

# Infoesfera

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*Infoesfera*

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Internet, allied to Gandhian creed of nonviolence,  
can promote world peace



## Internet, allied to Gandhian creed of nonviolence, can promote world peace

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This year, 2015, marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II (WW II). It was the deadliest war fought in the history of mankind, both in terms of the number of people killed — over 50 million — and the number of countries and continents involved in the hostilities. No less mind-numbing was the fact that, for the first time, and prayerfully for the last time in human history, an atomic weapon was used in a war.

The most important lesson of WW II is that a war of that kind must never again be fought. But there is good news. Mankind may well be learning that lesson, at least some important parts of that lesson. There has been no world war in the past seven decades, whereas the interval between the First and Second World Wars was just about two decades. Moreover, although there have been some horrific localized wars and civil wars since 1945, there are no signs on the horizon that World War III could happen.

What accounts for this optimistic development? Briefly, four reasons. Firstly, at a time when many nations possess weapons of mass destruction, awareness about the catastrophic consequences of a globalized war is acting as a deterrent factor. If it all World War III were to happen, there would be no more wars since the human race itself could suffer extinction. Secondly, after 1945, the international community has devised institutions, the United Nations being the foremost among them, which provide platforms for inter-governmental dialogue.

Thirdly, the world we live in has become far more inter-connected and inter-dependent than at any time in the past, thanks primarily to the advent of the internet, created by a convergence of information and communication

technologies. Lastly, since the end of WW II, there has been, worldwide, a steady rise of nonviolent consciousness whose greatest icon in modern times is Mahatma Gandhi.

Of these four reasons, the first two suffer from inherent inadequacy. Fear of more catastrophic destruction alone has never prevented nations from waging further wars. Men and their rulers have time and again repeated costly mistakes of the past. It is also obvious that the post-WW II institutions such as the UN are far from perfect or effective in timely conflict-resolution. They need urgent and thorough-going democratic reforms.

In contrast, the third and fourth reasons are most hope-giving. The combination of the revolutionary power of the internet to connect and unite the world, and the still greater revolutionary power of nonviolence as an ethical commandment for human interactions of all kinds, is the greatest guarantor of peace in the future.

#### INTERNET: A WEAPON OF MASS CONSTRUCTION, MORE POWERFUL THAN WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (WMD)

Never in human history has an offspring of science and technology brought the entire human race so dramatically closer as the internet has done. Internet is not merely a network of lifeless computers, routers and servers. It is above all a network of human beings. World wide web is also the world wide mind because the internet has become the collective mind of the human race, its central nervous system as it were. By effecting the miraculous “death of distance”, it has shrunk the world into a global village. Mahatma Gandhi would have heartily welcomed this development, since he had envisioned the world to become a harmonious and cooperative village community, inheriting all the life-nourishing human values from the past.

The internet is facilitating millions upon millions of conversations and interactions — each day, each hour — among people transcending national, racial, religious, cultural and gender barriers. Most of these interactions are nonviolent in nature. In addition, the internet has created an ocean of information, knowledge and cultural resources, and made them accessible to ordinary citizens around the world. People are beginning to know more about themselves, about others, and about a wide array of subjects, in ways that were unthinkable in the past. This interconnectedness in economic, so-

cial, spiritual, educational, cultural and entertainment spheres is producing new communities with non-narrow and overlapping identities. The internet is also empowering people in relation to their own governments and multi-lateral bodies, which are now under intense pressure to be transparent and accountable.

Other digital-era technologies also have the potential to bring enormous benefits to mankind. Nanotechnology promises that small is not only beautiful but can also be plentiful, insofar as it uses less natural resources to create materials of far superior quality. Similarly, 3-D printing, also called ‘molecular manufacturing’ promises decentralized production of a wide range of products, thus reversing the centralising trend of capitalist economies. It can even transform globalization into glocalisation — a proper balance between the global and the local. Gandhi would have greatly welcomed these exciting new developments which will have a far-reaching — and largely positive — impact on mankind’s future evolution. After all, these futuristic technologies can turn into reality Gandhi’s dream: “For my material needs, the village is my world. For my spiritual needs, the world is my village” (Kulkarni, 2012: 479).

True, the internet can be misused in many different ways. Nevertheless, its overall effect has been positive. It has strengthened the constituency for peace worldwide, a technology-enabled advantage that simply did not exist before WW I and WW II. Not surprisingly, internet is hailed by many as a “weapon of mass construction”, more powerful than the weapons of mass destruction — a modern version of the pen being more powerful than the sword. The internet was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize a few years ago!

Of course, we should be under no illusion that, on its own, the internet and the numerous technological offerings of the digital era can ensure a peaceful future for humanity. To think so would be foolhardy. Peace requires active and ceaseless striving, inspired by noble ideas and impulses such as universal brotherhood, justice, love, care, compassion and cooperation that have distinguished us human beings from other species. The seeds of peace, like the seeds of violence and wars, are first planted in the minds and hearts of people. Therefore, peacemaking demands transformation of the mindset of common people and institutions with positive ideas and ideals. Specifically, both individuals and institutions need to be made aware of a cardinal lesson of human history: There can be no peace without justice; and there can be no justice if it is sought with violent means.

