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## UNIT 3 COMMUNITY PEACE

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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The condition of peace covers a broad spectrum in human life both personal and social as well. Here we will confine ourselves with the idea of peace in social relations at community level, and the various solutions that seek to preserve community peace. Peace seems to be humanity's fondest dream. A situation that is peaceful for one group may be oppressive for another. Many people understand peace to be the absence of war. While this is of course vital, others see it as only the first step towards a fuller ideal, as an interweaving of relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions that value diversity and foster the full development of human potential. Peace is the existence of peaceful relationships, active association, and planned co-operation among persons and groups for achieving greater aims such as justice, security, and constructive transformation of conflict.

Community is the centre of ideals in Gandhi's scheme of holistic development. Before going for any political demand, Gandhi always sought to bring about necessary changes in community and get his ideas and methods well accepted by the community. Gandhi tried to bring about major changes in the Indian society. He says that society is a group of individuals dwelling together that symbiotically carries out various activities to bring happiness and stabilisation. As it is a unique blend of diverse religions, cultures, and

changes its structure keeps changing with respect to time. After all, nothing is constant but “change”. Gandhi had stressed upon youth participation in bringing out various social reforms during his struggle for independence: in the practices such as sati, purdah, polygamy, child marriage, education of women, widow remarriage, untouchables, caste system, exploitation and religious misguidance. And the attributes that make youth swim through were non-violence, co-operation, justice, equality and love. Non-violence has a religious, social, spiritual and personal significance. Force or aggression leads to a total destruction of society. Violent feelings provoke conflicts, which grow in strength and threaten the very existence of society.

### **Aims and Objectives**

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The concept and basis of community peace
- Gandhi’s vision of community peace
- People’s participation in maintaining peace process

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## **3.2 PEACE AS SOCIAL HARMONY**

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Gandhi believed that the ultimate notion of peace would signify that every human being lives in peace with himself or herself, that is, without inner tensions. But inner peace for individuals is itself normally dependent upon peace in relations with others in social or natural domain. Peace in a society is, in its turn, conditioned by peace in and with neighbouring communities. In actual practice, neither an individual nor a society lives in total harmony. Conflicting emotions and inter-personal tensions of one sort or another constantly disturb harmony. Therefore, the aspiration for peace is in a way automatically pegged at a lower level of expectation. For the same reason, spontaneous prevalence of peace without attempts to sustain it by conscious effort is also almost impossible.

The aim of peace, thus, is containment of conflict. Conflict between interacting individuals is taken as inevitable. In the case of conflict avoidance, efforts are made to avoid the causes of conflict as far as possible. Since avoidance of conflict altogether is not always possible, conflicts are sought to be contained or restricted. By this, a society through various degrees of collective strength, including the use of force tries to limit the spread of conflict. Thus, social organisation is the most important step in preserving peace. One feature of family, community, class, caste, and tribe is that they have a common function - that of maintaining peace within the society. But it is also necessary to realise that these social institutions do not always succeed in maintaining peace. More so, they may come into conflict with each other. Gandhi’s ideas on society and politics are well-known. The Gandhian vision of peace is derived from multiple sources and traditions. It was influenced as much by the pacifist and anarchist writings, especially of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and the American anarchist Henry Thoreau, as by the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Jainism and Christianity.

### **3.2.1 Basis of Community Peace**

In order to understand the Gandhian approach to community peace, we must comprehend the core of Gandhi’s general social and political thought. He had an integral philosophy of life and society applicable to domestic and international situations alike. This philosophy stemmed from his actions as well as his thoughts. His conceptions about man, society and

the state provide the basis for his approach to peace and world affairs. Gandhi enunciates both the epistemology of peace as well as the sociology of peace. In the Gandhian thought, metaphysics and social principles, religious values and political strategy are woven together. The primacy of the moral over the political and of the spiritual over the temporal is fundamental to Gandhi's thinking. He considered Absolute Truth as the ultimate goal and non-violence as the best method of achieving it. Absolute Truth is omnipotent and all-encompassing. It is equivalent to divinity. Purity of means to achieve any end is also fundamental to the Gandhian approach. Rejecting the Machiavellian approach that end justifies means, Gandhi said that ends and means are inseparable. Good begets good and evil begets evil. In fact, 'end' grows out of the 'means'.

