



Saarth E-Journal

Saarth

E-Journal of Research

E-mail: sarthejournal@gmail.com

www.sarthejournal.com

ISSN NO: 2395-339X

Peer Reviewed

Vol,3 Issue.02 No.13

Impact Factor: 6.89

Quarterly

April to June 2018

Women: Igniting Agents of Gandhi's Non-violence for Peace

Dr. Sheetal Rawat

Abstract:

A woman in each phase of life is a source of energy and therefore called a symbol of power as well. The power resides in creation and the destruction too. Women is considered source of power and in our mythology she is considered the Goddess of power that is 'shakti' swarup. It leads world to better organized place for better living. One peculiar characteristic of women is that of her role as an agent of conflict resolutions. Do women hold the key to a peaceful society? Much is known about the victimization of women through rape, trafficking, and early marriages, but much is yet to be discovered about how women can be empowered in conflict settings to bridge the gap towards peace.

The needs of women have not always been a focal point in conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction. It was not until 2000 when the UN passed security council resolution 1325 detailing specific risks women face in conflict and determined to tackle the issue. From this resolution, activists, academics, and policymakers began to address the specific "burden of war" women carry and how the international community could protect and empower them. The present paper talks about the continuous struggle of women in Liberia to fight back to violence for peace resolution in their country. The folk of women in Liberia were not only succeeding in bringing peace to their country but also emerged as an

empowered agent of crucial change among the psyche of Liberian people. It also tries to focus upon how Gandhi's concept of non-violence ignited their mind for this saga of peace in their country.

Key Words: Liberian women, peace, conflict resolution, Gandhi's concept of non-violence

Dr.Sheetal Rawat, Asst.Professor, ShikshanVidyashakha(IASE), GujaratVidyapith, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Introduction:

Nonviolence has a rich history. Over the years, nonviolent actions have been known to largely contribute to bringing about various desired specific changes, and challenge social norms and unjust authorities. A number of examples exist, from Gandhi's nonviolent struggle against British rule in India that led to India's independence in 1947, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle to win civil rights for African Americans in the United States, to the Arab Spring uprising of 2011 (Nepstad, 2015: 1). Cesar Chavez's nonviolent campaigns against the treatment of farm workers in California in 1960, and the uprising in Indonesia against President Suharto, as well as the French Huguenot resistance in the era of World War II, are a few other examples. However, what seems not to have enjoyed much attention in the practice of nonviolent struggle is the challenge of social change after a ruler is deposed (Martins, 2015: 537). It is, however, on records that a number of nonviolent struggles led to specific changes.

Gandhi's Philosophy of Non-violence:

With Gandhi, the notion of nonviolence attained a special status. He not only theorized on it, he adopted nonviolence as a philosophy and an ideal way of life. He made us understand that the philosophy of nonviolence is not a weapon of the weak; it is a weapon, which can be tried by all. Nonviolence was not Gandhi's invention. He is however called the father of nonviolence because as Kripalani asserts "Gandhi was the first in Human history to extend the principle of nonviolence from the individual to social and political plane. the Gandhian *ahimsa* is a philosophy and strategy for social change that rejects the use of violence, but at the same time sees nonviolent action (also called civil resistance) as an alternative to passive acceptance of oppression or armed struggle against it. In general, advocates of an activist philosophy of nonviolence use diverse methods in their campaigns for social change, including critical forms of education and persuasion, mass non-cooperation civil disobedience and non-violent direct action and social, political, cultural and economic forms of intervention.

Women's Involvement in Nonviolent Movements:

Women have historically been denied full access to political spaces usually reserved for, or dominated by, men. Given existing inequalities, women are presented with specific opportunities, as well as challenges, in engaging in nonviolent struggles. Linkages between nonviolent movements and the role

of women are typically rooted in examples of movements for woman's rights specifically: suffrage movements, civil rights, anti-germicide campaigns, or even *slut walks*. (The term *slut walk* refers to the global trend of anti sexual assault protests, especially against rape culture that promotes victim-blaming. The protestors frequently dress provocatively to satirize the notion that rape can be excused or explained by any aspect of a woman's appearance.) Beyond gender-specific movements, and frequently without recognition, women activists have organized and led countless movements for rights and freedom around the world.

