morality over power politics. The principle "Truth is God" and the insistence on the unity of means and ends encapsulate Gandhi's worldview, in which ethical methods are indispensable for achieving just outcomes. Truth, coupled with non-violence, constitutes the only morally pure route to a peaceful and just world order. Through Satyagraha, Gandhi transformed social reform movements, demonstrating that nonviolent struggle could effectively challenge injustice, exploitation, and dictatorship. His conception of peace was not merely the absence of war or a strategic choice but a comprehensive moral and spiritual journey grounded in truth, ethical courage, and the transformation of both individuals and society.

❒ Holistic philosophy prioritises ethics over power politics

4.2.4 Methods, Forms and Practice of Satyagraha

Satyagraha, as formulated by Mahatma Gandhi, transcends mere political strategy to embody a moral and spiritual method of resistance, aimed at transforming hearts, relationships, and social structures without recourse to hatred or harm. It is founded on the principles of truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and self-discipline, with the overarching goal of achieving moral persuasion and social reform. Central to its practice are purificatory acts such as fasting, vows (Vrata), and penance, which cultivate self-discipline, moral clarity, and spiritual preparation. These practices strengthen resilience, enabling the Satyagrahi to endure suffering with equanimity while appealing to the conscience of the oppressor.

❒ Satyagraha as moral, spiritual resistance method

Non-cooperation represents another fundamental method of Satyagraha, entailing a principled refusal to support unjust systems through measures such as boycotts, strikes, resignations, or withdrawal from unethical institutions. This form of resistance is non-violent and constructive, designed to restore dignity and ethical agency to the oppressed. Civil disobedience complements non-cooperation by deliberately and non-violently violating unjust laws to awaken the moral conscience of both oppressors and society. Successful civil disobedience requires transparency, discipline, and unwavering adherence to non-vi-

❒ Non-cooperation and civil disobedience awaken conscience

olence, with participants prepared to accept personal suffering and legal consequences.

Equally integral to Satyagraha is the Constructive Programme, which pairs resistance with proactive social reform aimed at building a just and self-reliant society. This programme encompasses economic self-sufficiency through the promotion of Khadi and village industries, social justice through the abolition of untouchability and eradication of social evils, education and empowerment including literacy and women's rights, communal harmony, and ethical local governance under the framework of Gram Swaraj. The Constructive Programme exemplifies the moral and spiritual underpinnings of Satyagraha, demonstrating that genuine freedom requires transformation not only of societal structures but also of individual character.

❒ Constructive Programme promotes social reform and self-reliance

Satyagraha employs a diverse range of non-violent actions adapted to specific contexts, including prayer, fasting, voluntary suffering (Tapasya), peaceful strikes (hartals), withdrawal from unjust environments (hijrat), silent protests, picketing, and symbolic gestures. These actions emphasise ethical intent, discipline, and moral persuasion. Its efficacy depends upon the practitioner's consistent commitment to live by its principles, ensuring alignment between thought and action. Successful Satyagraha requires careful planning and disciplined execution, underpinned by the assumptions that there is a shared moral interest, that opponents are responsive to ethical appeal, and that participants remain steadfast in non-violence. Typical stages involve dialogue, moral appeal through self-suffering, non-violent dramatization of injustice, and, if necessary, civil disobedience or non-cooperation.

❒ Non-violent actions include fasting, protests, symbolic acts

For Gandhi, conflict was an opportunity for ethical and social transformation, with true peace emerging from the elimination of oppression, intolerance, and structural violence. Satyagraha, grounded in Satya, Ahimsa, and Tapasya, seeks to effect both personal and societal change, prioritising transformation over domination or confrontation. Gandhi's broader vision to prevent structural violence incorporated principles such as Sarvodaya (the upliftment of all), Swaraj (self-rule), Swadeshi (local economic self-reliance), trusteeship, decentralisation, basic education (Buniyadi Talim), economic equality, and communal harmony. Through its methods and practices, Satyagraha operates not merely as a non-violent instrument of resistance but as a comprehensive philosophy of ethical living, social reform, and transformative peace, offering a uniquely integrated approach to political and moral action.

❒ Satyagraha transforms individuals and society through ethics

4.2.5 Influences Behind the Concept of Satyagraha

❒ Indian philosophies nurtured truth, non-violence, duty

Gandhi's development of Satyagraha was shaped by a synthesis of diverse religious, philosophical, and political influences, drawing upon both Indian and Western traditions.

Within Indian thought, his moral and spiritual outlook was deeply informed by indigenous philosophies. Hindu texts, particularly the Upanishads, emphasised Satya (truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence), while the Bhagavad Gita introduced the principles of Anasakti Yoga or Nishkama Karma, advocating selfless action without attachment to outcomes. These teachings nurtured Gandhi's commitment to duty and ethical conduct, preparing him for principled action. Jainism and Buddhism, with their insistence on non-violence as the highest ethical standard, further reinforced his dedication to Ahimsa as the guiding force of human behaviour. In addition, Indian saints and reformers such as Kabir, Swami Vivekananda, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale inspired Gandhi to integrate spirituality with socio-political engagement, emphasising ethical leadership and the pursuit of social reform.

❒ Jainism, Buddhism, and saints reinforced Ahimsa principles

Gandhi was equally influenced by Western thinkers and literature. Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* offered him both ethical and spiritual justification for non-violent resistance and a critique of state-sanctioned violence, an influence deepened through their subsequent correspondence. John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which Gandhi translated into Gujarati as Sarvodaya (Welfare of All), instilled ideals such as the dignity of labour, simplicity of life, and equality across professions, shaping his vision of a just and equitable society. Henry David Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience* provided a practical framework for the moral and political obligation to resist unjust laws through non-violent action. Christian thought, particularly the Sermon on the Mount and the principle of "turning the other cheek," also informed Gandhi's ethical outlook, reinforcing the moral power of non-violence and love towards adversaries.

❒ Western thinkers inspired non-violent ethical action

By drawing upon this rich interplay of Indian spiritual traditions and Western ethical and political philosophy, Gandhi forged Satyagraha into a distinctive methodology that combined moral principles with practical strategies for effecting social and political change. It became a holistic approach in which ethical integrity, spiritual discipline, and active non-violent engagement were inseparable.

❒ Satyagraha blends moral, spiritual, and practical strategies

4.2.6 Relevance of Gandhian Satyagraha in the Indian Freedom Struggle

Satyagraha emerged as the central strategy of the Indian National Movement under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, transforming the struggle for independence from an elite-driven, petition-focused effort into a mass-based moral campaign. It empowered people across all social strata, including the poor, women, and peasants, to resist injustice without resorting to arms. Gandhi conceived Satyagraha not merely as a political tactic but as a profound moral philosophy, a form of soul-force designed to confront oppression and injustice. Its ethical foundation rested on the principles of truth, non-violence, and self-discipline, rendering it both a practical and spiritual method of resistance.

❒ Satyagraha empowered masses through moral resistance

The effectiveness of Satyagraha was evident in several pivotal campaigns. The Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 marked Gandhi's first large-scale engagement with peasants, challenging the exploitative practices of indigo planters in Bihar through detailed surveys, grassroots mobilisation, and negotiation, ultimately achieving significant reforms. In 1918, during the Kheda Satyagraha, he organised farmers to protest unfair tax collection amid famine, asserting their rights through disciplined, non-violent resistance. That same year, Gandhi mediated a labour dispute in Ahmedabad between mill workers and factory owners, promoting a peaceful strike grounded in mutual understanding and conciliation. Later, the Vaikom Satyagraha in Travancore in 1924 challenged caste-based discrimination, particularly restrictions on temple access, further extending the moral and social impact of nonviolent resistance.

❒ Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad, and Vaikom campaigns succeeded

Satyagraha attained national prominence with the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, exemplified by the Dandi March, when Indians openly defied the Salt Laws, and with the Quit India Movement of 1942, which demanded the immediate withdrawal of British rule. These campaigns mobilised millions in disciplined, non-violent protest, attracting widespread attention both nationally and internationally. Satyagraha enabled Indians to retain the moral high ground, compelling British authorities to confront the contradictions between their proclaimed democratic values and the realities of imperial domination. By combining moral persuasion with strategic political action, it fostered national unity, heightened political consciousness, and strengthened self-confidence among the population while minimising bloodshed.