### **3.2.2 Gandhi's Vision of Community Peace**

Peace, as Gandhi envisaged it, is more than the absence of conflict and violence. It implies a state of positive and constructive social order, where individuals, groups and societies do not dominate or exploit one another and live in cooperation and mutual aid. Peace is thus a cementing factor for the society and the community. It is a state of affairs in which men can resolve their differences by talking to each other rather than by using violence. Peace and truth cannot be separated. "The way of peace", Gandhi said, "is the way of truth. Truthfulness is even more important than peacefulness." Hence, peace achieved through untruth and deceit is not to be encouraged. Such peace cannot last long. Peace-based truth is stable and also promotes internal spiritual growth in man and social progress. Peace and justice are also integrally related. They are like two sides of the same coin. The realist approach looks at conflict as a clash of interests between two parties, which can be resolved either by the victory of one side or by some compromise agreement between the two parties. The Gandhian approach does not accept conflict as clash of interests. It regards them as products of mental illusions, misperceptions and prejudices. Gandhi believes that conflicts are temporary irregularities in the normal flow of life. Creative dialogue and negotiations have the potential to resolve the differences between two actors. Such a method does not demand any party to sacrifice his position or interest. Instead, the mental transformation during the conflict resolution process results into a win-win situation.

According to Gandhi, war is not a natural phenomenon but a social and a cultural one. It is not the nature of man to kill others and commit violence. Since individuals can be pacific, the community that is composed of individuals can also be pacific. It is possible to avoid war if we eliminate the root causes of war and create the right environment through moral techniques. Gandhi had deep faith in the possibility of establishing peace through non-violent action. He wrote: "Not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve in the Godliness of human nature."

### **3.2.3 Satyagraha**

Gandhi said that the root of every violence or conflict is untruth and that the only permanent solution of conflict is truth. Consequently, to resolve conflicts, he conceived the non-violent technique, Satyagraha, which is the most potent method of ensuring a durable community peace. Satyagraha is applicable to all situations: from inter-personal to the group relationships, from the micro- to macro-level problems. It can also be used to fight against the problems of injustice, exploitation and conflict at the community level. The Gandhian approach to peace relies heavily on satyagraha. In fact, Gandhi considers satyagraha as a moral substitute of war, and as a superior means of redressing the grievances of a state. It relies on persuasion and moral pressure rather than on physical

force or other coercive techniques to achieve the goal of peace and justice at the community level. Satyagraha aims at liquidating the antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves. In Satyagraha, the negative actions of the other party will have to be opposed persistently and resolutely, at the same time maintaining the feeling of amity for the opponent. Gandhi believed that we must not consider our opponents as our enemies. He wrote: "While we may attack measures and systems... we must not attack men. Imperfect ourselves, we must be tender towards others and slow to impute motives."

### **3.2.4 Non-violence and Forgiveness**

The basis of Gandhi's pacifism is the supreme value of Ahimsa or non-violence. Non-violence is the means to 'achieve truth. Just as violence is the distinctive character of animals, non-violence is the nature of man'. Violence and non-violence are two opposite terms. The arguments against violence often revolve around the assumption that it does not work, that there are inherent laws governing violence that prevent it from producing positive results. Gandhi is opposed to violence because of five reasons. One, continuity, i.e., once you start using violence you cannot escape it. Secondly, reciprocity, i.e., violence creates, begets and procreates further violence. On this point, Gandhi warned that to answer brutality with brutality is to admit one's moral and intellectual bankruptcy and it can only start a vicious circle. Thirdly, Sameness, i.e., it is impossible to distinguish between justified and unjustified violence, between violence that liberates and violence that enslaves. No matter how high the goal, violence reduces all practitioners to the same level. Or again, in Gandhi's words that counter-violence can only result in further brutalisation of human nature. Fourthly, violence begets only further violence, i.e., the end grows out of the means used; and lastly, violence needs to be justified, but such justification is hypocritical, there is no "pure" violence. Violence and hatred are always linked to each other. "If violence is answered by violence, the result is a physical struggle. Now, physical struggle inevitably arouses in the minds of those directly and even indirectly concerned in emotions of hatred, fear, rage and resentment. In the heat of conflict all scruples are thrown to the winds, and all the habits of forbearance and humanness, slowly and laboriously formed during generations of civilized living, are forgotten. Nothing matters any more except victory. And when at last victory comes to one or other of the parties, this final outcome of physical struggle bears no necessary relation to the right and wrongs of the case; nor in most cases, does it provide any lasting settlement to the dispute." Thus, Ahimsa is not passive but dynamic. It means not hurting anybody in thoughts, words and deeds.

