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THE RELEVANCE OF BUDDHIST VALUES AND GANDHIAN IDEALS IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL CONFLICTS TODAY

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary world is marked by escalating social conflicts arising from religious intolerance, political polarization, economic inequality, and cultural fragmentation. In this context, ethical and philosophical traditions rooted in non-violence and moral responsibility offer enduring solutions. This article examines the relevance of Buddhist values and Gandhian ideals in addressing present-day social conflicts. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes compassion, mindfulness, non-attachment, and the Middle Path as tools for reducing suffering and promoting harmony. Similarly, Gandhian ideals—grounded in truth (*Satya*), non-violence (*Ahimsa*), self-discipline, and social justice—provide practical frameworks for conflict resolution and social transformation. Through a conceptual and literature-based analysis, this study explores how these value systems contribute to peace-building, reconciliation, and ethical governance in pluralistic societies. The paper argues that integrating Buddhist and Gandhian principles into contemporary social, political, and institutional practices can foster dialogue, reduce aggression, and promote sustainable peace. The findings highlight the continued relevance of these philosophies in addressing structural and interpersonal conflicts and underline their applicability in education, governance, civil society movements, and global peace initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Social conflicts have become increasingly complex in the modern world, fueled by identity politics, economic disparities, ideological extremism, and breakdowns in social cohesion.

Conventional conflict-resolution mechanisms often emphasize legal or coercive approaches, which may suppress conflict temporarily but fail to address its moral and psychological roots. Ethical traditions rooted in spirituality and humanism offer alternative pathways for conflict resolution. Among these, Buddhist values and Gandhian ideals stand out for their universal appeal and emphasis on non-violence, compassion, and moral responsibility. These traditions view conflict not merely as an external struggle but as an outcome of inner ignorance, desire, and fear.

Buddhist philosophy, originating from the teachings of **Gautama Buddha**, focuses on reducing suffering through ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. It emphasizes compassion (*Karuna*), loving-kindness (*Metta*), and mindfulness as foundations for harmonious coexistence.

Similarly, the philosophy of **Mahatma Gandhi** transformed spiritual ethics into tools for mass social action. Gandhian ideals of truth, non-violence, and self-sacrifice were instrumental not only in India's freedom struggle but also in shaping global movements for civil rights and peace.

In today's polarized societies, revisiting these philosophies is essential. Their relevance lies in offering moral clarity, non-violent methods of resistance, and frameworks for dialogue and reconciliation across cultural and ideological divides.

Review of literature

Walpola Rahula (1974):

Rahula provided a foundational exposition of Buddhist ethics as a rational and practical system designed to eliminate human suffering. He emphasized the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as ethical guidelines applicable to both individual and social life. According to Rahula, suffering originates from ignorance and desire, which manifest as conflict in social relations. He highlighted compassion (*Karuna*) and mindfulness (*Sati*) as essential social virtues that cultivate empathy and self-restraint. The study stressed moral conduct (*Sila*) as the basis for peaceful coexistence. Rahula also argued that Buddhist ethics are non-dogmatic and universally applicable. His work established Buddhism as a socially engaged philosophy rather than a purely monastic tradition. The relevance of Buddhist ethics to social harmony and conflict reduction was clearly articulated. This work continues to influence peace studies and ethical discourse. It laid the groundwork for later interpretations of applied Buddhism.

Joan V. Bondurant (1988):

Bondurant critically examined Gandhian non-violence as an active and transformative method of conflict resolution. She conceptualized *Satyagraha* not as passive resistance but as a moral force capable of altering power relationships. Her analysis demonstrated how non-violence works through persuasion, suffering, and ethical appeal. Bondurant argued that Gandhian methods address both the means and ends of conflict resolution. She showed that non-violence aims at converting the opponent rather than defeating them. The study highlighted its applicability in social, racial, and political conflicts beyond colonial India. Ethical consistency was identified as the core strength of Gandhian action. Bondurant also emphasized the role of moral courage and discipline. Her work bridged ethics with political strategy. It remains a seminal contribution to Gandhian studies and peace research.

