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## **3.5 SALIENT COMPONENTS OF NONVIOLENT STRATEGIES**

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The idea of strategy has been originally conceived in relation to wars and military campaigns. In the military parlance, strategy refers to the maneuvering and deployment of troops before the enemy is actually engaged. Though originating in the military sphere, nonviolent movements have adapted the ideas of strategy to their goals and operations.

Strategy is a plan for the conduct of a movement. It involves a basic idea of how the movement shall develop and how its separate components shall be welded together to achieve its objectives in the most advantageous manner. In the context of the limited resources and prevalent uncertainty, strategy is concerned with deciding whether, when and how to fight. Strategy is not the mission. It is the plan that allows the mission to be accomplished. Tactics and methods are used in specific operations meant to implement a strategy. Nonviolent movements require effective strategies in order to achieve their goals in the most effective manner. If nonviolence is applied in a sporadic and spontaneous manner, it might not lead to much success.

Gene Sharp has theorised the nonviolent movements and systematised an important field of enquiry about their strategies and dynamics. He has catalogued scores of different techniques of nonviolent struggles along with their historical examples. As strategies have to do with power directly and are concerned about fighting against unjust or exploitative forces through nonviolent power, Sharp has also elaborated a theory of power that explains how nonviolent actions work.

### **3.5.1 Four-Level Strategic Management of Nonviolent Movements**

Strategic nonviolent movements are not organised spontaneously. They are carried out on the basis of a deliberate and detailed planning. There are four levels of strategic management of nonviolent movements: grand strategy, campaigns, tactics and specific methods.

Grand strategy is the broadest conception of the objectives and how they are to be attained. Grand strategy determines the forms of action to be used in the struggle and addresses the coordination, allocation and timing of all appropriate and available resources (human, political, economic etc.).

Campaign is a plan for the conduct of each major phase within a grand strategy. Campaigns are designed to reinforce the objectives of a movement's grand strategy. Each campaign involves a series of activities designed to achieve a particular medium and long-term objective. Each campaign also has a plan for the development and integration of its separate components (such as tactics and methods) to contribute to its success.

Tactics are limited plans of action for achieving specific, partial objectives that support the larger objectives of a campaign. They are intended for implementing a wider strategy in a particular phase of a conflict. They are the building blocks of nonviolent campaigns. Sequencing of a variety of nonviolent tactics is essential. It allows a movement to increase pressure on opponent and maintain its momentum.

Methods are specific nonviolent actions. There are scores of methods of nonviolent action which fall into three broad categories: nonviolent protest and persuasion, non-cooperation and nonviolent intervention. We will have a detailed understanding of these methods of nonviolent struggles in the next section.

Peter Ackerman and Christopher Krueger in their book *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* suggest twelve principles of strategic nonviolent movement. Adherence to these principles raises the probability of the success of the movement.

These twelve principles are:

1. The nonviolent group must formulate clear, well-defined, functional goals. Such goals must be amenable to nonviolent action.
2. The group must develop organisational strength at each level of the organisation: leadership, operational corps and general population.
3. The group must secure access to material resources. Adequate food, energy and medical supplies can be crucial in maintaining the morale of the activists.
4. The movement must cultivate sources of external support. External sympathy and support can be very helpful in achieving the first three principles.
5. The movement must seek to expand the group's repertoire of strategic nonviolent actions. Flexibility and versatility are keys to success in nonviolent movements.
6. The movement must attack the adversary's strategy for maintaining control and obedience.
7. The nonviolent group should seek to minimise the impact of the adversary's use of violence. Groups may try to limit the violence by disabling the adversary's weapons.
8. The group should use the adversary's attempts at violent repression to alienate the adversary's supporters.
9. The nonviolent protagonists must maintain discipline and thereby gain credibility, stature and power.
10. The movement must pay attention to the five different levels of strategic planning and decision-making. These are the levels of policy, operation, strategy, tactics and logistics.
11. The nonviolent strategist should adjust offensive and defensive operations according to the relative vulnerabilities of the protagonists. Offensive actions undermine an adversary's ability to stay in the fight. Defensive actions protect a group's own ability to stay in the fight.
12. The nonviolent strategists must match their choice of nonviolent action not only to their goals but also to the desired mechanism by which the adversary eventually accedes to that goal.

It is clear from the above that a movement must first define its grand strategy, identify suitable campaigns and then choose different tactics and methods that support those campaigns. The outcomes of the movement will be partly dependent upon the skills of the leaders and the activists pursuing it. In general, unity and discipline of the leaders and followers ensure greater success of nonviolent movements. Successful movements also invest on building up their capacity to recruit and train the activists.

