



Harmonizing Non-violent Communication with Buddhist and Gandhian Ideals

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ABSTRACT

The world is facing the challenge of violent communication and its heinous effects in every aspect, at all levels - from individuals to families, institutions, societies, nations, and the global level. Promoting and establishing a healthy, Non-violent Communication ecosystem at all levels is the key to triggering all forms of violence and hatred. Ancient philosophical tradition, Buddhism encompasses the philosophy of Non-violence and integrates values, mutual respect, empathy, and, ultimately, peace. An integral part of the Buddhist tradition is Non-violent Communication. Whereas the pioneer of Non-violence practices, Gandhian philosophical praxis articulates his understanding of Non-violent Communication (NVC). It emphasizes self-discipline, self-restraint, and compassion. Both the principles of Buddhism and the Gandhian model of Non-violent Communication are very pertinent to the construction of the communication ecosystem in contemporary society. This paper is mainly concerned with the centrality of Non-violent Communication, which seems to engulf the contemporary world. This paper examines the intersections and divergences between Buddhist teachings and Gandhian principles in the context of NVC. This paper explores how the Buddhist and Gandhian thoughts are relevant to Non-violent Communication in the contemporary scenario and unfolds the internal dimension of peace for a more humane world.

Keywords: Non-violence, Non-violent Communication, Gandhi, Buddhism, Peace, Conflict

In our everyday conversations, whether it be interpersonal, group, or mass communication, human beings frequently overlook what they say and unintentionally employ trigger phrases that are offensive to other people. Since human communication has advanced to new heights, communication is getting much easier. People can now easily communicate their ideas, opinions, and sentiments to a larger audience. They are so accustomed to exploiting our freedom of speech that we hardly even notice when we engage in hate speech. The use of derogatory language, which is a type of passive aggression, has persisted across several communication

contexts, including interpersonal, group, and mass communication. In a variety of social contexts, Non-violent Communication is generated in a very effective manner between people and groups. It is the righteous way in which human beings express themselves, keeping the speech austere and avoiding words that can provoke an angry or defensive response. It is evident that even passive aggression eventually leads to physical violence

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when we attempt to discriminate between non-violent and violent communication.

Throughout the ages, appropriate language and communication have been major concerns in Indian intellectual traditions. In ancient Indian traditions, non-violent verbal communication was a crucial component of harmonious coexistence. Whether it be from ancient philosophical traditions like Buddhism or from contemporary thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, who emphasized Non-violent Communication, there is an utmost connection between communication and the idea of human interconnectedness—whether it be with other living things, the natural world or other humans. The notion of communication, including Non-violent Communication, was more than just a theory in ancient India; it was also practiced in various ways. The idea of Non-violent Communication has been the fundamental way of life in Indian religions, mainly, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In terms of significance and applicability, these religions' philosophical principle of Non-violence ranks highest. Besides, the Gandhian model of Non-violent Communication and practices is the guide for the perfect communication style that promotes improvements in society.

This present paper focuses on the comparative study of the Indian tradition of Buddhism and the great preacher of Non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, on Non-violent Communication and its relevance in contemporary society to increase social responsibility and foster peace.

Principles of Non-violent Communication

The Sanskrit term 'Ahimsā'= *a+himsā* means not + *himsā*. *Himsā*= Harm, injury, or violence. The Sanskrit root *hims* means to strike. As a result, we begin with the concept of non-harm. It translates to "not hitting" in some senses. In most cases, it is translated into English as "Non-violence," "non-harm," or "non-injury. To put it another way, Non-violence also includes abstaining wilfully from any action, cause of action, or intention of action that is motivated by hatred or greed and is accompanied by a desire to avoid causing harm to others, an

indifferent attitude, or a lack of concern for others. It means that one should not kill other people, should not intend to kill, and should not be inspired to do so by other people. Regardless, "Non-violence" is the universal translation of "*ahimsa*."

