Role of Spiritual Leaders in Conflict Management: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Frequently the word "management" is known to relate to the running of economic enterprises. But this is too narrow and prejudiced view, especially when we are dealing with a comprehensive and deep theme as the role of Spiritual Leadership in conflict management. There is a famous Sanskrit dictum: "svarat samrat bhavati" which means one who can rule or govern oneself can also direct others well. That is, the ideal leader exercises leadership upon him or her in the first place. This requires bringing forth the hidden Spirit being of the leader into the forefront of his or her personality. Then only he or she becomes authorized to lead others. Such capability is more basic than professional competence and skills. The latter are essential but secondary. The legendary (puranic) kings of ancient India have been called Rajarshi that means a king plus a sage. In this holistic model, the schism between the secular and the sacred vanishes (the king is the secular aspect, rishi the sacred). In managing the conflicts of modern world we are in needed this type of Spirit-centered leaders. An expanded interpretation of spirituality in conflict management is proposed below. While management will be correctly and wisely understood as such a process for running our affairs this is consciously founded on this continuity right through the entire cosmic chain. Only then Spirituality in management can turn into a sensible and fruitful engagement. In the present article we will try to find out the actions of our spiritual leaders in conflict management from the historical perspective.

Conflict Management

Disagreements, debates, differing perspectives, clashing ideologies, and justice struggles are inevitable in a pluralistic and unequal society. Thus, education about how to understand and handle conflict is an essential ingredient of democracy, as well as essential for safe and healthy personal and community lives. Conflict is a normal product of diversity in beliefs and values, differences in attitudes and perceptions and competing socio-economic and political interests among individuals, social classes, ethnic groups and states. The word conflict derives from the Latin configure, which means literally "to strike together"(Barash and Webel, 2002). Within the human realm, conflict occurs when different social groups are rivals or otherwise are in competition. According to Mohammad Rabie, "because conflict is about values, beliefs, interests, and perceptions, it occurs at every level of human and state

interaction." (Rashid,2005, p:50). It is apparent that, we cannot define the word "conflict" in any single characterization. Most definitions seem to involve the following factors: that there are at least two independent groups, the groups perceive some incongruity between themselves, and the groups interact with each other in some way.

Conflict resolution comprises the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Conflict resolution works in phases: first prevention, second reduction of the intensity of conflict and finally to an ultimate resolution (Harun ur Rashid,2005,p.66). In practice, when people talk about conflict resolution they tend to use terms like toleration, avoidance, negotiation, bargaining, coercion, mediation, or arbitration. Conflict management does not necessarily imply conflict resolution. Prior to dealing with issues of conflict, it is important to first reduce tension by changing behavior of parties. Management of conflicts is to be distinguished from conflict resolution because management of conflict means changing of behavior of parties while conflict resolution deals with issues of conflict.

Conflict management involves implementing strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place. Therefore conflict management involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict. Pruitt (1983) places forward a model based on the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict. The understanding of the parties concern for their own interests and their concern for the interests of those across would yield a particular conflict management style. Pruitt called these styles:

- Yielding (low assertiveness/high cooperativeness),
- Problem solving (high assertiveness/high cooperativeness),
- Inaction (low assertiveness/low cooperativeness),
- Contending (high assertiveness/low cooperativeness).

There are five famous management approaches, these are integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integration involves openness; exchanging information, looking for alternatives, and examining differences so solve the problem in a manner that is acceptable to both parties. But the most important thing is ethics of the leader who will lead in conflict management. A wise leader must behave ethically, and to do so the leader should be open to new information and be willing to change his or her mind. Without an understanding of ethics, conflict cannot be controlled.

Spirituality in the Management

Spirit or soul is distinct from the mind, which is dependent on the brain. The spirit refers to the essence of our being, our very nature, our core, our true, permanent identity which is

independent of our physical body after death. Spirituality refers to behavior that knowingly seeks self-realization. When the "lower self" sheds its attachment to the body and experiences itself as the "higher self" or simply the "Self", it has achieved "self-realization", a state of perfect being, awareness and bliss. Spirituality is the noun corresponding to the adjective "spiritual". It is the basis of religious beliefs and traditions. While a religion is typically based on a set of tenets that are shared by its members, a bible or gospel, a set of well established rules and rituals, a house of worship and, in general, a priesthood that interprets the holy texts and the rules, spirituality is simply the context for all religious belief. But it is more than that since a person can be spiritual –follow a spiritual path – without adhering to any particular religion. And a person who, as a matter of social convention, follows the rules and traditions of a particular religion can appear to be religious, without in fact being spiritual. (Pruzan, 2003, p:6)