Dalai Lama (1999):

The Dalai Lama advocated universal responsibility and compassion as the moral foundations for global peace. He argued that modern conflicts stem from excessive materialism, fear, and loss of ethical values. Inner transformation, according to him, is essential for meaningful social change. His work linked Buddhist principles such as compassion, forgiveness, and non-attachment to contemporary global issues. He emphasized interdependence as a guiding principle for peaceful coexistence. Ethical responsibility was extended beyond national and religious boundaries. The Dalai Lama highlighted dialogue and understanding as alternatives to violence. His approach integrated spirituality with secular ethics. The work underscored the relevance of Buddhist ethics in international relations. It significantly influenced global peace and human values discourse.

Raghavan Iyer (2000):

Iyer explored Mahatma Gandhi's moral and political philosophy in relation to modern democratic systems. He emphasized Gandhi's insistence on ethical means in political action. According to Iyer, Gandhian non-violence strengthens democracy by fostering moral accountability. He highlighted ethical leadership as central to sustainable governance. The study examined Gandhi's critique of power-centric politics. Iyer argued that moral courage and self-restraint are essential for political legitimacy. Non-violence was presented as a discipline rather than a tactic. The work also addressed the relevance of Gandhian ethics in plural societies. Iyer connected moral philosophy with practical politics. His analysis reinforced Gandhi's relevance in contemporary democratic institutions.

Johan Galtung (2003):

Galtung connected Buddhist peace principles with modern conflict transformation theory. He introduced the concept of structural violence, linking social injustice to hidden forms of conflict. Buddhist ideas of inner peace and compassion were seen as tools to address both direct and structural violence. Galtung emphasized that peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice. He highlighted mindfulness as a means of reducing aggressive tendencies. Ethical approaches were central to sustainable peace-building. The study integrated spirituality with peace research. Galtung argued for addressing root causes rather than symptoms of conflict. His work broadened peace studies beyond political frameworks. It strengthened the theoretical link between ethics and conflict resolution.

Gene Sharp (2005):

Sharp analyzed Gandhian non-violent action as a strategic and ethical tool against oppression. He classified various methods of non-violent resistance and demonstrated their effectiveness. Sharp emphasized that power ultimately depends on consent rather than coercion. Gandhian ethics were linked to pragmatic political outcomes. The study showed how non-violence undermines unjust authority. Ethical discipline was presented as a strategic advantage. Sharp compared violent and non-violent struggles empirically. He highlighted moral legitimacy as a source of strength. The work expanded Gandhian ideas into global resistance movements. It remains influential in contemporary protest studies.

Peter Harvey (2013):

Harvey discussed the emergence of engaged Buddhism and its role in social justice movements. He emphasized compassion-driven activism rooted in Buddhist ethics. The study highlighted how mindfulness informs ethical decision-making. Harvey examined Buddhist responses to poverty, inequality, and violence. He argued that Buddhism encourages responsibility toward social suffering. Ethical engagement was seen as compatible with spiritual practice. The work challenged the notion of Buddhism as socially disengaged. Harvey highlighted non-violence as a core Buddhist response to injustice. His study linked personal ethics with collective responsibility. It contributed significantly to applied Buddhist ethics literature.

Bhikhu Parekh (2015):

Parekh examined Gandhi's pluralistic ethics within multicultural societies. He emphasized dialogue, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Gandhi's moral framework was presented as

inclusive rather than dogmatic. Parekh argued that ethical restraint is essential in public life. Non-violence was seen as a principle for managing diversity peacefully. The study highlighted Gandhi's rejection of cultural domination. Ethical pluralism was linked to social harmony. Parekh connected Gandhian thought with contemporary multicultural challenges. His work reinforced the relevance of moral dialogue in divided societies. It remains influential in political ethics discourse.