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## 3.6 METHODS OF NONVIOLENT MOVEMENTS

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Methods of nonviolent movements are as critical for their success as the conditions under which they operate. Once a movement identifies its strategic objectives, it must identify effective nonviolent methods in order to increase the number of supporters and their participation, as also to build their capacity to resist.

Nonviolent movements use a number of methods to carry out the campaigns. Certain methods are more useful in achieving change than the others. Nonviolent methods can be the acts of omission - that is, the participants refuse to perform acts that they usually perform or that are required by law; or the acts of commission - that is, the participants perform acts that they usually do not perform or that are forbidden by law.

Nonviolent strategies include a multitude of specific methods that can be grouped into three main classes: methods of protest and persuasion, methods of non-cooperation and methods of intervention. Gene Sharp has documented almost 200 nonviolent methods under these three categories. These methods are like the 'weapons' of nonviolent action.

Depending upon a movement's objectives, the capabilities of the principal actors and the probability of violent reprisals by the adversary, different nonviolent methods can be applied from amongst these three categories. Nonviolent actions belonging to the various categories of methods can also be employed simultaneously.

### 3.6.1 Methods of Protest and Persuasion

The nonviolent methods of protest and persuasion include protest actions such as public speeches, petitions, leaflets, posters, street theatre, door-to-door campaigns, radio and TV coverage, press release, rallies and marches, picketing, wearing of symbols, display of flags, singing, walk-outs and other forms of action. As most of these acts are symbolic in nature, they might not directly cause the desired changes. However, the main purpose of such actions is to educate the people and communicate a strong message that something is wrong and that people are ready to act to resist it. By transmitting the movement's message, these actions can be helpful in converting the members from the other groups. The methods of protest and persuasion thus create conducive environment for launching more targeted and disruptive actions later.

### 3.6.2 Methods of Non-Cooperation

These methods consist of different forms of social, economic and political non-cooperation such as social ostracism, protest emigration (*hijarat*), civil disobedience towards illegitimate laws and decrees, boycott of elections and legislative bodies, withdrawal from formal educational institutions, strike, work slowdown, blocking of the lines of communication and command, withdrawal of money from bank accounts, refusal to pay rent and interests, international trade embargo, stay-at-home and boycott by various groups such as consumers, students, workers, traders, and management. Non-cooperation implies that people stop obeying the adversary and deny and withdraw their support to its system of power and control. Some of these methods require numerous people in order to be effective. When there is broad public participation, these methods can be most effective in achieving successful outcomes.

### 3.6.3 Methods of Intervention

Intervention methods such as sit-ins, blocking of roads, physical obstructions, overloading of facilities, self-inflicted suffering such as fast and hunger strike, establishing of parallel

institutions and alternative practices, underground educational institutions, occupation of buildings, collective acts of civil disobedience, deliberate imprisonment etc. directly disrupt the ability of the adversary to function. The risk level in the practice of these methods is very high as the authority can mount a very violent response. Since these involve risks, only the most committed and the best-trained people carry out these actions. Failure of the interventionist methods can also damage the credibility of the movement.

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### **3.7 GENERATION OF POWER THROUGH NONVIOLENT STRATEGIES**

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There is a widespread perception that nonviolent actions are powerless, driven as they are by moral considerations and neglect of the reality of power politics. However, this is a misconception as power plays a crucial role even in the operation of a nonviolent movement. A nonviolent struggle is as much linked up with the power distribution in society and politics as a violent movement is. All nonviolent strategies are meant to generate power and match forces against an adversary who usually commands considerable administrative, economic, political, police and military capability. An essential part of a nonviolent struggle aims at denying these capabilities to the adversary. It succeeds when it is able to produce sufficient power against the unjust adversary, which may be a person, a group or an institution. The practice, dynamics and consequences of nonviolent movement depend upon its effects on the adversary's power. Therefore, understanding of nonviolent movements requires consideration of the dynamics of the generation of power.

Nonviolent strategies do not create the power to dominate but the power to get liberated. They are not about power over someone, but about power to be and power to do. Nonviolent struggle thus involves qualitative changes in power relationships. It envisages a process of restructuring social power from the grassroots. The power of a nonviolent movement operates at three levels: power-within (personal power that we sense when we feel centred), power-with (the power we feel when we connect with others) and power-in-relation-to (the power to achieve our goals and to defend our values). Mahatma Gandhi proved that social solidarity can overcome efforts to dominate or exploit. It is not just enough to oppose an adversary and blame it for everything but also to look at our own responsibilities and behaviour. Freedom and justice are not just to be demanded but to be practised by the leaders and workers of the movement.