❒ Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements gained prominence

Through these movements, Gandhi refined Satyagraha from localised experiments into a national instrument of civil resistance. It became a powerful means of challenging state authority, securing material relief, and asserting fundamental rights, all while remaining firmly rooted in the ethical principles of non-violence, truth, and civil courage. The Indian freedom struggle thus exemplifies Satyagraha's dual character as both a pragmatic political strategy and a deeply moral philosophy, demonstrating its capacity to mobilise masses, transform social relations, and uphold the legitimacy of justice without recourse to violence.

❒ Satyagraha combined ethical principles with political strategy

4.2.7 Relevance of Gandhian Satyagraha in Post-Independent Indian Politics

Even after India achieved independence, the ethos of Satyagraha has endured, frequently adapted to confront social, environmental, and political issues. Leaders such as Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan utilised Satyagraha-inspired movements, including the Bhoodan and Sarvodaya campaigns, to address social and economic inequalities through voluntary action and moral persuasion. The philosophy has also inspired numerous social justice initiatives; for example, the Chipko Movement in the Himalayas, where villagers non-violently embraced trees to prevent deforestation, serves as a notable instance of environmental Satyagraha. Similarly, campaigns advocating for tribal rights or opposing destructive development projects, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, continue to draw upon Gandhian methods of non-violent protest.

❒ Satyagraha addresses social, environmental, and economic issues

Moreover, Satyagraha has functioned as an instrument for promoting political accountability. Movements such as Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution in the 1970s, which sought to combat corruption and misgovernance, and more recent anti-corruption campaigns, like those led by Anna Hazare, derived moral authority from Gandhian principles. In contemporary India, Satyagraha remains an integral part of the political culture, symbolising ethical protest and participatory democracy. It demonstrates that non-violent resistance continues to provide an effective and morally persuasive means of challenging injustice, influencing policy, and mobilising public awareness.

❒ Promotes political accountability and ethical participatory democracy

4.2.8 Relevance of Gandhian Satyagraha in the Contemporary World

Gandhian Satyagraha continues to possess deep and enduring global significance, functioning both as a moral philosophy and a practical strategy for nonviolent conflict resolution in a world increasingly defined by violence, inequality, and ecological degradation. Rooted in the principles of truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and self-suffering (Tapasya), Satyagraha has transcended its original role in India's struggle for independence to become a universal framework for ethical resistance, social reform, and peacebuilding. It remains profoundly relevant across political, social, educational, and environmental spheres, demonstrating that nonviolence is not merely a moral ideal but an effective instrument of transformative action.

❒ Satyagraha: global moral and practical strategy

Within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies, Gandhian Satyagraha has established itself as a foundational paradigm, offering both theoretical insight and practical methods for addressing conflict without resorting to force. Rather than perceiving conflict as inherently destructive, Gandhi viewed it as an opportunity for moral engagement and reconciliation through truth and dialogue. His philosophy shifts the emphasis from coercion to persuasion, confrontation to cooperation, and domination to understanding. The modern academic concepts of "positive peace," which aspires not only to the absence of war but also to the elimination of structural and cultural injustices, and "constructive conflict," which seeks regeneration through ethical engagement, owe much to Gandhian ideas. These frameworks illustrate how Satyagraha continues to influence contemporary approaches to peace and social justice.

❒ Foundations for peace studies and constructive conflict

Gandhi's influence extends into the work of notable scholars such as Gene Sharp, who meticulously examined and categorised various methods of nonviolent action, drawing heavily from Gandhian practice. The idea of civilian-based defence, which emphasises a population's capacity to resist aggression through collective non-cooperation rather than armed force, also stems from this tradition. Historical examples such as the nonviolent resistance of Norway and Denmark during the Nazi occupation, and subsequent civil movements in Eastern Europe, stand as powerful testaments to the effectiveness of Satyagraha-inspired methods even under repressive political regimes.

❒ Influence on nonviolent action theory and defence

Beyond academia, Satyagraha has profoundly shaped global movements for justice, equality, and peace. Its emphasis on

disciplined nonviolence, moral conviction, and collective mobilisation has inspired countless struggles for human dignity across the world. In the United States, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. described Gandhi as "the guiding light of our technique of non-violent social change," adopting Satyagraha as the moral and strategic foundation of the Civil Rights Movement through sit-ins, marches, and civil disobedience. Similarly, Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in South Africa initially adopted nonviolent resistance inspired by Gandhi's early campaigns against racial discrimination. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Khudai Khidmatgar movement in the North-West Frontier Province further demonstrated that even deeply traditional and martial societies could embrace nonviolent activism as a means of political transformation.

❒ Inspired global justice and human rights movements

Satyagraha's principles continue to animate pro-democracy and independence movements across the world. It has inspired efforts such as the Solidarity Movement in Poland, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and Aung San Suu Kyi's campaign for democracy in Myanmar, all of which relied on mass nonviolent mobilisation to challenge authoritarian power. In India, environmental movements like the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan exemplify environmental Satyagraha, where peaceful protest and moral resolve are employed to safeguard both nature and human rights. Likewise, global environmental campaigns, anti-nuclear movements, and struggles for indigenous rights draw upon Gandhian ideals, demonstrating the continuing moral and strategic relevance of Satyagraha in the pursuit of justice and sustainability.

❒ Guided pro-democracy and environmental campaigns worldwide

In post-independence India, the influence of Satyagraha endures across political and civic life. Leaders such as Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan adapted Gandhian principles to new social challenges through movements like Bhoodan and Sarvodaya, which sought voluntary land redistribution, social harmony, and moral upliftment. Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution of the 1970s, aimed at confronting corruption and political authoritarianism, and Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement in the early twenty-first century, both reflected the moral spirit of Gandhian protest. Today, Satyagraha remains a deeply embedded ethos within India's democratic culture, symbolising ethical resistance and collective responsibility in public life.

❒ Continues to shape post-independence Indian activism

The philosophy of Satyagraha also retains immense value in the realm of education and civic development. Integrating Gandhian principles into educational curricula fosters moral

❒ Integrates moral education, civic engagement, and women's leadership

awareness, empathy, and nonviolent problem-solving among young people. In professional and industrial settings, it offers practical frameworks for resolving disputes through dialogue and cooperation rather than coercion. Gandhi's belief in women's moral strength and social leadership likewise continues to inspire women-led movements across India. From anti-liquor protests in Andhra Pradesh to the Meira Paibi movement in Manipur, and various grassroots feminist campaigns, women have embodied the essence of Gandhian nonviolence in their struggles for equality, justice, and community welfare.

❒ Offers ethical responses to global political crises

In contemporary global politics, Satyagraha remains a vital moral and strategic response to challenges such as nuclear proliferation, authoritarianism, religious extremism, and environmental crises. It provides a humane and nonviolent alternative grounded in empathy, truth, and ethical resistance. Initiatives like the United Nations' Decade for a Culture of Peace and various international youth movements promoting intercultural dialogue and reconciliation continue to reflect Gandhian values of respect, cooperation, and universal dignity.

❒ Provides moral guidance in nuclear and security dilemmas

In the nuclear age, Gandhi's emphasis on ethical diplomacy, restraint, and collective moral courage gains renewed urgency. Although nonviolent action cannot physically prevent the use of nuclear weapons, it offers a pathway toward disarmament and lasting peace through public mobilisation and the transformation of global consciousness. Satyagraha challenges the logic of deterrence, asserting that genuine peace can never arise from fear or domination but must instead be built upon justice, truth, and mutual trust.

❒ Endures as transformative philosophy uniting ethics and pragmatism

Ultimately, Gandhian Satyagraha endures as a timeless and transformative philosophy that unites ethical conviction with political pragmatism. It has demonstrated its adaptability across diverse contexts, from colonial liberation struggles to modern movements for human rights, environmental protection, and democratic reform. By harmonising moral integrity, compassion, and disciplined action, Satyagraha remains not only a philosophy of resistance but also a guide to living ethically in a divided world. In an era overshadowed by violence and uncertainty, Gandhi's vision of truth and nonviolence continues to serve as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards justice, harmony, and a more humane global order.