### **3.2.5 Focus on the Individual**

For Gandhi, a crucial factor and first step for peaceful and just world order is the individual. Gandhi was a humanist who put man at the centre of all social and political activities. An individual is an integral part of the whole. There is an unbreakable link between an individual and the family, a family and the neighbourhood, a neighbourhood and the society, a society and the nation. Each level is as strong as the ties it has with the other. Therefore, for strengthening the probability of peace at the societal and national level, the beginning has to be made at the level of the individual psychology. Gandhi believed that the sources of peace and conflict lie in the minds of men. The question of world peace is ultimately about achieving conquest of the self. Man can appreciate and live by the principles of truth and non-violence. Ultimately, the moral and spiritual forces would triumph over the material and physical forces because the spiritual force and desire for non-violence lies in every man's heart. This spiritual force might be dormant, but it can

be awakened by right stimulus and training. Mere denunciation of violence will not result into a peaceful world order. It is necessary to reform the individual for this. Peace cannot be imposed from above but must grow from within. As both conflict and peace begin in the minds men, a non-violent peacemaker must first establish peace within himself before attempting to establish peace elsewhere. Continuous self-introspection, self-analysis and self-purification are essential for the satyagrahis to achieve their goals. He stated further “There is no freedom for India (or the world as a whole) so long as one man, no matter how highly placed he may be, holds in the hollow of his hand the life, the property and honour of millions of human beings....”

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### **3.3 PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESS**

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Gandhi was convinced that peace is possible not through diplomatic activities alone but mainly through the participation of people and groups at all levels of the society. Peace from below rather than above is the cornerstone of the Gandhian thinking. Thus involvement of all the sections of the society - ordinary men and women, children, youth, civil society organisations, educational institutions etc., in the peace process are imperative. Gandhi described the term co-operation as all individuals come together to achieve the designed goals and all of them share the fruits of the achievements. Nobody is overburdened or over-regarded. Youth should co-operate with elders and children. It should be looked upon as a way of life. He underlined that co-operation is the basis for peace, love, equality and justice. Gandhi advocated joint families and village communities as the co-operation among different individuals, classes, castes and groups in the society ensures growth in all walks of human life from basic needs of food, clothing and shelter to more complex requirement of the people like industries, transportation, recreation, finance etc. Peace is a relationship between people. Peace begins with a harmony between individuals. Gandhi lived and worked for the establishment of such relationship among individuals and groups. He has a unique contribution to peace in the modern context.

#### **3.3.1 Equal Opportunity for all**

Gandhi maintained that there cannot be lasting peace unless there are equal opportunities for all. According to Gandhi, “You cannot have a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economic system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideas are low and groveling, you cannot succeed in ensuring equal status for women, and the access to opportunities for all was the ultimate that would bring independence to the people of India.” Gandhi believed that real peace cannot emerge unless the individuals cease to exploit one another. A peaceful community would aim at resolving conflicts by helping its neighbours alleviate their economic problems and try to remain friendly with them. The other principle of Community peace is social justice. Peace cannot be established in a society where a big class distinction exists.

#### **3.3.2 Role of Political Freedom**

According to Gandhi, political freedom is needed for every individual and the community. He wanted the man to be the centre of all in a political cycle. The entire exercise should be around him or her leading to benefit him/her and not destruct him/her. As the star is believed to be the source of human life, it is good to have this companion. If star is the

'life giver' for the entire earth, the man is the 'life giver' of the entire games of politics. Such a man should be helped economically. Therefore, Gandhi advocated his political philosophy by taking mass as a centre of all activities. According to him, theory and practice in politics should be equal and should be followed in a balanced way. Economic uplifting is the ultimate goal of any individual and in this politics should help. If one is self-punishing for his own wrong things himself, the politics he does would help the human kind. If not, good political philosophy, even if it is good, will not work in practice.

### 3.3.3 Reform Development Model

Gandhi said that our development models too would have to be reformed to make them people-oriented rather than machine-centred. Big technology aligned with big business could create disastrous consequences for the society. Appropriate technology is the need of the hour to encourage the movement towards a non-violent society. Decentralised production that generates employment and does not marginalise and exploit men at the lowest rung of the society alone can be conducive to peace and non-violence. The Gandhian approach to community peace not only concerns human beings and society but also includes the ecology and the cosmos. Gandhi anticipated and articulated the concern for environment. The compulsion for conflict arises not just due to urge for power, but also by the pattern of development based on disregard for nature and life forms. In his famous book, *Hind Swaraj*, he dismissed the western civilisation as exploitative of nature as well as of human beings, based on an over-use of earth's resources, over-production and over-consumption. Such a civilisation resting on the selfish nature of the individual promotes amoral economics and amoral politics. A peaceful world will arise when man learns to live in harmony with nature and when all men and women identify themselves with all other living beings.