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* "spirituality" means: "the quality of being interested in spiritual or religious matters, worship, prayer, etc." Karen C. Cash and George R. Gray referred another understanding of "spirituality" by differentiating its legal interpretation and practical application. According to Karen, those who discuss the issue of spirituality in relation to workplace consider it differently than those who discuss it within religion (Pruzan, 2003, p: 134). Although the authors are rather against introducing religion to work environment they support the idea that spirituality is attached to places of work. It is because spirituality offers deeper insight and more universal understanding of values while religion mostly rests on formal rites and scriptures. Spirituality as such is both deeper and more mysterious part of human existence while religion is also a formal system of manners and beliefs which is an institution with its services and worships. The concept of spirituality is dependent of practical understanding of values. So spirituality is wider than that of religion.

Conflict Management in Spiritual way briefly clarified our theoretical position on Spirituality from the ontological and epistemological angles, and about management from the viewpoint of decision making in human affairs.

Role of Spiritual Leaders

A number of historical leaders and thinkers have achieved a special level of greatness and wisdom. King Solomon, Moses, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Buddha, Gandhi, Muhammad, and many others have struck a chord with multitudes in an unusually powerful way. The most appealing and common thing of these spiritual leaders was that, they approached as leaders at those times of history when the places related with them were occupied by conflict. All of them were more or less successful in managing these conflicts and became legendary in the history of civilization.   Among them the present paper will discuss concerning three

historical spiritual figures who led their nation with their immense spiritual wisdom. The three leaders are Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad and Mahatma Gandhi. Here I am only intending to find out their dealings with conflict and their activities in conflict management at their time and space.

Jesus Christ: The Messenger of Love and Peace

Jesus was launched as a religious leader into a part of the world that was ruled by Rome. The cultural and political situation of Rome was favorable to the development of many new religions. At the time of Jesus, religion and politics were intertwined in many ways in Rome. Religion was directly influenced by the political turmoil of then Rome. At the time of Jesus Jewish were split among four main groups: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots (Dean Peterson,1993,p:16). The historical Jesus of Nazareth offered to his world and times a different ethical and moral thinking on war and violence.

Jesus came with a new commandment, the commandment of love, intricately dependent upon and interwoven with the necessity for justice. Jesus' two greatest commandments were, "love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it; love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Matthew 22:37-38). While Jesus accepts the centrality of love of and respect for God and enacted through loving treatment of fellow human beings, through the exercise of justice particularly for preferential conduct of the oppressed, the economically poor, the marginalized, he demands more of people in his commandment of love that is implemented through reconciliation between conflicting parties and persons and the creation of peace.

The key to Jesus' teaching can be found in the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-11, Lk. 6: 20-26). In Matthew, in a more expansive and inclusive description than that found in Luke who contrasts the blessed with the woes cast upon those presently at ease and wealthy in worldly leisure, the blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (i.e., act in moral conduct in conformity with the will of God), who are merciful, who are clean of heart, who are the peacemakers, who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, who are insulted and persecuted because of Jesus himself. The specific reference in Mt. 5:9 to peacemaker, "happy are those who work for peace".

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:38-48) provides the fundamental guidance to create this new order. Jesus says there, "you have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in

heaven…"Jesus himself captures his own fate as one persecuted for the sake of righteousness. The Jesus who neither accepted nor implemented violence was willing to receive and be subject to violence, even lethal violence upon himself in his death on a cross as a criminal who was alleged to threaten the state and the local religious powers. Jesus declared, "from the time John preached his message until this very day the kingdom of heaven has suffered violent attacks, and the violent are taking it by force (Mt. 11:12).

Jesus, in seeming acceptance of self-victimization, viewed himself at the end of his life as becoming the target of opponents of the good news of his message of justice, peace, love and reconciliation. Despite the potential for being the target of brutality, Jesus neither teaches nor tolerates retaliation. Jesus forbids even balanced retaliation and instructs his followers (who happen to be the powerless and the victims of the powerful) not even to defend against the evil doer. Jesus neither is known to have used weapons nor advocated such and the early apostolic community refrained from holding and using such. Jesus through his teachings forbids retaliation, forbids hatred, and, opposing to what is thought ordinary sense, returns only love when confronted or receiving abuse, harassment, evil itself, and even death.