4.2.9 Critique of the Gandhian Concept of Satyagraha

❒ Satyagraha criticised for relying on opponent's conscience

While Gandhian Satyagraha is celebrated as a profound moral and political innovation, it has not been without criticism from scholars and political theorists. A central critique concerns its dependence on the moral conscience of the adversary. Satyagraha assumes that the opponent possesses ethical awareness or a sense of justice, as was arguably the case with the British colonial authorities, who operated within a liberal moral framework. Critics contend that such an approach would be ineffective against regimes devoid of moral restraint, such as totalitarian or genocidal governments like Nazi Germany, which perpetrated atrocities without hesitation or remorse. This reliance on the opponent's ethical sensibility, therefore, limits the universality of Satyagraha in confronting extreme or amoral power structures.

❒ Non-violence demands exceptional personal moral discipline

The practicality of Ahimsa, or non-violence, has also been questioned. The moral and spiritual discipline expected of a Satyagrahi, including strict adherence to vows such as Brahmacharya (self-restraint) and Aparigraha (non-possession), demands an exceptional level of commitment and self-control. Critics argue that these standards make Satyagraha inaccessible to the majority of people, particularly in situations of immediate crisis where survival and security are at stake. Moreover, the philosophy's strong focus on personal morality has been criticised for overlooking the structural and systemic dimensions of injustice. Marxist and structuralist thinkers, for instance, argue that moral persuasion alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched systems of economic exploitation and institutionalised power.

❒ Success depends on mass unity and patience

Another challenge lies in Satyagraha's reliance on disciplined mass participation. Its success depends on the collective self-restraint and unity of its followers, as any lapse into violence undermines its ethical foundation and political effectiveness. Historical incidents, such as the Chauri Chaura episode of 1922, where protestors turned violent, prompting Gandhi to suspend the Non-Cooperation Movement, highlight the fragility of maintaining nonviolent discipline in mass movements. Some critics also argue that Gandhi's insistence on absolute truth and non-violence can appear morally rigid, leaving little room for pragmatic flexibility. In crises demanding swift intervention or the prevention of greater harm, the gradual and persuasive methods of Satyagraha may prove inadequate. Its gradualist nature, relying on patience, self-suffering, and moral conversion, can seem ineffective when urgent political or humanitarian action is required.

❒ Effectiveness limited by cultural and contextual factors

Cultural and contextual limitations further complicate the application of Satyagraha. Its success in colonial India was facilitated by specific historical and social conditions, including the presence of a relatively accountable British administration and a vibrant civil society. Replicating these circumstances in different geopolitical contexts, especially where violence and repression are endemic, remains uncertain. Some scholars also detect conservative undertones in Gandhi's approach, suggesting that Satyagraha sometimes sought to preserve social harmony rather than radically transform existing hierarchies of class, caste, or gender. The emphasis on self-sacrifice and moral reform, while noble, could inadvertently reinforce traditional social norms and expectations, particularly those affecting women and marginalised groups.

❒ Absolutism of ethical means may hinder action

Another area of critique concerns Gandhi's insistence on the purity of means. While his belief that ethical ends cannot be achieved through unethical means is philosophically compelling, critics argue that such absolutism may result in political paralysis when confronting ruthless or violent regimes. The moral tension between maintaining non-violence and achieving tangible justice exposes the inherent conflict between idealism and realism within the Gandhian framework. Additionally, Satyagraha's effectiveness often depends on visibility and communication, its moral appeal works best when the struggle is publicised and the audience can respond with empathy. In contexts lacking free media or public accountability, such as authoritarian states, its influence may be severely constrained.

❒ Historical and scholarly recognition of Satyagraha's legacy

Despite these limitations, scholars widely acknowledge the profound intellectual and moral legacy of Satyagraha. Its focus on truth, non-violence, and disciplined mass action has inspired movements for civil rights, justice, and human dignity across the globe. Academic analyses by thinkers such as Rai (2000) highlight the philosophical depth of Satyagraha, showing how it promotes universal human values and moral courage. Historical studies by Shukla (2008), Verma and Bakshi (2005), and Krishna (2008) further illuminate its practical applications in India and South Africa, demonstrating both its transformative potential and the challenges of sustaining a morally rigorous movement within complex socio-political realities.

Ultimately, while the ethical and spiritual power of Satyagraha remains undeniable, its practical constraints are equally evident. Its reliance on the conscience of opponents, its demand for exceptional moral discipline, and its gradual, non-coercive methods make it vulnerable in the face of violent repression or

❒ Practical constraints challenge application in violent contexts

systemic injustice. Critics argue that in situations involving terrorism, genocide, or existential threats, moral appeals may be ignored or brutally suppressed. Nonetheless, the critiques do not diminish Satyagraha's philosophical significance; rather, they underscore the need to adapt its principles to modern contexts by integrating ethical integrity with pragmatic strategies. In sum, Satyagraha endures as a remarkable model of moral and political action—an approach that continues to challenge both the conscience and the practicality of human resistance, while reminding the world of the enduring power of truth, non-violence, and moral courage.

❒ Endures as transformative ethical and political philosophy

Satyagraha stands as one of the most original contributions of Indian political thought to global political theory, bridging ethics and politics, individual morality and collective action, and personal discipline with public transformation. Though criticised for its idealism, its relevance endures in an age marked by violence, polarization, and ecological crisis. By uniting moral integrity with disciplined, non-violent action, Gandhian Satyagraha demonstrates that social and political change can be achieved without recourse to violence, coercion, or domination. While its idealism and reliance on ethical opponents present practical challenges, its successes in India's freedom struggle and its influence on global movements for justice, human rights, and peace attest to its transformative power. Beyond a strategy for resistance, Satyagraha embodies a philosophy of life that seeks to harmonise individual conscience, social responsibility, and collective action, offering timeless lessons in courage, empathy, and the pursuit of truth in the face of injustice. For both scholars and practitioners of political science, it continues to provide a dynamic framework for understanding the complex relationship between power, morality, and social change.

Summarised Overview

Satyagraha, the cornerstone of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and political practice, represents a unique synthesis of truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and voluntary suffering (Tapasya). It transcends conventional political resistance by transforming moral conviction into a tool for social and political reform. Developed during Gandhi's time in South Africa and perfected during India's freedom struggle, Satyagraha redefined the nature of resistance by emphasising persuasion over coercion, reconciliation over domination, and ethical transformation over material gain. Unlike passive resistance, it was an active and disciplined struggle rooted in spiritual strength and moral integrity.

Through key campaigns such as the Champaran, Kheda, and Salt Satyagrahas, Gandhi demonstrated the power of collective non-violent action, mobilising ordinary citizens across social and economic divisions. Satyagraha thus evolved into a comprehensive ethical and political framework capable of transforming both individuals and societies through the pursuit of truth and the moral force of non-violence.

The significance of Satyagraha extends far beyond India's independence movement, shaping both post-independence politics and global peace movements. In India, its principles inspired post-colonial initiatives such as Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement, Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution, and contemporary anti-corruption and environmental campaigns. Its methods of moral persuasion and peaceful protest also influenced international leaders and movements, including Martin Luther King Jr. in the American Civil Rights Movement, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and global movements for democracy and human rights. Within academic and peace studies, Gandhian Satyagraha remains a foundational paradigm for understanding non-violent conflict resolution, inspiring concepts such as "positive peace" and "constructive conflict." Beyond politics, it provides ethical guidance for education, civic engagement, and environmental sustainability, demonstrating its enduring relevance as both a moral philosophy and a pragmatic strategy for addressing modern challenges such as ecological degradation, inequality, and global conflict.

Despite its universal appeal, Satyagraha has faced notable criticisms concerning its practicality and moral assumptions. Critics argue that its effectiveness relies heavily on the conscience of the oppressor, which may not exist in totalitarian or violent regimes. Its demands for personal discipline and self-sacrifice are also seen as impractical for ordinary individuals, while its focus on moral conversion may overlook deeper structural injustices. Nevertheless, Satyagraha's lasting influence lies in its ability to unite ethics with political action, offering a humane and principled alternative to coercion and violence. By harmonising individual morality with collective justice, Gandhi's philosophy continues to illuminate pathways toward peace and reconciliation in a fractured world. Satyagraha remains not only a method of resistance but also a universal moral framework, reminding humanity that enduring peace and justice are attainable only through truth, compassion, and the courage of conscience.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How do the principles of Satya and Ahimsa form the core of the Satyagraha philosophy?
2. What significance did Gandhi's experiences in South Africa have in shaping his development of Satyagraha?