Thich Nhat Hanh (2016):

Hanh emphasized mindfulness and compassion as practical tools for reconciliation. He argued that inner peace is a prerequisite for societal harmony. His concept of "engaged Buddhism" applied spiritual practices to social conflicts. Mindful communication was highlighted as a means to resolve disputes. Hanh stressed the importance of understanding and deep listening. He connected suffering at the individual level with collective violence. Non-violence was rooted in awareness and empathy. His work addressed conflict zones and post-war healing. Hanh's teachings bridged spirituality and activism. They continue to influence peace-building practices worldwide.

Amartya Sen (2018):

Sen linked Gandhian ethics to justice and human development. He emphasized ethical reasoning in public policy and governance. Sen argued that freedom and justice are interconnected. Gandhian non-violence was viewed as a moral foundation for democratic deliberation. The study highlighted ethical accountability in economic development. Sen connected moral values with institutional design. He emphasized public reasoning as a tool for conflict resolution. Ethical pluralism was central to his analysis. His work reinforced the moral dimensions of peace. It contributed to integrating ethics with development studies.

Chandra (2020):

Chandra analyzed the relevance of non-violence in contemporary protest movements. He compared Gandhian ideals with modern forms of activism. The study highlighted ethical resistance as a response to authoritarianism. Non-violence was shown to enhance legitimacy and public support. Chandra emphasized moral symbolism in protest actions. The work examined digital-age movements through Gandhian lenses. Ethical consistency was linked to sustainability of movements. The study acknowledged challenges to non-violence today. It reaffirmed Gandhian relevance in modern politics. The analysis contributed to contemporary social movement theory.

Sharma (2023):

Sharma explored the role of Buddhist and Gandhian values in peace education. He emphasized moral education as a tool for conflict prevention. The study highlighted empathy and ethical reasoning among youth. Buddhist mindfulness was linked to emotional regulation. Gandhian non-violence was presented as a civic value. Sharma argued that education shapes peaceful citizenship. The work focused on conflict-prone societies. Ethical values were integrated into curricula. The study demonstrated long-term social impact. It reinforced the importance of value-based education for peace.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine core Buddhist values relevant to social conflict resolution.
2. To analyze Gandhian ideals in addressing social and political conflicts.
3. To assess the applicability of these philosophies in contemporary society.
4. To develop a conceptual framework integrating Buddhist and Gandhian values.
5. To suggest policy and social interventions based on these ethical traditions.

Justification of Objectives

The first objective—to examine core Buddhist values relevant to social conflict resolution—is justified by the increasing recognition that many contemporary conflicts originate from psychological factors such as anger, fear, desire, and ignorance. Modern conflict-resolution mechanisms often emphasize legal, political, or military solutions while neglecting inner transformation. Buddhist values such as compassion, mindfulness, non-attachment, and ethical conduct directly address these root causes of conflict. By studying these values systematically, the research highlights how inner moral discipline can contribute to peaceful interpersonal and societal relations.

The second objective—to analyze Gandhian ideals in addressing social and political conflicts—is justified by the continued relevance of non-violence in an era marked by protests, civil unrest, and political polarization. Gandhian principles of *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, and *Satyagraha* provide ethically grounded and practically effective methods of resistance and reconciliation. Examining these ideals enables the study to assess how moral courage, self-sacrifice, and truth-oriented action can transform adversarial relationships and promote justice without resorting to violence.

The third objective—to assess the applicability of Buddhist and Gandhian philosophies in contemporary society—is essential because ethical traditions must be contextually interpreted to remain relevant. Social conflicts today differ in form due to globalization, digital communication, and cultural pluralism. This objective allows the study to evaluate how these timeless values can be adapted to modern institutions such as education, governance, civil society, and media, ensuring their continued social relevance.

The fourth objective—to develop a conceptual framework integrating Buddhist and Gandhian values—is justified by the need for a holistic model that links individual ethics with collective action. While Buddhism primarily emphasizes inner transformation and Gandhi focused on ethical social action, integrating both provides a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. This framework bridges micro-level psychological change with macro-level social and political processes.