 Many of the readers are considering that the conducts paved by Jesus were not practical. For them I am tempted to point out here the expressions of Charles C. Manz. The writer in his *The Leadership Wisdom of Jesus* holds that, "It is important to note that much of the wisdom of Jesus' teachings does not directly address leadership. Nevertheless, I believe that his teachings offer a wealth of ethical and practical guidance for leadership practice. Rather, I will address the subject of leadership in a way that captures some of the spiritual yet practical wisdom of the teachings of Jesus. . . My intention is not to be religious in focus. Rather, I will address the subject of leadership in a way that captures some of the spiritual yet practical wisdom of the teachings of Jesus (2005 by Charles C. Manz, p.3).It indicates, the modern thinkers surrender themselves to spiritual form of Jesus' leadership though they consider that the conducts of this spiritual leader were unrealistic. Many of Jesus' teachings focus especially on such common, powerful themes as the advantages of forgiveness over judgment, the importance of love and service, the power of humility, and the wisdom of recognizing the deeper value of every person.

Thus, Jesus' teachings suggest lessons for aspiring wise and compassionate leaders. Therefore my intention is not to be religious in focus but to employ spiritual wisdom in leadership.

Prophet Muhammad: A Statesman with Spiritual Wisdom

In the history of Arab, 6th century is known as the ayyam al-jahiliyah. The term jahiliyah, usually rendered "time of ignorance" or "barabarism", in reality means the period in which

Arabia had no dispensation, no inspired prophet, no received book (Hitti, 2006, p.87). At that era in about 571 A.D Muhammad was born at Makkah and at the age of forty he obtained prophet hood in deep meditation. Muhammad came at a time when the Bedouin tribes of Arab were collapsed in war over simple matters like cattle, pasture-land or springs (Hitti, 2006, p: 89, 90). The spiritual world of pre-Islamic age was also completely chaotic and confusing (Hitti, 2006, p: 96-103). However, the young Muhammad was known as al-Amin(the faithful) in his tribe which was apparently an honorific title (Hitti, 2006, p:111). Muhammad was spiritual by nature and was evidently predisposed to the message of reform that he received in his vision. According to Rom Landu, in addition to his spiritual nature he was essentially a practical man who knew the strength of the Arab character and he realized that the reforms that were necessary would have to be taught gradually to both undisciplined Bedouin and pagan townsman (Rom Nandau, 1958). Muhammad's task was threefold:

i) He had to break down the strong tribal system of Arab that had been responsible for almost constant warfare.
ii) He had to introduce a universal law that yet could be found acceptable by the lawless Arabs.
iii) He had to impose discipline upon a society that thrived on tribal violence

In simple words Muhammad's problem was to replace humanity for cruelty, order for anarchy, and justice for sheer might. A turning point in Muhammad's life came in 620 A.D when a group of pilgrims from Yathrib accepted his message of monotheism and two years later they returned with an invitation for the Prophet to Yathrib. Yathrib later known as Madinah (the place of justice) was suffering from a malaise as serious as that of Mecca because of tribal conflict. In 622 A.D the famous Hijrah to Madinah was taken place was a turning point of Muhammad's life. In the language of Hitti, "the seer in him now recedes into the background and the practical man of politics comes to the fore. The prophet is gradually overshadowed by the statesman" (Hitti, 2006, P.116). Muhammad took many historical steps in managing the conflicts of a cephalous society.

Muhammad at first abolished the tribal distinction and grouped the inhabitants of Madinah under one general name Ansar or Helper. He unites the emigrants of Mecca and the helpers of Madinah in a brotherhood which was based on faith not on kinship or blood. With this end in view he had granted a famous charter which is known as the 'Charter of Madinah'. The charter included 57 provisions, among them some main provisions which worked in conflict management among the inhabitants of Madinah were:

All the communities signing the Charter would form the common nationality. No Jew will be wronged for being a Jew. The Jews have their religion. This will also apply to their freedmen. The exception will be those who act unjustly and sinfully. Those in

alliance with the Jews will be given the same treatment as the Jews. If anyone attacks anyone who is a party to this pact the other must come to his help. They (parties to this pact) must seek mutual advice and consultation. In case of any dispute or controversy which may result in trouble the matter must be referred to Allah and Muhammed .This document will not protect one who is unjust or commits a crime against other parties of the pact. (www.constitutiopn.org/cons/medina)