3. How did mass participation contribute to the effectiveness of Satyagraha movements?
4. Identify the three key components of Satyagraha: Satya, Ahimsa, and Tapasya, and explain their interrelationship.
5. In what ways did Gandhi distinguish Satyagraha from Duragraha?
6. How does civil disobedience function within the wider framework of Satyagraha?
7. Explain how Satyagraha continues to influence post-independence social and political activism in India.
8. In what ways has Satyagraha inspired global civil rights movements and leaders?

Assignments

1. How does Gandhian Satyagraha reconcile the tension between moral idealism and political pragmatism in achieving social and political change?
2. To what extent can the principles of Satyagraha be effectively applied in modern authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, where moral appeal may fail to influence power structures?
3. In what ways does Satyagraha move beyond traditional notions of passive resistance to become an active and transformative force for justice and peace?
4. How far does Gandhi's insistence on the purity of means limit the strategic flexibility of Satyagraha in urgent political or humanitarian crises?
5. How has Gandhian Satyagraha influenced the theoretical development of modern Peace and Conflict Studies, particularly in shaping concepts such as "positive peace" and "constructive conflict"?
6. Does Satyagraha adequately address structural and systemic forms of violence, or does its focus on individual morality risk overlooking deeper socio-economic injustices?
7. To what extent can Satyagraha offer viable strategies for addressing contemporary global challenges such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and economic inequality?
8. How does the notion of self-suffering within Satyagraha function as a moral and psychological tool for transforming both the self and the opponent?

9. Is Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence universally applicable, or is it culturally and historically contingent upon specific Indian socio-political conditions?
10. How can the study and practice of Satyagraha contribute to rethinking modern paradigms of power, justice, and resistance in the twenty-first century?

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

UNIT 3

Passive Resistance: Gandhian Approach to Peace

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the concept of Gandhian passive resistance and its evolution into Satyagraha
- evaluate the role of Satyagraha in India's struggle for independence
- discuss the practical applications of Gandhian non-violence in modern social reform and political activism
- critically assess the limitations and criticisms of Gandhian passive resistance
- explore the global influence of Gandhian methods on peace, human rights, and conflict resolution

Background

Passive resistance, as interpreted and transformed by Mahatma Gandhi, represents a profound moral and political philosophy rooted in truth, non-violence, and ethical self-discipline. Although the term originally suggested a reluctant or defensive form of political non-compliance, Gandhi re-envisioned it as a dynamic and courageous method for confronting injustice. Drawing on ancient Indian ethical traditions—particularly the principles of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth)—as well as Western intellectual influences from thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, and John Ruskin, Gandhi elevated passive resistance beyond a tactical protest mechanism to a holistic philosophy of life. The method took its mature form in Satyagraha, meaning "truth-force" or "soul-force", which emphasised moral persuasion, voluntary self-suffering, and respect for one's adversary as instruments for social and political transformation. Passive resistance under Gandhi became a powerful tool during India's freedom struggle, inspiring mass mobilisation, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation without resorting to violence. Its enduring relevance lies in its insistence on ethical engagement, social responsibility, and personal integrity, offering a compelling framework for addressing contemporary issues of injustice, conflict, and human rights across the world.

Keywords

Satyagraha, Passive Resistance, Ahimsa, Moral Authority, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Self-Suffering

Discussion

Mahatma Gandhi's understanding of passive resistance stands as one of the most significant moral and political innovations of the modern era. Although the phrase "passive resistance" predated him, Gandhi redefined it, transforming it from a mere political strategy into a holistic philosophy of life founded on the principles of truth, love, and moral courage. He first employed the term during his early struggles in South Africa, where he led campaigns against discriminatory laws directed at the Indian community. However, Gandhi soon realised that the expression failed to capture the deeper moral essence of his approach. The term "passive resistance," as commonly understood in the Western context, implied a tactic born of weakness or necessity, a means of opposition used by those without access to physical power. Gandhi rejected this interpretation, finding it inconsistent with his vision of resistance as an act of strength, not submission. For him, true resistance was not passive but profoundly active, requiring spiritual discipline, moral conviction, and inner strength. It was rooted in the force of truth rather than physical might, representing a courageous and principled stand against injustice rather than a reluctant avoidance of conflict.

4.3.1 Meaning of Passive Resistance

❒ Non-violent opposition using moral persuasion

Passive resistance is a non-violent approach to opposing authority, perceived injustice, or unjust laws. It involves the deliberate refusal to comply with specific commands, demands, or policies while consciously avoiding any form of physical aggression or violence. Although the term 'passive' suggests a lack of action, the method itself is an active and purposeful strategy that requires considerable moral strength, discipline, and conviction. It relies on ethical persuasion and moral appeal rather than coercion or force, drawing its power from conscience and moral authority. By employing non-cooperation and the withdrawal of consent from unjust systems, passive resistance seeks to achieve social or political change without

resorting to violent rebellion or insurrection. Its emphasis is on patience, self-restraint, and the willingness to endure suffering rather than inflict harm, asserting moral and political will through steadfast non-violence and principled defiance.

In Gandhi's philosophy, passive resistance assumes a deeper moral and spiritual significance. It is not simply a political tactic but a profound ethical discipline, grounded in the rejection of aggression and hatred and sustained through personal suffering. It entails opposing injustice and untruth with love and respect for the wrongdoer, maintaining moral integrity even in the face of oppression. According to Gandhi, genuine resistance requires immense courage, self-control, and unwavering faith. Central to his thought is the belief that truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) are ultimately more powerful than coercion or physical force, and that real victory is attained not by defeating an opponent but by winning their heart through self-suffering and the force of moral persuasion.

❒ Ethical discipline winning hearts, not defeating

4.3.2 Historical Evolution of the Concept

The concept of passive resistance has deep historical, religious, and philosophical foundations, having developed over centuries as a moral and political response to injustice. It originated in ancient civilisations and spiritual traditions that emphasised non-violence and the ethical duty to oppose wrongdoing without resorting to aggression. Early religious teachings often presented non-violent resistance as a sacred duty rather than merely a political strategy. In early Christian history, for example, believers who refused to worship the Roman Emperor practised moral defiance grounded in faith, willingly enduring persecution rather than compromising their conscience. Similarly, Buddhism promoted the principle of Ahimsa—non-violence and compassion for all beings—as a means of resisting wrongdoing through inner discipline and moral strength rather than through physical retaliation. Hinduism also provided a robust ethical framework through its emphasis on Dharma (righteous duty) and Ahimsa, principles that later profoundly influenced Mahatma Gandhi's formulation of moral resistance.

❒ Ancient roots in moral and religious traditions

Over time, passive resistance transcended its religious origins to acquire political significance as a deliberate strategy of non-violent opposition. By the nineteenth century, social reformers and nationalist movements in Europe and the United States were employing non-cooperation and civil disobedience as tools against unjust authority. The Irish nationalist

❒ 19th century political use and philosophical grounding

movement, for instance, implemented forms of passive resistance such as rent strikes and organised boycotts to challenge the authority of British landlords and colonial administrators. Around the same period, Henry David Thoreau's seminal essay Civil Disobedience (1849) provided a philosophical foundation for the practice, arguing that individuals have a moral obligation to refuse compliance with unjust laws. Thoreau's focus on conscience and personal responsibility transformed passive resistance from a mere act of endurance into a structured form of moral and political protest.

❒ Gandhi rejected passive resistance for Satyagraha

Despite its increasing prominence, the term "passive resistance" attracted criticism for suggesting weakness or inaction, implying mere endurance rather than active engagement with injustice. Gandhi initially used the term during his early campaigns in South Africa but soon rejected it for its misleading connotations. For him, genuine non-violent resistance demanded courage, moral clarity, and active participation. He subsequently reformulated the concept into Satyagraha, derived from the Sanskrit words Satya (truth) and Agraha (firmness or insistence), meaning "truth-force" or "soul-force." This innovation represented a turning point, transforming passive resistance from a reactive political method into a dynamic spiritual and ethical philosophy that emphasised moral conviction, active engagement, and the power of truth to bring about social and political change.