The United Nations defines the principle of Non-violence or non-violent resistance as "rejects the use of physical violence to achieve social or political change." Meanwhile, an elaborate explanation of Non-violent Communication has been given by senior Gandhian, Natwar Thakkar who explains the concept as (Kundu, 2018 & 2022):

To me Non-violent Communication literacy would mean how our communication efforts should be non-violent; how our ability and capacity to communicate not only with ourselves but with our family and society be non-violent in all aspects and overall, how the entire process of communication whether between individuals, groups, communities and the world at large should be non-violent in nature. This would entail deep understanding of the art and science of Non-violence and its centrality in all our daily actions. It's not just verbal and nonverbal communication, Non-violent Communication literacy would also include whether our thoughts and ideas are non-violent or not. This would also mean how we can rid of our preconceived notions of individuals or groups with whom we want to communicate and stop evaluating them to suit our own ideas. More than often, we are attuned to think in terms of moralistic judgments which may be our own constructions. By developing deep understanding of the art and science of Non-violence and integrating it in our communication practices we could get over with biased and moralistic judgments; this in turn could contribute to emotional bridge building.

The Buddhist Foundation to Non-violent Communication: Non-violence is, from the Buddhist perspective, a truly valuable gift to the world. The core of Buddhist thinking and behavior is Non-violence. Buddhist traditions place a significant emphasis on Non-violent Communication. It is based on the belief that there is universal love (Maitri) and compassion (*Karuṇā*) for all living things. Non-violence calls for positive action to

alleviate the suffering of all living things when understood in this way.

The theory and practice of Buddhism are based on the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha recommends the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha asserts that there is much suffering in the world. According to Digh Nikaya 2:3, Mahaparinibbana Sutta, there are Four Noble Truths: (1) the truth of suffering, (2) the reality of the source of suffering, (3) the truth of the cessation of suffering, and (4) the road leading to the cessation of suffering. ((*Digh Nikaya 2: 3, Mahaparinibbana Sutta*). The final one among them encourages people to abstain from actions that bring suffering. To end suffering, the Eightfold Path is advised by the Buddha. In this context, the Four Noble Truths—that suffering exists, that suffering is created, that there is a chance to restore well-being, and that the Noble Eightfold Path leads to well-being—are what the Buddha taught us, as Hanh points us.

Hanh also notes that the Sanskrit term for “right” is *samyak*, while the Pali equivalent is *samma*. This adverb is not deformed or crooked; rather, it means “in the right way,” “straight,” or “upright.” For example, “right mindfulness” refers to the existence of helpful and appropriate forms of mindfulness.

Perfect speech is used by *Sangharakshita* for Sanskrit *samyak-vaca*, as opposed to correct speech. According to him, perfect speech is typically defined in Buddhist teachings as speech that is helpful, kind, truthful, and conducive to concord, harmony, and unity. Similarly, speech that is incorrect or flawed is defined as speech that is untrue, harsh, damaging, and that encourages disagreement, disharmony, and disunity—words that are the opposite of each other.

Right speech, or *sammavaci*, is one of the eight paths that the Buddha outlined. In his very first *sutta* after awakening, “The Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Truth,” the Buddha made mention of it. What, then is appropriate speech? *Magga-Vibha Ega Sutta* (SN 45:8) makes sense of it, “And what is correct discourse? Refraining from dishonesty, divisive speech, abusive speech, and idle conversation. A definitive objective of *samyak-vaca* is “arousing” one of the elements of the respectable eightfold

way to end languishing. The *samyak-vaca* alludes to going without lying, from bogus discourse, noxious discourse, cruel discourse, and pointless talking (Nikaya, 45-8). The Buddha trains us to get out whatever is valid, to talk in manners that advance concordance among individuals, to utilize a manner of speaking that is satisfying, kind, and delicate, and to talk carefully. The *samyak-vaca* is a careful practice. By embracing this training, we focus more prominent attention on our body, brain and feelings. The act of *samyak-vaca* expects us to go to karma or the law of circumstances and logical results. We find that unskillful discourse corrupts individual relationships and reduces the chance of harmony and amicability. One of the perceptions in *The Pancha Sila* is avoiding telling a misrepresentation. The Buddha teaches his supporters to maintain the idea of peacefulness in act and discourse. His sharpness about the demonstration of discourse shows that discourse could incite savagery. As indicated by *Sivaraksa*, the soul of peacefulness penetrates the Buddha’s lessons across the world. He sees that the primary statute - not to kill - is the groundwork of all Buddhist activity. All Buddhist activity incorporates the demonstration of correspondence as well. Accordingly, the possibility of discourse or any articulation to be inactively vicious has been recognized. The lessons of the Buddha energize *samyak-vaca* or wonderful discourse which incorporates avoiding lying, disruptive, and oppressive discourse as well as inactive or ignorant prattle.