The charter proves that Muhammad through his religious and spiritual wisdom tried and succeeds to repair the conflicting tendency of the inhabitants of Madinah. Another treaty which reflects the wisdom of Muhammad in conflict management was the 'treaty to the Christians' which ascertained in the sixth year of the Hijrah with the Christians of Nijran. The provisions of the charter which worked in managing conflict with the Christians were, "no bishop was to be expelled from the monastery, no pilgrim was to be detained from the performance of pilgrimage, no Christian churches were to be pulled down for the building of mosques" (K. Ali, 1998, p: 50). The treaty of Hudaybiah was another monument of tolerance in the way of managing conflict. In the sixth year of the Hijrah (628 A.D) Muhammad started to Mecca with 1400 companions to perform the pilgrimage. But the Qurayash did not want that they would enter into Makkah and perform the pilgrimage. Finally the two parties agreed to sign a treaty which was famous as the Treaty of Hudaybiyah. It was decided in the treaty that war would be suspended for ten years. If anybody went over to Muhammad without the permission of his guardian he should be sent back to his guardian but should any of the followers of Muhammad return to the Quraysh he should not be sent back. Muhammad should retire that year without entering the city. In the coming year Muhammad and his followers might visit Makkah, but they might not enter it with any weapons (K. Ali, 1998, p: 52). Though the treaty seemed outwardly humiliating on the part of the Muslims, the treaty reflected the political wisdom and farsightedness of Muhammad. The ten years truce gave time and opportunity to the Muslims to expand their area. After two years of this treaty in 630 A.D Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad peacefully conquered Makkah. This event is obviously a direct result of the treaty of Hudaybiyah.

From these historical events it is apparent that Muhammad with the authority of his prophet hood and spiritual wisdom could stand above the warring blood-groups and arbitrate between them.

We know the term 'jihad' which is one of the most controversial terms of Islam. Peace theorists believe that through the concept of Jihad Islam have contributed to warfare directly. However if we turn the pages of history we will find that Muhammad worked on the principle of 'no compulsion in religion'. At the reign of Muhammad differences of opinion in religious matters were respected and individual opinion was encouraged. Freedom of conscience was also allowed. Muhammad allowed the use of arms only in self-defense. All

the war which occurred at the time of Muhammad was defensive war. Within a brief span of mortal life Muhammad utilized his spiritual wisdom as a statesman and united a nation under a common brotherhood which was never united before.

Mahatama Gandhi: the Revolutionary Leader Using Spirituality in Revolt

Nonviolence is intimately associated with certain ethical and religious traditions, notably, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christian pacifism. Mohandas Gandhi is the major teacher of non-violence in modern times. Gandhi's nonviolent struggle against racial discrimination strengthened his basic philosophy of life. It was in South Africa that he first put his moral convictions into practice in a situation where the interests of thousands of helpless and oppressed people were involved. He remained there for twenty one years, leading numerous campaigns for Indian rights and developing his philosophy of nonviolent action as well as specific technique for implementing it. Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and soon became the leader of the Indian nationalist movement, seeking independence from colonial Britain. Through the Civil Disobedience campaigns of 1921, 1931 and 1942 he led India step by step towards freedom. And finally in 1947 he saw India as an independent nation. V. S Naravane holds, "in Gandhi however, we have the unique example of a man who influenced the thoughts, the emotions as well as the actions of a very large number of people." Regarding the source of Gandhi's extraordinary power, Naravane says, "his power was almost entirely of the spirit…his strength was aimed at the conscience the innermost chamber of the shrine of humanity" (Naravane, 1964, p:169). The fundamental principle of Gandhi's teachings and activities was non-violence, obviously in his own invented method. He pioneered the modern use of on violent resistance in two modes:

i)   Spiritual or philosophical approach of non-violence to life

ii)   Powerful practical technique of achieving political and social change.

On the nature of Non-violence Gandhi says, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiment in both on vast scales as I could.… In fact it is in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence" (Basant Kumar Lal, 1978; p: 108). Explaining more clearly he says, "Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc… Ahimsa is the means truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later" (Basant Kumar Lal, 1978; p: 108,109).