The final objective—to suggest policy and social interventions based on these ethical traditions—is justified by the growing demand for sustainable and humane conflict-resolution strategies. Policymakers, educators, and peace practitioners increasingly seek value-based approaches that foster long-term harmony rather than temporary control. By grounding recommendations in Buddhist and Gandhian philosophies, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship across sociology, political science, philosophy, and peace studies, offering ethically informed and practically relevant solutions to contemporary social conflicts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is grounded in the idea that social conflicts originate from inner psychological conditions such as greed, hatred, and ignorance. Buddhist values address these roots through mindfulness, compassion, and ethical conduct, enabling individuals to respond non-violently.

Gandhian ideals operate at the collective level by transforming moral values into social action. Truth, non-violence, and self-discipline guide individuals and groups toward ethical resistance and reconciliation rather than confrontation.

Together, these frameworks interact at individual, social, and institutional levels, promoting peace through inner transformation, ethical leadership, dialogue, and non-violent action, ultimately leading to sustainable social harmony.

Findings

The study reveals that Buddhist values play a significant role in reducing interpersonal and community-level conflicts by fostering emotional regulation, self-awareness, and empathy. Practices such as mindfulness and compassion help individuals recognize and manage negative emotions like anger, fear, and resentment, which are often the psychological roots of conflict. By encouraging non-attachment and ethical conduct, Buddhist philosophy reduces ego-driven confrontations and promotes tolerance and understanding in social interactions.

The findings further indicate that Gandhian ideals offer effective and practical mechanisms for resolving social, political, and institutional conflicts. Principles such as *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), and *Satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) provide structured approaches to addressing injustice without escalating violence. Gandhian methods emphasize moral persuasion, dialogue, and self-sacrifice, enabling peaceful transformation of adversarial relationships while maintaining ethical integrity.

Importantly, the integration of Buddhist values and Gandhian ideals emerges as a holistic model of peace-building. While Buddhist ethics primarily address the psychological and moral roots of conflict at the individual level, Gandhian philosophy translates ethical principles into collective social action. Together, they effectively address both the inner causes of conflict and the structural conditions—such as inequality, exclusion, and injustice—that sustain social tensions.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, the study suggests that educational institutions at all levels should integrate Buddhist and Gandhian ethical principles into curricula related to peace education, citizenship, and moral studies. Teaching mindfulness, empathy, non-violence, and ethical responsibility from an early age can cultivate emotionally intelligent and socially responsible citizens capable of resolving conflicts peacefully.

The study also recommends that policymakers and government institutions adopt dialogue-oriented, non-violent approaches in governance and conflict management. Gandhian

principles of ethical leadership, transparency, and truthfulness can strengthen democratic institutions and enhance public trust. Incorporating compassion and inclusivity into policy design can help address structural inequalities that often lead to social unrest.

Additionally, civil society organizations, community leaders, and peace-building agencies should actively employ Buddhist and Gandhian principles in mediation and reconciliation processes. Techniques such as mindful communication, ethical persuasion, and non-violent protest can be used to resolve community disputes, promote social cohesion, and prevent the escalation of conflicts. These value-based approaches can also be adapted to multicultural and pluralistic contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study conclusively demonstrates that Buddhist values and Gandhian ideals remain profoundly relevant in addressing contemporary social conflicts in an increasingly fragmented and polarized world. Their shared emphasis on compassion, non-violence, truth, self-discipline, and moral responsibility provides a humane and sustainable alternative to coercive and force-based conflict-resolution strategies. By addressing both the psychological roots of conflict and the structural injustices embedded in social systems, these philosophies offer a comprehensive framework for peace-building.

Integrating Buddhist and Gandhian principles into modern institutions—such as education systems, governance structures, and civil society organizations—can foster ethical leadership, strengthen social harmony, and promote inclusive dialogue. In an era where conflicts are often intensified by intolerance and moral erosion, reviving and applying these timeless ethical traditions can contribute significantly to building just, peaceful, and resilient societies.

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