Deciphering Mahatma Gandhi’s Non-violent Communication: One of the greatest advocates of Non-violence is Mahatma Gandhi. Truth and Non-violence were paramount to Gandhi. One of the main tenets of *Satyagraha* was that opponents were not always seen as permanent foes but rather as possible allies. A *Satyagrahi*’s work did not contain any hatred toward others or indications of violence, either in words or deeds. Therefore, a *Satyagrahi* needed to uphold truth and Non-violence under all conditions. According to Gandhi’s *Satyagraha*, the goal in conflict or disagreement circumstances should be to recognize the legitimacy of the other party’s perspective. The goal was to show empathy

and respect for the opinions of others rather than to promote one's own.

Gandhi stated that violent communication is never effective and harms communication incalculably. It is the underlying source of all conflicts and has the potential to destroy relationships over time. It follows that there is a good reason to encourage peaceful communication in all of our relationships. Gandhi's Non-violent Communication approach is predicated on the fact that violence is impermanent. Gandhi said, "I object to violence because when it appears to be doing good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

The *Satyagraha* provides the foundation of Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful communication paradigm. A fundamental component of Gandhi's Non-violent Communication paradigm, non-violent persuasion was a potent tactic for engaging opponents. One key component of Non-violent Communication is empathic comprehension of other people's perspectives, especially those of our opponents. The use of non-violent persuasion was a key component of *Satyagraha*. Pelton (1974) observed that the honest and straightforward dissemination of information is an essential ingredient of non-violent persuasion...the packaging of an issue and appeals to greed, prejudice, and hatred cannot under any circumstances be reconciled with the philosophy of Non-violence. The Gandhian approach emphasizes the importance of empathy in resolving conflicts. In this regard, Bode made one of the earliest attempts to comprehend the Gandhian model of Non-violent Communication. Bode (1994) attempted to develop a Gandhian theory of Non-violent Communication by utilizing Gandhi's life, philosophy, principles, and actions. There are four theoretical units in this theory: non-violent speech and action; maintaining relationships and enhancing one's personhood, being open; and being flexible. Bode noted and argued, based on this theory, that "Gandhi predicted that Non-violent Communication contributes to the maintenance of peaceful relationships and the enrichment of personhood" and that "violent communications would result in harm." According to Natwar Thakkar (Kundu, 2022a), Non-violent Communication encompasses more than just

human-to-human communication, thoughts and ideas, and verbal and nonverbal communication. It also takes a broad approach to advancing symbolic communication between humans and other living things, as well as between humans and the natural world. In the context of communication, violent communication never lasts; it causes unimaginable harm. All disagreements stem from it, and it can cause long-term gaps in relationships. Thus, there is an appropriate argument for the necessity of fostering peaceful communication in every one of our conversations.

Comparing Buddhist and Gandhian Perspectives

The convention of NVC is today connected with contemporary philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi as well as to the world religion like Buddhism. The Buddha and Gandhi both regard Non-violence (*ahimsa*) as places at the top of the list of things to live by. There is no doubt that the ideal of Non-violence for the well-being of living things is emphasized by the teachings of Buddhism and Gandhi, too. For Buddhism, expectation (*cetanā*) is the critical determinant of the karmic importance of activities performed. While it is regrettable to injure a creature accidentally, it does not result in any negative karmic repercussions for that specific effect. The only kind of behavior that causes harm is done to cause harm. In Buddhism, it shows an individual may just be blamed for coincidentally harming one more conscious being because the person has been preoccupied or thoughtless. However, they can't be blamed for being hurtful. If there is a flaw, it is not the agent's level of kindness but rather the lack of awareness that defines its intentional state (being inattentive). In this manner, by and large, supporters of the Buddha take on an even-minded, centered way concerning inquiries of training and restriction of activity. As a result, when it comes to issues of practice and self-control, Buddhists often take a practical, moderate stance.