In Gandhi the word Ahimsa has both a negative and a positive significance. The positive

aspect of its meaning is more essential for Gandhi, because it comprehends the negative aspects also and represents its essence. The negative meaning of Ahimsa is non-killing. The positive features of Ahimsa are much more basic than its negative characters. Ahimsa is not merely abstaining from causing injuries to creature; it stands for certain positive towards other living beings that one must promote. In fact, in its positive facet ahimsa is nothing but love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. Non-violence also includes sacrifice and suffering. It is the firm conviction of Gandhi that Ahimsa can be practiced universally. It is a power which can be wielded equally by all. It does not involve the use of any external object; it only demands a sincerity of purpose and a purity of intentions. But there is one supreme condition attached to the practice of Ahimsa. It cannot be practiced unless one has a living and unwavering faith in God. The practice of Ahimsa necessitates an inner strength, which can only be generated by a living faith in God. A sincere faith in God will make man see that all human beings are fellow beings and essentially one. Thus, the love of God turns into a love of humanity, which can work in conflict management. Gandhi is aware that a theoretical emphasis on the non-violence and importance of Truth would lead us nowhere unless a way is shown for the practice of Ahimsa. This thought directed Gandhi to develop a technique of Ahimsa, to which he gives the name of Satyagraha, which is translated in English as Truth-force, soul-force or love-force.

Gandhi's unique contribution was Satyagraha, the technique of non-violent way of conflict resolution. Satyagraha is literally holding on to truth (Satya) and therefore it meant truth-force. Truth was soul or spirit and therefore known as soul force. Gandhi believed that Satyagraha was always superior to armed resistance. It was the weapon that adorned the strong never the weak. By weak he meant weak in mind and spirit, not in body. Satyagraha can never be used to defend a wrong cause. Gandhi distinguishes Satyagraha from passive resistance with which it is usually confused. Gandhian non-violence is the non-violence of the strong, the courageous, and the outraged, not merely passive resistance by the weak the cowardly. Non-cooperation or civil disobedience is one of the methods of non-violent collective behavior of community. Through this method Gandhi raised his voice against British government and he was successful in his mission.

Gandhi was not only the leader of Hindus, but of all people of the Indian subcontinent irrespective caste, creed or race. During the 1920s, Gandhi continued to fight for the rights for the lowest Hindu caste, the untouchables, which he renamed the Harijan, Children of God. When communal violence erupted between Hindus and Muslims in India in 1947, Gandhi at the age of 78 announced he would fast until the bloodshed ended. Seventy two hours later communal violence ended.

Considering the pattern of his philosophy, Naravane outlines the general features of Gandhi's thought, "in the first place, he shows a decisive for simplicity as against

complexity…. Secondly, Gandhian thought is based upon the firm conviction that reality is merely a natural order but a moral order as well…. Thirdly and this is a feature we have already noticed- in Gandhian thought reality is regarded as spiritual through and through…" (Naravane, 1964; p.176.).

So Gandhi in conflict management tried to use spiritual energy. Which emphasizes on spontaneity, faith and devotion, the acceptance of love as the supreme value, the demand for service and sacrifice, the insistence on the divinity of truth, all these are connected with the central principal which makes the human spirit the highest repository of reality and power.

Closing Remarks

From the activities and theories of these three great spiritual Leaders we get three main points of their direction regarding conflict management.

Firstly, Jesus Christ who was mainly the leader of marginalized people, came with the message of love and peace; in establishing peace he never allowed any type of retaliation, moreover he teaches to receive every kind of sentence so that people can finally live in the 'kingdom of heaven,' a place which is full of harmony and integrity.

Secondly, Prophet Muhammad upon whom the term "Rajarshi" could be employed successfully, as he applied his spiritual wisdom in leading the people of a conflicting region and succeed in tying them under the banner of a common brotherhood.

Thirdly, Mahatma Gandhi who led his nation in a radical period by innovating a unique concept of non-violence, which has both spiritual approach and successful practical implication.

As we indicated primarily management of conflict means changing of behavior of parties, we have observed that, how these three famous spiritual leaders contributed in conflict management through their theories of love for all, brotherhood of humanity and non-violent action. There are no point of get the wrong idea that the paper is trying to create a relation between religion and leadership. Since it is previously established Spirituality as such is both deeper and more mysterious side of human existence while religion is a formal system of attitudes and beliefs which is an institution with its services and worships. Therefore a secular leader can also be spiritually sound and can take decision through spiritual wisdom. The present paper is just a little attempt to study spirituality in conflict management from historical perspective. We can get more new and effective methods in managing conflict through a vast study of the subject. It is very important to give a new dimension of spirituality in conflict management to deal with the conflicting situations of the present world.

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