### 3.3.4 Settle Internal Differences

Gandhi also believed that without settling the differences within one's own society, it is not possible to work for or establish peace at the global level. A nation, which has achieved internal harmony, will not need armed forces for its security. Thus, Satyagraha and constructive programmes should be applied for mending social relations. Religious tolerance and understanding, reconciliation of ethnic and racial differences etc. are of fundamental importance in the quest for establishing peace. Gandhi analysed peace and conflict as pertaining to the social order. He focused on the various methods by which society copes with the challenges of peace and conflict. As we noted, both the state as well as civil society have a role in controlling and even prevention of social strife. The state as the chief regulatory agency has been in existence since time immemorial in almost all societies. The state has been more concerned with containing conflict than in avoiding or preventing conflict. And containing conflict is expressed in terms of the very familiar phrase: maintenance of law and order, which also is characterised as the minimalist or minimal conception of peace. With the rise of the welfare state, the functions of the state have expanded. With this, there has been a broadening of the conception of peace and conflict.

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## 3.4 NON-VIOLENT ARMY OR SHANTI SENA AND PEACE COMMITTEES

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One important condition of a peaceful world, according to Gandhi, is the raising of a Shanti Sena. Gandhi felt that it should be possible to raise it if we are sincere about its purpose. A non-violent army acts unlike armed men in times of peace and war. It brings

warring communities together, carries out peace propaganda, engages in activities that bring and keep them in touch with other persons. Such an army should be ready to cope with any emergency. The non-violent force must be small if it is to become efficient. The trained satyagrahis of the Shanti Sena would be willing to make any sacrifice, including of their own lives, for the sake of truth, peace and non-violence. The band of satyagrahis in the Shanti Sena confronts the aggressors and tells them of wrongness of their action. They are even willing to lay down their lives in the process of non-violent resistance. The unexpected spectacle of endless rows upon rows of men and women simply dying rather than surrender to the will of an aggressor must ultimately melt him (the aggressor) and his soldiery. Gandhi claimed that “men can slaughter one another for years in the heat of battle, for them it seems a case of kill or be killed. But if there is no danger of being killed yourself by those you slay, you cannot go on killing defenseless and unresisting people endlessly. You must put down your gun in self-disgust.”

### **Peace Committees**

The peace Committees that have been formed must not go to sleep. The condition of keeping peace in our midst is that all the communities in India must live at peace with one another, not by force of arms but that of love than which there is no better cement to be found in the world. If the truth and peace are with an identity of human kind, there would be cycle of non-violence creating more rings all over. As a result, life dynamism of non-violence can encircle the entire life-setting starting from individual unity to Global writ or entity. War results when peace fails. Our effort must always be directed towards peace. But it must be peace with honour and a fair security for life and property. Gandhi suggested one Hindu and one Muslim standing surety for each Village: ‘The reality has to be faced and a determined effort made by everyone of you to root out the least trace of the feeling of hostility and make it possible for your Muslim neighbours to live in brotherly love once more’.

## **3.5 VALUE-BASED CULTURE AND MORAL SOLUTION**

Gandhi said that at the roots of violence lie in our infinite greed, consumerism and materialism, a new life-style and a new culture are required for making the world peaceful. The modern civilisation that glorifies and venerates self-interest debases the moral basis of society. Restriction on human needs and inculcation of other-regarding rather than self-regarding attitudes are vital components of the larger Gandhian vision of peace. Attainment of peace should be the ultimate goal of any youthful human emotions and actions. Once their minds are at rest they can concentrate their energies for spreading the message of peace. Youth should know that social harmony is an index of peace. They should strive peacefully to make their and other people’s social lives happy and undisturbed which is the aim of any society. Gandhi also warned youngsters against misinterpreting religions.