From Nonviolent Struggle to Negotiated Settlement: The Liberian experience

Leymah Gbowee led a nonviolent women's movement in Liberia, demonstrating how the nonviolent struggle moves into a process to produce a specific change. In the quest to bring about desired change, practitioners of nonviolence use diverse and creative methods. They sought to create conditions for just, peaceful, and sustainable societies that meet the needs of all people. This is largely anchored on the recognition that we all have a shared human identity and that life is valuable in and of itself.

The anarchy of civil war sustained in Liberia more than 15 years leaving behind thousands of Liberian citizens homeless, unable to access basic needs for better living. Youth were dragged into war activities .Conflict diamonds were used to fund Taylor's forces, while murder, rape, and the use of child soldiers made living conditions dangerous and unbearable for Liberian citizens. It was the dare stepping out of liberian women to protest against the rebel forces to bring peace in their country. Pray the Devil Back to Hell documents the daring and heroic story of the women who fought to bring peace to Liberia.

Leymah Gbowee inculcated great faith in women of Liberia for non-violent protest to bring peace in their country. They organized the Women in Peace building Network (WIPNET), a group that challenged patriarchal power and encouraged people to understand and acknowledge women's roles in peace building. As the major victims of sexual violence, abandonment, and financial hardship, these women felt they had a right to partake in the resolution of conflicts. Determined to end the violence, they distributed a statement of intent: "In the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying NO to violence and YES to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails."WIPNET extended their network to include Muslim women, and began holding peace vigils in churches and mosques, mass meetings in Monrovia's City Hall, and they marched in the street with shirts that proclaimed, "We want peace. No more war."

When the war subsided, Leyman Gbowee gathered Liberian women for nonviolent protests. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace commenced with a few local women praying and singing in a fish market. It eventually became a mass movement and first time in the history thousands of Christian and Muslim Liberian women stepped out together for this noble cause. They gathered in Monrovia for months in defiance of Charles Taylor, who was the country's president at the time. Their

actions further resonate “how moral clarity, persistence and bravery to raise voices against war and restore sanity to land” (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011: x) is significant to the attainment of desired change of nonviolent action. To ensure they stood out, they wore white t-shirts and head scarves, organized prayers for peace and handed out flyers with inscriptions, “We are tired! We are tired of our children being killed! We are tired of being raped! Women, wake up – you have a voice in the peace process!”(Gbowee &Mithers, 2011) The staged protests the women organized also involved the threat of a sex strike, as they resolved to deny their partners’ sex until they stopped fighting, laid down their weapons, and made peace. Their actions eventually led Charles Taylor to grant the women, about 2,000 of them, a hearing on April 23, 2003. In her speech during the hearing, Leyman Gbowee said, “They were tired of war, of running, of begging for bulgur wheat, and of their children being raped” (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011). She added that they were taking the stand to secure the future of their children, because they believed, as custodians of society, tomorrow their children will ask, ‘Mama, what was your role during the crisis?’(Gbowee & Mithers, 2011). In the process of the meeting or hearing, the women succeeded in their plan to pressure Charles Taylor into promising to attend peace talks in

Ghana. The women indeed manifested the virtues of faith and courage in conducting their nonviolent action, and as expressed by Leymah “if you have unshakeable faith in yourself, in your sisters and in the possibility of change, you can do almost anything” (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011: 230). The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace was very much conscious of the fact that the “success of campaign is due in large part to excellent grassroots organization” (Jackson, 25: 2), as their campaign structure was organized to ensure effective mobilization of grassroots participants.