❒ Satyagraha as active moral and spiritual force

While passive resistance had traditionally been viewed as a pragmatic or expedient tool employed by the weak, Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha represented an entirely different ethos. It functioned as an active moral force, sustained by love, self-suffering, and truth, with the aim not of defeating or humiliating the opponent but of transforming their heart and conscience. For Gandhi, truth was the ultimate reality, and non-violence (Ahimsa) constituted the sole path to realise it. Consequently, Satyagraha operated both as a political strategy and a spiritual discipline, offering a means to pursue justice while simultaneously purifying the self through ethical action.

❒ Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity influences

Gandhi's intellectual and moral development was profoundly shaped by a diverse range of religious, philosophical, and social influences. From Hinduism, he drew the principles of Ahimsa and Dharma, which instilled in him the belief that moral conduct and spiritual truth should guide all human endeavours. The Bhagavad Gita introduced him to the doctrines of Nishkama Karma (selfless action) and Aparigraha (non-possession), emphasising self-control and detachment from material desires.

Jainism and Buddhism reinforced his understanding of compassion and non-injury, highlighting the transformative potential of harmlessness. Christianity, particularly the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, left a deep imprint on Gandhi's thinking, shaping his views on forgiveness, love, and moral resistance to evil. The injunction to "turn the other cheek" became, in Gandhi's interpretation, an act of courageous moral strength and disciplined self-suffering rather than passive submission.

❒ Western thinkers shaped Gandhi's non-violent approach

Gandhi also drew inspiration from Western thinkers. Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience provided a philosophical rationale for refusing to obey unjust laws, forming the ethical basis for Gandhi's campaigns of non-cooperation. Leo Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God Is Within You influenced him with its radical Christian humanism and advocacy of non-resistance to evil through love, inspiring Gandhi's commitment to spiritual strength and moral critique of violence. Their correspondence even led to the establishment of Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, a practical experiment in communal simplicity and non-violent living. Similarly, John Ruskin's Unto This Last shaped Gandhi's social and economic ideals, inspiring his concepts of trusteeship, the dignity of labour, and the moral value of simple living. Gandhi implemented these principles practically through the Phoenix Settlement, where he explored communal self-reliance and egalitarian social relationships.

❒ Indian reformers inspired social and moral activism

Gandhi was also deeply influenced by Indian reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who had advocated moral regeneration, social justice, and spiritual awakening as essential foundations for national progress. Observing their efforts, Gandhi became convinced that society could be transformed effectively through moral persuasion and dedicated public service, without the use of violence.

❒ Passive resistance evolved into Satyagraha philosophy

Drawing on this rich combination of religious, philosophical, and practical influences, Gandhi reinterpreted the traditional concept of passive resistance, developing it into Satyagraha, a comprehensive philosophy that integrated ethics, spirituality, and politics. By doing so, he elevated non-violence from a mere tactical strategy to a universal principle of human existence, presenting it as a means of realising Dharma through the pursuit of truth and the practice of love. The historical evolution of passive resistance, therefore, represents a journey from ancient moral and religious ideals to a deliberate and sophisticated instrument for political and social transformation. Gandhi's doc-

trine of Satyagraha culminated this evolution, embodying the highest ideals of moral courage, self-discipline, and steadfast faith in the redemptive power of truth and non-violence.

4.3.3 Nature of the Concept of Passive Resistance

Gandhi's concept of passive resistance is essentially ethical, spiritual, and constructive, extending far beyond mere political strategy. It represents an active moral force rather than a passive stance. Gandhi himself highlighted the distinction between Satyagraha and conventional passive resistance, likening it to the difference between the North and South Poles. Whereas traditional passive resistance might be adopted by those lacking the means to use force, Satyagraha is the weapon of the strong, practised by those who renounce violence out of moral conviction rather than weakness. This approach demands self-discipline, courage, and an unwavering commitment to truth, grounded in the belief that voluntarily endured suffering in a righteous cause can awaken the conscience of the oppressor and foster reconciliation rather than destruction.

❒ Ethical, spiritual, and morally active force

Gandhi's approach to passive resistance was never impulsive or emotional; it was founded on careful ethical reasoning, practical wisdom, and meticulous preparation. Major campaigns such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Salt March, and the Quit India Movement exemplified this principle, rejecting violence not out of convenience but from a firm belief in the transformative power of self-suffering and moral appeal. These disciplined actions combined ethical conviction with strategic resistance, demonstrating the effectiveness and moral authority of non-violent struggle.

❒ Careful planning underpins disciplined non-violent campaigns

Ultimately, Gandhian passive resistance transcended conventional political tactics, functioning as a moral and spiritual force capable of uniting the Indian nation around shared values of truth, non-violence, and collective dignity, while simultaneously undermining the legitimacy of colonial rule. By transforming political struggle into a moral crusade, Gandhi elevated India's pursuit of independence into a universal model of non-violent resistance. His philosophy continues to inspire movements for justice, human rights, and social transformation worldwide, illustrating the enduring influence of ethical courage and principled defiance.

❒ Transcends politics, inspiring global moral resistance

4.3.4 Characteristics of the Concept

- Rooted in truth, humility, and dialogue
- Non-violence as active love and strength
- Emphasis on self-suffering over harming others
- Incorporates non-cooperation and civil disobedience
- Constructive protest fostering justice and compassion
- Universally applicable across social and personal spheres

Gandhi's concept of passive resistance is distinguished by several fundamental characteristics that set it apart from other forms of non-violent action.

Foremost, it is rooted in the principle of truth, or Satya. Gandhi regarded truth as divine and viewed the pursuit of truth as the highest aim of human life. Recognising that no individual can possess absolute knowledge of truth, the Satyagrahi—the practitioner of Satyagraha—must approach conflict with humility, openness to dialogue, and respect for the opponent.

Secondly, passive resistance is founded on Ahimsa, or non-violence, which extends beyond the mere avoidance of harm. For Gandhi, non-violence was an active expression of love, compassion, and goodwill towards all beings. He considered violence a sign of weakness and fear, while true strength lay in the ability to endure suffering without harbouring hatred.

A third defining feature of Gandhian passive resistance is its emphasis on self-suffering rather than causing suffering to others. Voluntarily borne hardship serves to purify the self while appealing to the conscience of the adversary. Practices such as fasting, imprisonment, and enduring difficulties were, for Gandhi, not acts of coercion but forms of moral persuasion, demonstrating the power of ethical steadfastness over force or intimidation.

A fourth defining aspect of Gandhian passive resistance is its incorporation of non-cooperation and civil disobedience as legitimate and morally grounded forms of protest. By deliberately refusing to participate in unjust systems, the Satyagrahi undermines the structures of oppression while preserving personal and collective moral integrity. These acts of non-violent defiance are constructive in nature, aiming not to harm or destroy the opponent but to foster a more just, compassionate, and equitable social order.

Finally, the universality of Gandhian passive resistance distinguishes it as a principle applicable across political, social, and personal spheres. It is not a strategy reserved for the weak or unarmed but a spiritual discipline accessible to anyone committed to the supremacy of truth and love. Gandhi emphasised that Satyagraha could be applied not only against governments and rulers but also within families and communities, reflecting its foundation in universal moral principles.

In essence, Gandhian passive resistance transcends conventional politics to become a comprehensive philosophy of life. It merges moral integrity, self-restraint, and active courage to confront injustice without hatred or violence. It represents both an inward struggle for truth and purity of motive and an outward effort to reform society through compassion and sacrifice. By elevating passive resistance into Satyagraha, Gandhi transformed a tactical method of protest into a profound spiritual doctrine, one that continues to inspire movements for justice and peace worldwide. At its core, it remains a timeless exhortation to confront injustice through the enduring powers of truth, love, and non-violence.

❒ Philosophy of life merging ethics, courage, and truth

4.3.5 Relevance of Gandhian Passive Resistance in the Indian Freedom Struggle

Gandhian passive resistance, as articulated through the philosophy and practice of Satyagraha, became the cornerstone of India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule. It transformed the nationalist movement from an elite-driven political effort into a broad-based, participatory, and ethically grounded mass movement, engaging people across different regions, social classes, and communities. Through non-violent resistance, Gandhi infused the freedom struggle with a new moral and psychological dimension, making it a movement that appealed not only to Indians' political aspirations but also to their ethical and spiritual sensibilities.