Since it defines conflict as a structural problem that requires structural change, the theory of nonviolent struggles is based on a strong analysis of the structural contexts that organise and institutionalise power relationships in a society and the social patterns that explain the origins and perpetuation of injustice. The nonviolent 'theory of consent' was first formulated by the French philosopher Etienne La Boetie (1530-1565) and further developed by European and American thinkers. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), stipulate that the authority of any ruler or regime rests on the continued voluntary obedience of its subjects. Therefore, the essence of a nonviolent movement rests on the withdrawal of this consent on which the exercise of power is based through non-cooperation or civil disobedience so that governments can no longer operate. It seeks to weaken the legitimacy of the rulers to rule and carry on with oppressive acts. Pursuit of nonviolent methods enhances the movement's domestic and international legitimacy and encourages more broad-based participation. Such increased legitimacy translates into increased power vis-à-vis the adversary and encourages alienation of the masses from the oppressive regime.

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## 3.8 DYNAMICS OF NONVIOLENT MOVEMENTS

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When conventional political and legal channels of securing justice appear blocked and yet people are unwilling to abandon their goals, the typical structural conditions leading to nonviolent struggles arise. The nonviolent actions sustain as they have many advantages over violence as a means of struggle. Compared to violence, nonviolent actions tend to invoke less cruel retaliation from the State forces. The use of violence by the British colonial rulers against nonviolent Indian freedom fighters was much smaller as compared to the violence used against the nationalists in other colonies. Besides, the application of nonviolence keeps the adversarial camp somewhat disunited, whereas use of violence tends to strengthen its unity and gives legitimacy to its oppression.

### 3.8.1 Mechanisms of Nonviolent Change

According to Gene Sharp, there are four mechanisms that impact power relationships between a nonviolent movement and its adversary and determine the outcomes of nonviolent movements: conversion, coercion, accommodation or disintegration.

**Conversion:** In this, the adversarial party accepts the justification of the objectives of a nonviolent movement for practical or ethical reasons. It willingly makes the desired changes and accepts the new point of view with some involvement of the emotions and belief system of the nonviolent campaigners. Conversion in which the hearts and minds of the adversary are touched is a very rare phenomenon.

**Accommodation:** In this, the parties strike a mutual compromise over select objectives. Accommodation is the most common mechanism which can occur through a variety of processes. When one or both the parties hope to avoid an escalation of conflict or to cut their losses, they prefer accommodation in which the adversary yields to the demands without changing its position on the underlying issues. Rather than changing the mindset of the adversary as in conversion, accommodation alters the circumstances of the conflict.

**Coercion:** In this, a party to the conflict is compelled to concede the demands due to the use of nonviolent methods. Goals are achieved against the will of the adversary but this does not necessarily imply disintegration of the oppressive system. In rare instances, the adversarial group might split through internal division and its ability to use repression against nonviolent activists might get circumscribed because of the disruptive consequence of non-cooperation.

**Disintegration:** In this, an adversarial party's official machinery or its capacity to make and implement decisions collapses as it is simply unable to respond to the extensive non-cooperation and defiance by the people. Such disintegration of the unjust system is a very uncommon but the highest achievement of nonviolent movements.

A movement aims to achieve different mechanisms of change with different groups and in different phases of struggle. Decisions regarding what mechanisms to apply, when to apply them and what groups to apply them to are strategic in nature that involve calculations of the power resources of the movement as well as of the adversary. All mechanisms require active participation of the masses as well as support of such community leaders who hold sway over them. In conditions of structural violence, mere disintegration of the unjust regime is not a sufficient condition for the desired changes. Unless necessary structural alterations after the change of regime are guaranteed by the nonviolent movement,

society might not experience stable and peaceful condition and new forms of injustice might come up.

### **3.8.2 Role of Leadership in Nonviolent Movements**

There are three levels of human resources involved in a nonviolent movement: leadership, movement activists and the general public. As exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. or Nelson Mandela, visionary and charismatic leadership plays the most critical role in the success of nonviolent movements. Leadership is the process of influencing, motivating and enabling members to achieve the objectives of a movement. An effective leader brings inspiration, courage and clarity of purpose to the movement. He also creates the future vision of the movement and acts in a democratic and participatory manner so as to retain and broaden the movement's social base. It is, therefore, vital for a nonviolent movement to apply principles of sound leadership and to recognise a leadership style that serves the movement well.

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## **3.9 OUTCOMES OF NONVIOLENT MOVEMENTS**

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Nonviolent actions in India and abroad have had a mixed record during the last six decades. However, there is ample historical evidence that establishes that nonviolent movements can be an effective method of social transformation under certain conditions. They have helped in toppling dictators and establishing democratic regimes. At another level, they have advanced the people's freedoms and rights of the marginalised groups and minorities in the existing democracies. The overall record of accomplishment of nonviolent movements has been significantly better than that of the changes brought about by violent means.