The problems of war and peace have been misconceived by the conventional approaches and theories. The efforts for peace so far have failed because of the wrong methods used and because of the lack of sincerity on the part of their practitioners. In the Gandhian approach, conflict is primarily a moral problem and requires moral solutions. Gandhi believed that every action- whether performed for self, family, group or community- produces its own appropriate results. Evil actions create evil results while the good actions lead to good results. In community, evil seems to have overtaken the good. Every conflict becomes the cause of a subsequent conflict. Therefore, in consonance with the spirit of

the sages and prophets of ancient times, Gandhi prescribed moral means for the settlement of disputes. Conflict is 'mutual violence' which breeds hatred, revenge and bitterness. Hatred cannot be a foundation for future peace. Gandhi stressed that "Peace is the temple or church of truth. Once that is being achieved in a human being, he or she will be a productive peace maker". A non-productive person has no right, according to Gandhi, to enjoy the fruits from the sources of nature. He or she has to therefore labour that too through peaceful means. Gandhi said that he honoured the place in us where the entire universe resides... a place of light, of love, of truth, of peace, of wisdom. "Each of us must learn to work not just for oneself, one's own family or nation, but for the benefit of all humankind. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for peace."

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### **3.6 A CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE GANDHIAN APPROACH**

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Gandhi's views and vision of peace have been criticised as utopian, idealistic, inconsistent and contradictory. Critics question the ethical and practical basis of Gandhi's non-violent philosophy. According to them, even a violent act can acquire moral character under certain circumstances. The relationship between means and ends is more complex than what Gandhi recognised. Means and ends have to be understood in their wider contexts. The Gandhian approach also relies greatly upon the potential for converting ruling elite to justice and peace. According to some scholars, Gandhi did not comprehend all the complexities of society or give an effective practical plan for community peace. However, Gandhi was a practical idealist. His contributions should, therefore, be judged on the basis of what he did rather than on the basis of what he wrote about peace. He was also not a dogmatic thinker and was open to revising his ideas according to new realities and developments. His shifting stand about conflict is also something that was known to Gandhi himself. He believed that his aim was not so much to be consistent with his previous statements but with truth as it evolved before him from time to time. Gandhi's approach to non-violence places him as a far-sighted, sensitive and perceptive man of peace. He gave a dynamic and flexible meaning of peace in which peace is the best, but not the only way, to achieve good. Modern peace researchers who have contributed to the idea of direct and indirect violence and particularly structural violence find Gandhi as an equally original contributor to the thinking of peace research. The concept of structural violence is a product of social relationships of exploitation. Despite the inconsistencies of his position on peace, no one can deny the fact that very few had given such a powerful moral thrust in social relations and argued for justice at community level. In Satyagraha, Gandhi gave a morally superior alternative to conflict as a means of achieving one's goals.

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### **3.7 SUMMARY**

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Gandhi claimed that his life was like a laboratory of truth and non-violence. Hence, this can be reinterpreted and applied fresh to the emerging realities of the 21st century. His teachings and personal examples do provide several practical tools and techniques that are relevant for addressing the challenges of the contemporary society. Mankind today is suffering from multidimensional crises such as terrorism, denial of human rights, economic inequality, racial discrimination, ethnic violence, religious intolerance, poverty, and environmental degradation and so on. Gandhian principles of truth, love, non-violence and social order based on justice and goodness are of great relevance in this context. The



Indian Constitution incorporated as its main commitment the Chapter on Fundamental Rights, which provides for guarantees against state interference with basic individual rights as well as positive commitment from the state to ensure a just social order. Further, the Constitution also incorporated a Chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy, which direct or enjoin the state to pursue policies that promote a healthier natural and material environment as well as ensure a just distribution of the material resources of the society. Even though the provisions of Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles slightly differ in the degree of their enforceability, they can together be regarded as one great charter embodying the commitment to a broad conception of peace in society. In different ways and in different fields, a growing number of initiatives to search for non-materialistic, non-violent alternatives to present modes of living are being taken in the society today. Whether or not these initiatives use the name of Gandhi, they are nevertheless promoting the values and principles he stood for. The lessons from Gandhi's life are, firstly, the goal of the struggle for peace is for the good of all and not just the good of the majority; secondly, one has to be prepared to make sacrifices to attain this and lastly, power in itself does not result in peace; we have to work and strive for peace. Gandhi's life taught us that it is easy to postulate principles, but very difficult to put them into practice. Believing in peace and a good life for all is an ideal principle but the final step is putting into practice what we have learnt or begun to believe in. This final step is what eventually determines the quality of our lives.

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### **3.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Critically examine Gandhi's views on community conflict.
2. Examine the features and objectives of Satyagraha.
3. How does Gandhi's approach to non-violence differ from pacifism?
4. What are the main elements of action suggested by Gandhi for a peaceful society?
5. Critically examine Gandhi's views on Shanti-Sena.
6. "Non-violence and forgiveness are essential for the community peace". Do you agree with the Gandhian view?

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