❒ Central to India's ethical, mass-based independence movement

Key campaigns such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and the Quit India Movement (1942) were firmly guided by the principles of Satyagraha. These movements employed strategies including non-cooperation, boycotts of British goods and institutions, and peaceful civil disobedience against unjust laws. By enabling the active participation of millions of ordinary people, i.e., peasants, workers, students, and women, the movements democratised the struggle for independence and lent it unprecedented legitimacy. Gandhi's unwavering commitment to non-violence prevented large-scale bloodshed and preserved the moral integrity of the campaign, ensuring that the fight for freedom did not descend into cycles of revenge or hatred.

❒ Non-violent campaigns empowered peasants, workers, and women

A particularly significant feature of Gandhian passive resistance was its ability to challenge the moral and psychological foundations of colonial authority. By maintaining strict non-violence even in the face of brutal repression, the movement ex-

posed the cruelty of British rule and undermined its legitimacy both in India and internationally. Images of unarmed protestors enduring beatings or imprisonment without retaliation generated global sympathy for the Indian cause and widespread moral condemnation of the colonial administration. In doing so, the British Empire, which prided itself on justice and civility, found its authority and reputation profoundly discredited in the eyes of the world.

❒ Exposed colonial cruelty, undermining British legitimacy globally

Equally significant was the psychological empowerment that Satyagraha imparted to the Indian populace. Gandhi's principle of voluntary self-suffering and non-retaliation was not an expression of weakness but a deliberate moral strategy that disarmed the oppressor. By willingly enduring hardship, Satyagrahis exhibited remarkable inner strength and moral superiority, effectively shifting the balance of power from the rulers to the ruled. Such disciplined non-violent resistance made it politically and morally difficult for the British to sustain their authority.

❒ Moral courage disarmed oppressors, shifted power balance

Gandhi's focus on the constructive programme further strengthened the social and ethical foundation of the freedom movement. Initiatives such as the promotion of Khadi and village industries, efforts to eradicate untouchability, the advancement of women, and the encouragement of Hindu-Muslim unity were central to his vision of Swaraj, or self-rule. These programmes aimed not merely at ending colonial domination but at fostering a society that was socially just, economically self-reliant, and morally rejuvenated.

4.3.6 Relevance of Gandhian Idea of Passive Resistance in Post-Independence Indian Politics

Following India's independence in 1947, the immediate need for Satyagraha as a tool against colonial rule diminished, yet its moral and philosophical influence continued to shape Indian politics and civic life. Gandhian Passive Resistance, with its focus on truth, non-violence, and moral persuasion, remained deeply ingrained in the nation's political culture, impacting both governmental institutions and grassroots activism.

❒ Inspired social reform through non-violent land and rights movements

In the decades after independence, Gandhi's methods inspired numerous social reform movements that sought to address enduring inequalities and injustices through non-violent means. The Bhoodan Movement, launched by Vinoba Bhave in 1951, exemplified this approach by encouraging landown-

ers to voluntarily donate land to the landless, promoting social justice through moral appeal rather than state coercion. Similarly, Jayaprakash Narayan's call for Total Revolution in the 1970s, aimed at combating corruption and authoritarian tendencies, drew heavily on Gandhian ideals of non-violent civil resistance and ethical renewal in public life. Later initiatives, such as the Chipko Movement for forest conservation and various Dalit rights campaigns addressing caste discrimination through peaceful mobilisation, further demonstrated the continued relevance of Gandhian techniques in post-independence India.

Gandhian Passive Resistance also found expression within the broader democratic framework of the Indian Republic. Non-violent protest, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and moral appeals became established methods for influencing public policy, demanding accountability, and expressing dissent. In this manner, Gandhian principles provided citizens and civil society with a legitimate and ethically grounded means of engaging with the state, ensuring that protest remained within the bounds of democratic non-violence. Political leaders, reformers, and activists frequently invoked Gandhi's moral authority to lend legitimacy and credibility to their causes.

❒ Non-violent protest became a tool for democratic engagement

Simultaneously, Gandhian thought continued to provide a critical perspective on India's developmental and political path. His advocacy for village self-reliance, decentralised governance through the Panchayati Raj system, and economic self-sufficiency offered an alternative to the dominant model of centralised, industrial development pursued by successive administrations. The Gandhian principle of Sarvodaya, or the welfare of all, remained a lasting ethical standard, informing alternative visions of social justice, equitable progress, and communal harmony.

❒ Gandhian principles critiqued centralised development, promoted Sarvodaya

Although the strategic cohesion and ideological purity of Satyagraha could not be fully maintained amid the complexities of post-independence politics, its underlying spirit endured as a moral and democratic force. Gandhi's doctrine of Passive Resistance continues to shape Indian political practice, influencing methods of peaceful protest, ethical governance, and social reform. It serves as a lasting reminder that within a democracy, moral authority and the power of public conscience can be as effective as political power in advancing justice and safeguarding freedom.

❒ Passive Resistance remained a moral force shaping politics

4.3.7 Relevance of the Concept of Passive Resistance in the Contemporary World

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance, grounded in his doctrine of Satyagraha, continues to possess significant relevance in contemporary society, politics, and the academic study of peace and conflict. While often popularly referred to as "passive resistance," Gandhi insisted that it is far from passive. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic, morally charged, and ethically disciplined approach to confronting injustice. At its heart, Gandhian passive resistance integrates the principles of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth) with a willingness to endure suffering, creating a powerful mechanism for personal, social, and political transformation.

❒ Ethically disciplined strategy confronting injustice actively

The philosophy rests upon several interlinked principles. For Gandhi, non-violence was more than simply refraining from physical harm; it was an active commitment to compassion, moral integrity, and the rejection of hatred or ill-will towards one's opponent. Truth functioned as the guiding principle, encompassing not only factual accuracy but also justice, love, and concern for the welfare of all. Central to the practice is self-suffering, whereby the practitioner willingly accepts the consequences of opposing injustice, thereby demonstrating moral authority and appealing to the conscience of the oppressor. Respect for the adversary is essential, recognising them as a human being capable of moral awakening rather than as an enemy to be defeated. In this way, passive resistance becomes an active and courageous strategy, requiring discipline and a steadfast refusal to cooperate with unjust laws or systems, often expressed through civil disobedience, non-cooperation, and peaceful protest.

❒ Non-violence, truth, and self-suffering guide action

Gandhi consistently argued that passive resistance is "the weapon of the strong," rather than of the weak. It demands immense inner strength to face oppression without resorting to violence, while maintaining faith in the power of truth and moral persuasion. The ultimate aim is not to humiliate or defeat the opponent, but to transform both oppressor and oppressed through ethical engagement, self-sacrifice, and moral integrity. This distinguishes Gandhian passive resistance from conventional notions of passive resistance, which often limit it to defensive or expedient forms of non-cooperation.

❒ Aims to transform oppressor and oppressed morally

At the national level, Gandhi's ideas profoundly influenced India's approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. His

❒ Strength, courage, and moral persuasion define practice

focus on self-restraint, dialogue, and reconciliation encouraged Indian scholars and practitioners to regard non-violence as a disciplined and systematic means of addressing political, social, and communal tensions. In a diverse society such as India, Gandhi's emphasis on moral authority, mutual respect, and ethical conduct provided an indigenous model of peace rooted in spiritual and cultural values. His strategies of non-cooperation and civil disobedience not only mobilised the masses during the struggle for independence but also demonstrated that moral courage and collective self-discipline could be powerful instruments for social transformation.

❒ Influenced India's conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches

On a global scale, Gandhian thought has had a transformative impact on the development of modern Peace and Conflict Studies. Gandhi shifted the intellectual framework from managing or suppressing conflict through coercion and force to addressing it constructively through understanding, empathy, and non-violent engagement. His methods illustrated that non-violence could function both as a moral philosophy and a practical strategy capable of confronting systemic injustice and effecting lasting change. The moral and spiritual dimensions of his philosophy inspired leaders and movements worldwide, including Martin Luther King Jr. and the American civil rights movement, as well as Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid struggle, all of whom recognised Gandhi's approach as a universal model of resistance founded on truth, justice, and human dignity.