Armed liberation struggles against a powerful state have met with no success in the recent times. The anti-apartheid movement in South Africa made much more progress after the armed struggle was subordinated to nonviolent action. In East Timor, nonviolent protests in urban areas were more effective in winning international support than guerrilla warfare in the interior areas. The first *Intifada struggle in Palestine* (1987-1993) which was largely unarmed was much more effective in bringing legitimacy for the Palestinian cause than the previous terrorist campaigns and the violent tactics used in the second *Intifada* (2000 onwards). Violent revolutions and campaigns have also achieved very little success in terms of establishing democratic, just and exploitation-free societies in spite of incurring a great loss of life and property.

Of course, instances of the failure of nonviolent movements also exist - such as the repression of the pro-democracy movement at Tiananmen in China in 1989 and the failure of the movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi to overthrow military regime in Myanmar. Similarly, the Tibetans' nonviolent struggle for self-determination has not borne fruits despite decades of activism. One can also argue that even as the American civil rights movement resulted into legal changes to remove discrimination against the African Americans, it has not succeeded in altering the deep-seated prejudices in the psyche of the ordinary white American citizens and in the institutional functioning. Failure of a nonviolent struggle also arises when it is unable to remain consistent with the nonviolent discipline and sporadically practises violence through the course of the movement. Also, the idea of civil disobedience is criticised for being a threat to the institution of democracy and rule of law.

When a conflict involves highly polarised communal groups opposed to each other over non-negotiable issues, the prospects of its nonviolent resolution are bleak. Nonviolent struggles in such situations are not always helpful in preventing misperceptions and hatred. If nonviolence has been adopted by the majority of activists purely for tactical reasons, it cannot guarantee that a spirit of nonviolence and truth would prevail once the cause is achieved. As seen in the case of India after independence, nonviolent freedom struggle did not pave the way for the establishment of a corruption-free and peaceful society. Many commentators are skeptical about the power of nonviolence against entrenched and brutal regimes. The Marxist thinkers believe that nonviolence is a false bourgeois ideal imposed upon the masses to retard the prospects of revolution through violent class struggle.

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### 3.10 SUMMARY

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While there are spontaneous dimensions in the origin and progress of nonviolent resistance, most nonviolent movements are based on strategic planning, coordination and implementation. The historical record indicates that the nonviolent campaigns have been more successful than the armed struggles in achieving ultimate normative goals. Although the power of nonviolent resistance does appear to be doubtful in the face of an acute asymmetry of power, it has proven to be an effective strategic tool in the hands of the marginalised communities to redress structural violence and claim rights to justice and human dignity.

Power has generally been identified with violence committed by the coercive agencies of the State. Legitimacy too is associated with the government authority. The nonviolent movements after Gandhi have brought a new perspective in the understanding of power and legitimacy. The nonviolent strategies are most effective when applied to undermine the legitimacy which allows the *status quo* to persist. Therefore, the major goal of a nonviolent movement is to convince a large number of people not to support the established order and to actively withdraw their consent to it. Empowering people to make them feel that they can bring about changes, inspiring them to adopt active nonviolent resistance and relating nonviolence with core philosophical values are the key functions of nonviolent movements. The strategically planned nonviolent movements can have any of the following main outcomes: mobilisation of target groups within society; recruitment of activists; interruption of the adversary's activities; and defection of people from different sectors of society, including from the adversarial camp. Nonviolent campaigns are more likely to win legitimacy and attract extensive domestic and international support.

There are some elements of the Gandhian thought which are non-negotiable. Truth and nonviolence which are integrally connected are two such elements, albeit not in an absolute sense. In a principled nonviolent movement, the means must be consistent with the end results it professes to achieve. Therefore, such movements have to be concerned as much with moral changes as with social and political ones, or else they are unlikely to fulfill their fundamental objectives of achieving normative and empirical justice. Just as all materialists are not Marxists, all those not using violent means of protest are not following the Gandhian philosophy. Harmonisation of the inner world of values and consciousness and the outer world of action was of prime importance to Gandhi. In his thought, nonviolence is a product of a morally and spiritually inclined way of life. Hence, mere tactical or strategic application of nonviolence without commitment to its principled and ethical aspects is not a preferred form of nonviolent action.

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### 3.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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1. What are the key features of the nonviolent movements?
2. Define 'strategy' and demonstrate its importance in the conduct of nonviolent movements.
3. Distinguish between principled and strategic nonviolent movements.
4. What do we understand by four-level strategic management of nonviolent conflicts?
5. Categorise methods of nonviolent struggle into different types and elaborate upon them.
6. Explain how nonviolent movements seek to generate power to achieve their objectives.
7. Critically examine the outcomes of nonviolent movements after Gandhi.

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