Buddhism emphasizes the sufferings in the four noble truths and explains their outcomes. Similarly, in the context of NVC, Gandhi describes that the

law of the jungle is battle; the law of humans is suffering. Suffering, however, has far more ability than the rule of the jungle to persuade an opponent and open his closed ears to the voice of reason. "...It allows man to discover his inherent wisdom. Not the sword, but suffering is the emblem of the human race."

For the practice of Non-violence, Buddhism exhibits four virtues: *Maitri* (kindness), *Karuṇā* (compassion), *Mudita* (finding bliss in another person's happiness), and *Upekhsa* (non-attachment). A moral being should learn and practice these ideals to be a non-violent communicator. These ethical approaches towards Non-violence and its practices in every sphere of life. By taking the non-violent route of right action, right decision, right observation, right livelihood, right exercise, right memory, right meditation, and right speech, a peaceful society is established. Besides, the Non-violent Communication theory of Gandhi teaches us how to uphold moral principles without showing disdain for others who may hold opposing opinions. The effectiveness of Non-violent Communication depends on our ability to convince people with opposing viewpoints to support our moral objective. Gandhi briefly describes how persuasion is a part of his Non-violent Communication in his book *Ahimsa*, or the Way of Non-violence: "Humans are bound by suffering; the jungle is bound by war." But endurance is far more amazing than the law of the wilderness when it comes to subduing the adversary and opening his blocked ears to the voice of reason. If something is really necessary, you should do more than follow the instructions; you should also act from the heart. While rationality tends to appeal more to the brain, suffering speaks to the heart. It facilitates greater access to man's inner knowledge. Not the blade, but the identity of humanity is what makes one enduring."

Meanwhile, Rosenberg (2015) claims that the way we use language and the words we use have a significant impact on the factors that shape our capacity to remain compassionate. He identifies a particular method of speaking and listening that encourages us to give from the heart, establishing a connection between us and one another that

fosters our inherent compassion. Rosenberg claims that Non-violent Communication helps us see ourselves, others, our intentions, and our relationships in a new light as it replaces our old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking in the face of criticism and judgment. The opposition, protectiveness, and vicious responses are limited.

Contemporary Relevance of NVC

Our current world is rife with conflict, pain, unrest, and turmoil. People are losing their ancient, priceless ethical principles in the pursuit of economic growth, religious peace, and political stability. Every nation is working to strengthen its defenses by acquiring nuclear weapons and other technical capabilities. In certain nations, using violence is an everyday occurrence. Several individuals are forced to travel to other countries as a result of the fast-rising violence, and a number of them end up destitute. Conflict is frequently inevitable in social and political life, and occasionally, it is even beneficial and essential. In such circumstances, the question of whether a moral precept of Non-violent Communication can be effectively implemented in the cruel, careless, self-serving, and illogical political environment emerges. Is it not ethically repugnant to submit to oppression and tyranny through violence? Is it not the case that adhering to the principles of principled Non-violence necessitates confronting and making an effort to end such oppression and tyranny—not mindlessly, but with sound judgment, skill, and effectiveness? The fundamental question thus becomes, at least partially, how adherents of the principle of Non-violence and NVC may work to rectify such violent expressions without engaging in violent acts themselves.

It can be exceedingly challenging to practice ethical Non-violence in larger society, particularly in dire circumstances. It's a common misconception that "the world" always uses different tactics than what's suitable for each individual, particularly for those who adhere to non-violent core values. It is believed that such methods need to be assessed using distinct criteria than ones that are suitable for certain people. Today, we are in a period of globalization, where

there are several methods for correspondence and transportation accessible. Then again, a few nations are consumed under the fire of brutality constantly thus, they look for the illumination of peacefulness for help. As a result, Non-violence must be made practical so that the global political and religious crisis can be substantially resolved. The world is in desperate need of its application. One of the eminent social workers and Gandhian researcher, Natwar Thakkar argues for the need to understand the art and science of Non-violence in every aspect of our lives to become non-violent communicators.