❒ Inspired global leaders and movements for justice

The theoretical study of non-violent action owes much to Gandhi's legacy. Scholars such as Gene Sharp explicitly drew on Gandhian principles to develop a systematic framework for analysing non-violent struggle, codifying numerous techniques of peaceful resistance and establishing non-violence as a recognised field of academic inquiry and practical application. Additionally, Gandhi's philosophy introduced moral and relational dimensions into conflict resolution, prioritising empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation over coercion and retaliation. Contemporary approaches to mediation, restorative justice, and post-conflict reconciliation often reflect these principles, focusing on healing relationships, ensuring moral accountability, and transforming structural injustices rather than merely terminating hostilities.

In contemporary settings, Gandhian passive resistance offers a powerful alternative to violent approaches to conflict. It illustrates that social and political transformation can be achieved through ethically grounded, non-violent means that uphold hu-

❒ Contributed to academic frameworks in Peace Studies

man dignity and encourage lasting reconciliation. By focusing on the transformation of relationships and systems rather than the defeat of opponents, passive resistance provides a framework for addressing injustice while minimising cycles of retaliation and long-term harm. This approach is particularly relevant to movements advocating civil rights, environmental protection, social justice, and the defence of human rights, where enduring change relies on moral authority, collective ethical action, and principled engagement rather than coercion or force.

❒ Remains relevant for ethical, sustainable social transformation

In summary, Gandhian passive resistance continues to hold significant relevance in today's world. It offers a practical, ethical, and spiritually informed method for confronting injustice, reforming relationships, and fostering sustainable peace. Its focus on moral authority, self-discipline, non-violence, and the transformative power of truth remains an essential guide for individuals, communities, and nations seeking to resolve conflict and build a more just, compassionate, and equitable society.

4.3.8 Critique of the Gandhian Concept of Passive Resistance

❒ Celebrated as a moral and political innovation

Although Gandhian Passive Resistance, or Satyagraha, is widely celebrated as one of the most original and influential contributions to political thought and moral philosophy, it has faced its share of criticism. Scholars and political theorists have questioned both its ethical assumptions and its practical applicability in contemporary socio-political contexts.

❒ Requires extraordinary personal moral discipline

A common critique centres on its idealistic and moralistic foundations. Gandhi's insistence on Ahimsa (absolute non-violence) and Satya (truth) as essential principles of Satyagraha requires an extraordinary level of moral discipline and self-purification, which is challenging for most individuals to achieve. The approach assumes that participants possess an unwavering commitment to non-violence, self-suffering, and truth, making it an exceptionally demanding method for ordinary people and large-scale movements in complex, pluralistic societies. Critics argue that, while morally admirable, such rigorous ethical expectations may render the strategy impractical when applied broadly.

Another significant criticism concerns the presumed moral responsiveness of the oppressor. Satyagraha relies on the belief that the self-suffering and ethical appeal of the oppressed will eventually awaken the conscience of the oppressor, resulting in justice and reconciliation. However, this expectation may not be

❒ Depends on oppressor's ethical responsiveness

realistic in situations where rulers are authoritarian, militarised, or entirely devoid of moral restraint. Totalitarian regimes, such as those under Nazism or Stalinism, are frequently cited as examples where Gandhian methods would likely fail, given that such systems are largely impervious to moral persuasion and maintain control through systematic violence.

❒ Non-violence can be exploited by adversaries

Critics further point to the potential for co-option and manipulation inherent in strict adherence to non-violence. Because Satyagrahis refuse to retaliate, oppressive regimes can exploit their restraint, employing force with impunity while retaining control. This imbalance may result in prolonged suffering without producing meaningful political change. Gandhi's inability to prevent the communal violence that accompanied the Partition of India in 1947 is sometimes cited as evidence of the limitations of non-violence in averting large-scale conflict when emotions and entrenched prejudices overwhelm moral appeals.

❒ Utopian vision challenged by modern complexities

The utopian aspects of Gandhi's socio-political vision have also been questioned. His promotion of self-sufficient village republics, decentralised governance, and minimal industrialisation is seen by some as incompatible with the demands of modern economic and technological development. While Gandhi's approach sought moral and ecological harmony, critics contend that it underestimates the complexities of global interdependence, economic competition, and technological advancement that characterise the contemporary world.

❒ Ambiguity between moral aims and tactics

Some scholars have also noted a certain ambiguity in Gandhian methods. In practice, the line between pure Satyagraha, rooted in love, moral conviction, and the aim of converting the opponent, and political non-cooperation as a tactical instrument of resistance can become blurred. This ambiguity may create uncertainty about the ultimate goals of a movement: whether it aspires to the moral transformation of the adversary or simply to secure political concessions.

❒ Ethical force continues to inspire movements worldwide

Despite these criticisms, Gandhian Passive Resistance stands as a remarkable contribution to political thought, ethical theory, and the study of peace. Its focus on moral integrity, truth, and the inherent dignity of human beings has inspired innumerable movements for justice and freedom worldwide. While its practical application may be constrained by specific contexts, its ethical force and visionary idealism continue to challenge societies to pursue non-violent alternatives to conflict, oppression, and injustice.

Summarised overview

Mahatma Gandhi transformed the concept of passive resistance from a strategy often associated with weakness into an ethically and spiritually grounded philosophy known as Satyagraha. Integrating principles of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth), Satyagraha emphasised moral courage, self-discipline, and voluntary suffering as tools for confronting injustice. Rooted in religious and philosophical traditions from Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity, and influenced by thinkers such as Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin, Gandhi elevated non-violence into a universal principle of ethical action applicable across personal, social, and political spheres.

Historically, Gandhian passive resistance played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, providing a framework for mass participation through movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement. By relying on moral authority rather than force, these campaigns empowered ordinary people and fostered unity across social, regional, and religious lines. Beyond the independence struggle, Gandhian methods inspired social reform campaigns, such as the Bhoodan and Chipko Movements, and initiatives for Dalit rights and ethical governance, demonstrating that principled non-violence could achieve social and political transformation while minimising cycles of retaliation.

Despite its enduring significance, Gandhian passive resistance has faced criticism for its idealism and practical limitations, especially in authoritarian or large-scale contexts. Critics question the assumption that oppressors will respond morally to non-violent resistance and note the utopian elements in Gandhi's vision of decentralised, self-sufficient communities. Additionally, distinguishing between moral transformation and strategic political goals can be challenging. Nevertheless, Satyagraha remains foundational in peace and conflict studies, offering insights into ethical leadership, non-violent action, and the transformative power of moral authority. Its legacy continues to inspire movements for justice, human rights, and sustainable peace worldwide.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. How does passive resistance differ from violent rebellion?
2. Why did Gandhi believe that passive resistance required inner strength?
3. In what way did voluntary suffering serve as a central element of Satyagraha?
4. What role does moral persuasion play in Gandhian resistance?
5. Why is humility important in the practice of Satyagraha?
6. How does a Satyagrahi demonstrate respect for their opponent?

7. Why did Gandhian methods attract global attention during the independence movement?
8. How did passive resistance contribute to exposing the moral weaknesses of colonial rule?

Assignments

1. How did Gandhi redefine the concept of passive resistance?
2. How does Gandhian passive resistance differ from traditional Western notions of passive resistance?
3. What strategies and methods were employed in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements?
4. How did Gandhian methods enable mass participation in the freedom struggle?
5. How did Gandhian passive resistance maintain ethical legitimacy during the independence movement?
6. What are the criticisms of Gandhian passive resistance in terms of practicality and idealism?
7. In what ways has Gandhian philosophy influenced global movements for civil rights and human rights?
8. What are the limitations of non-violent strategies in authoritarian contexts?
9. How does Gandhian passive resistance contribute to ethical leadership and conflict resolution?
10. How does Gandhian philosophy continue to inform the study of peace, conflict resolution, and non-violent activism?