The documentary “Pray the Devil Back to Hell” is the inspirational story of a group of women who recognized the traumatic effects of the war and overcame their religious conflicts to fight for a common goal. It reveals the gripping account of a group of brave women who demanded peace for Liberia, a nation torn to shreds by a decades-long civil war. The women's historic achievement finds its voice in a narrative that intersperses interviews, archival images, and scenes of present-day Liberia together to recount the memories of a few of the women who were there. “The people of Liberia have hope,” Gbowee said when she reflected on their efforts to end violence. “Our vision is for the unity of families and the elimination of hunger and disease. We believe God’s hands are under us in this effort now. God has turned ears toward us.”

The narration of Gbowee in documentary shows the determination and courage of women of liberia for peace." Money, greed, agnocity, absolute power there is nothing that should make people do what they did to the children of Liberia, now all they have to give these boys gone, they were sent to war. They just do anything because they had guns. You go to bed and say God please what do we do .we the women of liberia want peace, just now I have a dream and it was like a crazy dream. We decided to protest we wore a white stint for people who were at act of at peace, how place of dream where Muslim and Christian women came together from different walks of life. These women have seen the worst but still they have that fragrance for life, ever say that well if I just should be killed, just

remember me that I was fighting for peace. We stepped out first indeed the only manageable we the Liberian women are tired of killing of our people, we want a peace NOW”

Strong Urge of Female leadership for Peace worldwide

The recommendation for female leadership in the peace process gathered greater force after success stories like the one about women's peace activism in Liberia. A report by UN Women (pdf) also strengthened the call for more female peacemakers by revealing that only 4% of participants in peace processes were women. Advocates for greater female representation say that women are essential because they bring a more comprehensive peace plan to the negotiating table by addressing societal needs rather than solely focusing on what will make the warring parties happy. However, from my analysis of data on Uppsala's Peace Agreements, a couple of key challenges emerged that determine the extent to which women are able to help the peace process. The results demonstrated that women do have a positive and significant impact on peace, as encouraging their participation increases the probability of violence ending within a year by 24%. However, restrictions do apply. Including a woman from outside the conflict, like from the UN or the African Union, does not necessarily result in more durable peace agreement. Rather, local women from the conflict are vital for creating a lasting peace agreement. This distinction is extremely important because it reveals that female presence does not necessarily provide the key to peace.

Current cases like South Sudan illustrate how local women desperately want to become more involved in the peace process but are side lined by the warring parties. How might South Sudan's recent recurrence to violence be resolved if women are granted greater access to the negotiating table and a developing peace plan? Identifying these barriers will be critical for increasing the participation of women in peacemaking and therefore increasing the probability of lasting peace.

Based on these initial results, building local women's capacity will be an important area of investment for the international community in order to encourage female leadership. Only by creating more inclusive policies inviting the participation of women can the UN and governments understand the vital role women carry. Building quality representation in local female leadership may be the key ingredient to a peaceful society as women are empowered to transform conflict.

Conclusion:

The campaigns indeed showed that uniformity and perseverance as well as integrity are not only important attributes, but also rewarding for reaching to the target results. These attributes also came into play in the Liberian nonviolent campaign that led to the negotiated exit of Charles Taylor, brought the civil war to an end and promoted democracy in the land, freedom from the claws of a dictator, and peace for the Liberian people. These are crucial lessons for every nonviolent campaign and advocacy group.

Work sited:

Dalai Lama, "Relevance of Compassion and Non-violence Today", *Gandhi Marg*, 13, April-June, 1991,pp. 1-11.

Lester R. Kurtz, "Non-violent War: An Idea whose Time has Come? *Gandhi Marg*, 14, 3, 1992, p. 456. Stephen Zunes, "Role of Non-violent Action in the Collapse of Apartheid", *Gandhi Marg*, 20, 4, 1999, p. 407.

Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Non-violent Action*, vol.1,op.cit., p.8. Lisa Adler and L.H.M. Ling, "From Practice to Theory: Towards a Dissident Feminist Reconstruction of Non-violence, *Gandhi Marg*, 16, 4. 1995, p. 467.

Brian Martin. "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power", *Journal of PeaceResearch*, 26, 2, 1989, p. 216. Adler and Ling. *op.cit.*, p.472.