Non-violence is, from the Buddhist perspective, a truly valuable gift to the world. If properly implemented, this idea has the potential to significantly contribute to the improvement, happiness, and peace of the world. Internal conflict gives rise to the belief that an individual is distinct from others, which in turn causes exterior conflicts. Prejudices ingrained in society shape an individual's thought process. This impairs people's ability to think critically about the truth. Prejudices like these intensify into disputes inside cultures and between countries. Thus, the Ashtanga Marga, also known as the Eightfold Road, is a non-violent route that leads to peace. A person who has attained inner peace, grown in compassion, and developed logical thought processes views the world objectively. Right speech gives birth to Non-violent Communication. NVC is our sole means of peacefully resolving any disagreements if we are to achieve universal brotherhood, mutual understanding, cooperation, communal harmony, and global peace.

In light of present conflicts in every sphere of society, the Gandhian model of NVC is significant and promoted at all levels of our society. Given the rising prevalence of toxic communication, the dissemination of false information, distortions, and stereotyping, the thoughts of Gandhi have become more pertinent. Peaceful correspondence is a comprehensive correspondence approach that highlights the significance of human interconnectedness. It includes communication within ourselves, communication with other people, communication throughout society, communication with the natural world, and communication with

other living things. Its premise is that relationships would be disrupted in the event of dysfunctional communication, whether it be destructive self-communication, interactions with others, society, nature, or other living things. One comprehensive method of communication that emphasizes the value of human interconnectivity is Non-violent Communication. It includes the way we communicate with one another, with others, with society as a whole, with nature, and with other living things. Its basic idea is that relationships would suffer if there were dysfunctional communication, whether it be harmful self-communication, interactions with other people, society, the environment, or other living things (Kundu, 2022 a).

The Gandhian Non-violent Communication model's dynamism and action-oriented approach are crucial features. The Gandhian model, in contrast to other scholars of communication who primarily focus on the theoretical aspects of communication, is practical, persuasive, and encourages the masses to engage in positive, constructive work. The main point of the Gandhian model was how the workers were inspired to work with the poor and marginalized and be themselves. The Gandhian model of Non-violent Communication requires its practitioners to enter their hearts, practice compassion, and make people's problems their own because of its depth (Kundu, 2022b). This action-oriented, dynamic communication that aims to reach people's hearts appears to be missing from contemporary discourses. The Gandhian paradigm of Non-violent Communication requires us to communicate our thoughts and ideas in all forms of communication, whether they are nonverbal or spoken. It emphasizes how the body, mind, and heart maintain discipline throughout life (Kundu, 2022b). Gandhi's ideas of a non-violent society based on a cosmo-centric view of human nature inspired this holistic approach to Non-violent Communication.

This essential component of Gandhi's idea of a society devoid of violence is explained by Parekh (1997). A peaceful society, according to Gandhi, should "cherish epistemological pluralism," a point Parekh elaborates on. He notes that it should be

acknowledged that a range of important information sources, such as reason, intuition, faith, traditions, the generational accumulation of collective wisdom, and emotions aids understanding and navigating the intricacies of human existence. Rather than giving one person a dominant position or making them the judge of all others, a decent society would encourage dialogue and creative interaction.

CONCLUSION

Non-violent communication is crucial for promoting peace and harmony in the world. It emphasizes the need to eliminate negative actions and focus on restoring positivity. The concept must be practiced to prevent conflicts and promote global harmony. Embracing all nations and cultures is essential for achieving global peace. Current conflicts in various nations highlight the impact of violence and the importance of Non-violence in maintaining global harmony. Both the Gandhian Model of NVC and the teaching of Buddha are ethically valuable in the context of NVC. The efficacy of the NVC will be fruitful if every individual takes steps to the right action with the right speech.

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