Reference

1. Gandhi, M. K. (1928). *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Navajivan Publishing House.
2. Gandhi, M. K. (1935). *Non-violent resistance (Satyagraha)*. Navajivan Publishing House.
3. Gandhi, M. K. (1958). *Mangal Prabhat: A collection of speeches on Ashram vows*. Navajivan Publishing House.
4. Guha, R. (2018). *Gandhi: The years that changed the world, 1914–1948*. Penguin Random House.
5. *Peace Research Institute.* (2015). *Gandhi and the passive resistance campaign, 1907–1914*. *Journal of South African Studies*, 41(4), 623–640.

Suggested Reading

1. Gandhi, M. K. (1951). *The science of Satyagraha*. Navajivan Publishing House.
2. Gandhi, M. K. (1958). *Selections from Gandhi*. Navajivan Publishing House.
3. Guha, R. (2013). *Gandhi before India*. Penguin Random House.
4. Ostergaard, G. (1985). *Gandhian nonviolence and passive resistance*. *Peace Review*, 1(3), 9–16.
5. Gandhi, M. K. (1958). *Chapter 13: Satyagraha v. passive resistance*. In *Selections from Gandhi* (pp. 183–192). Navajivan Publishing House.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE: …… Reg. No.: …….....

Name: ……...……...

MODEL QUESTION PAPER I

THIRD SEMESTER M A POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE - M23PS04DE

Peace and Conflict Resolution

(CBCS - UG)

2024-25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours **Max Marks: 70**

Section A

I Answer any *ten* questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries *one* mark.

1. Who is considered the founder of Peace Studies as an academic discipline?
2. Define negative peace according to Johan Galtung.
3. What is structural violence?
4. Name one major theory of conflict.
5. What are the three types of violence in Galtung's violence triangle?
6. Define conflict suppression.
7. What is the primary goal of conflict resolution?
8. Name one key role of civil society groups in post-conflict reconstruction.
9. What does 'Ahimsa' mean in the Gandhian context?
10. Define Satyagraha.
11. What is the difference between passive resistance and active resistance?
12. In which decade did Peace Studies emerge as a formal academic discipline?
13. What is cultural violence?
14. Name one stage in the conflict lifecycle.
15. What is reconciliation in conflict handling?

(10×1=10 marks)

Section B

II Answer any five questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.

16. Explain the distinction between positive peace and negative peace.
17. How does structural violence differ from direct violence?

18. Discuss the relationship between cultural violence and structural violence.
19. What are the key characteristics of conflict management as an approach?
20. Explain the concept of Satyagraha and its core principles.
21. What is the role of civil society groups in post-conflict reconstruction?
22. Describe any two stages of conflict escalation.
23. How did Peace Studies develop as an academic discipline?
24. Explain Gandhi's concept of Ahimsa in the context of conflict resolution.
25. What is the difference between conflict resolution and reconciliation?

(5×2=10 marks)

Section C (*Short Answers)*

III Answer any five questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

26. Critically analyze Johan Galtung's framework of positive and negative peace.
27. Examine the interrelationship between structural violence and cultural violence with suitable examples.
28. Discuss the major theories of conflict and their application to real-world conflicts.
29. Compare and contrast conflict suppression and conflict management as approaches to handling conflicts.
30. Explain the Gandhian concept of Ahimsa and evaluate its relevance as a tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
31. Analyze the role of civil society groups in post-conflict reconstruction and the challenges they face.
32. Describe the stages of conflict and explain how understanding these stages helps in effective conflict intervention.
33. Discuss the principles and key features of Satyagraha and assess its relevance in contemporary peace and conflict studies.

(5×4=20 marks)

Section D

IV Answer any three questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

34. Trace the origin and evolution of Peace Studies as an academic discipline. Discuss the theoretical developments that have shaped the field and analyze its contemporary relevance in addressing global conflicts.

35. Critically examine Johan Galtung's contribution to Peace Studies, particularly his concepts of positive and negative peace, and his typology of violence. Evaluate the interrelationships between direct, structural, and cultural violence with suitable examples.

36. Discuss the major theories of conflict in detail. Apply these theoretical frameworks to analyze real-world conflicts at local, regional, or global levels, demonstrating how theory informs conflict analysis.

37. Compare and contrast different conflict handling mechanisms: suppression, management, resolution, and reconciliation. Analyze their methods, strategies, and outcomes, and evaluate which approach is most effective in different conflict scenarios.

38. Examine the Gandhian approach to peace through the concepts of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. Critically evaluate their philosophical foundations, practical applications, and relevance as tools for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the contemporary world.

39. Analyze the role of civil society groups in post-conflict reconstruction. Discuss the various stakeholders and agents involved, the methods employed, and the challenges faced by civil society organizations in rebuilding societies after violent conflicts.

(3×10=30 marks)

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER II

THIRD SEMESTER M A POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINATION

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE -M23PS04DE –

Peace and Conflict Resolution

(CBCS - UG)

2024-25 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours **Max Marks: 70**

Section A

I Answer any *ten* questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries *one* mark.

1. What is positive peace?
2. Name the three interrelated forms of violence identified by Johan Galtung.
3. What is the main difference between conflict management and conflict resolution?
4. Define direct violence.
5. Who developed the concepts of positive and negative peace?
6. What is the role of truth and non-violence in Satyagraha?
7. Name one contributing factor to conflict escalation.
8. What is post-conflict reconstruction?
9. In Gandhian philosophy, what is the relationship between means and ends?
10. What does conflict transformation aim to achieve?
11. Name one challenge faced by civil society groups in post-conflict situations.
12. What is the etymology of the word 'Ahimsa'?
13. Define conflict in simple terms.
14. What is the primary characteristic of structural violence?
15. Name one method of conflict suppression

.(10×1=10 marks)

Section B

II Answer any five questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.

16. What are the main contributions of Johan Galtung to Peace Studies?

17. Explain the concept of cultural violence with an example.
18. Distinguish between conflict suppression and conflict management.
19. What are the key features of Gandhian passive resistance?
20. Describe the interconnections between direct, structural, and cultural violence.
21. What are the major challenges faced by civil society groups in post-conflict scenarios?
22. Explain any two theories of conflict.
23. How is reconciliation different from conflict resolution in addressing conflicts?
24. What factors contribute to the emergence and escalation of conflicts?
25. Discuss the relevance of Satyagraha in contemporary peace and conflict studies

(5×2=10 marks)

Section C

III Answer any five questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

26. Trace the origin and evolution of Peace Studies as an academic discipline.
27. Explain Galtung's typology of violence: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence.
28. Examine the key issues that contribute to conflicts at local, regional, and global levels.
29. Distinguish between conflict resolution and reconciliation, highlighting their interconnections in peacebuilding processes.
30. Critically evaluate the Gandhian idea of passive resistance and its relevance in contemporary peace and conflict studies.
31. Discuss the various methods and strategies employed in conflict management and their outcomes.
32. Analyze the philosophical and religious roots of Ahimsa and its evolution as a Gandhian approach to peace.
33. Explain the concept of post-conflict reconstruction and identify the key stakeholders and agents involved in this process.

(5×4=20 marks)

Section D

IV Answer any three questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

34. Explain the concepts of positive and negative peace in detail. Critically analyze these frameworks and discuss how the understanding of peace has evolved beyond the mere absence of war to encompass social justice and structural transformation.

35. Discuss the typology of violence as conceptualized in Peace Studies. Examine how structural violence and cultural violence contribute to conflicts and analyze their role in perpetuating inequality and injustice in society with appropriate examples.
36. Elaborate on the meaning, definitions, and nature of conflict. Discuss the key issues and stages of conflict, and explain how understanding conflict dynamics helps in developing effective intervention strategies at different levels.
37. Distinguish between conflict resolution and reconciliation as approaches to addressing conflicts. Discuss their key aspects, methods, and the interconnections between them. Evaluate their effectiveness in achieving sustainable peace in post-conflict societies.
38. Critically appraise the Gandhian concepts of Ahimsa, Satyagraha, and Passive Resistance. Trace their philosophical and religious roots, discuss their principles and key features, and assess their relevance and applicability in contemporary peace and conflict studies.
39. Examine the concept of post-conflict reconstruction in detail. Analyze the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders including civil society groups, international organizations, and state actors. Discuss the challenges and best practices in rebuilding societies after violent conflicts.

(3×10=30 marks)

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
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