GANDHI'S SPINNING WHEEL: A PRIMITIVE MACHINE WITH ENORMOUS  
SPIRITUAL POWER TO CHANGE HISTORY

Which is why, the struggle for a world without wars and violence needs guidance from all those who have valiantly waged this struggle in the past. Both in ancient and recent eras of human history, all countries, continents and cultures have produced great warriors of nonviolence and justice. Many of them such as Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi, have also become martyrs to the cause they believed in. Nonviolence and justice are embedded as a core principle in all the religions, spiritual traditions and humanistic movements of the world. We should neither despair, nor cynically conclude, that this principle has failed insofar as the world continues to be rocked by violent conflicts of various kinds. As Gandhi used to say, history does not come to an end with us or with our generation. There is so much more history yet to be created, and it is the duty of every generation to try and shape this history in just and peaceful ways.

For the chariot of history to move in the desired direction, it has to move on two strong, stable and reliable wheels. One wheel is the new historical development of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the international community, made possible by the power of the internet. The other wheel is the long and rich tradition of worldwide struggles for nonviolence and justice.

In modern times, this second wheel is most inspiringly and instructively symbolized by the spinning wheel of Mahatma Gandhi. Spinning the wheel was Gandhi's vocation and mission. It is known in India as *charkha*, which is a derivative of the Sanskrit word *chakra*, meaning the eternally moving wheel of time. It is also the wheel of truth, nonviolence, justice and progress. India's national motto is *Satyameva Jayate* (sanskrit for "Truth Alone Triumphs"). Gandhi adopted the spinning wheel as his "weapon" because it proclaimed the ultimate unstoppable triumph of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). He called his movement *Satyagraha*, which means insistence on truth in all human actions, personal as well as institutional, economic as well as political. It also means "soul force", because his movement sought to gain victory of good over evil by employing spiritual power — power of the heart and soul — to transform the perpetrator of evil. Gandhi described *Satyagraha* as the "moral equivalent of war" (Shridharnani, 1939: 276), by which he meant that in this war the moral warriors of truth would refuse to commit violence

— in feelings, thoughts and actions — against the immoral agents of violence even if this entailed suffering hardships and death in the process. But the sheer fact of such show of love and compassion for the perpetrator of evil, at great risk to one's own life, would transform and re-humanise the latter. This, and not violent response to quell violence, would ensure the ultimate and durable triumph of peace in the world.

Thus, Gandhi's spinning wheel conveyed many practical, political and mystical meanings and mandates. Unique in the history of national liberation struggles around the world, Gandhi made his spinning wheel a nonviolent weapon in India's fight for independence from British colonial rule. And he succeeded in this struggle because millions upon millions of ordinary Indians responded to the spinning wheel's call for a nonviolent movement for national freedom.

For Gandhi, this was not only a struggle for India's freedom, but also a struggle for the creation of a world without exploitation, injustice, wars and violence. Indeed, his credo of nonviolence went beyond the human realm to embrace the animal world and the entire eco-system. It appealed to the people to live a life of simplicity, with limits on material consumption so that they can better pursue higher cultural, artistic and spiritual goals. It exhorted people and nations to remember that "Mother Nature has enough to satisfy every human being's need, but not every human being's greed". At a time when rich nations and rich communities are inflicting enormous destruction on the environment, and when an alarmed world community is debating ways to prevent global warming and climate change, Gandhi's maxim has now become a mantra for the Green Movement globally.

Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence had another important message of contemporary global relevance: women's empowerment. "If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman" (Deats, 2005: 123) he affirmed. He did so because of his belief that women's innate qualities are kindness, compassion, care, love and nurturing. This belief resonates with the findings of many modern evolutionary biologists who say that the law governing the future evolution of the human species is not "survival of the fittest", but "survival of the kindest". And the spinning wheel, Gandhi proclaimed, is a messenger of universal love and compassion, which according to him are the "active forms of nonviolence".

Above all, spinning the wheel was his prayerful and self-purificatory effort to achieve communion with god, which he understood as truth. And

since god does not discriminate among his children on the basis of colour, race or religion, Gandhi made the spinning wheel a powerful messenger of his appeal for equality within India's Hindu society and also for harmony between Hindus and Muslims on the one hand and, on the other hand, between India and the newly created state of Pakistan. Indeed, when he was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic in 1948, he became a martyr to the noble cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. At a time when the whole world today is worried about the threat posed by religious extremism and terrorism, Gandhi's call for inter-faith dialogue and peaceful co-existence has a strong ring of contemporary relevance.

Octavio Paz, Mexico's legendary Nobel laureate writer, who was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, wrote in his book *In Light of India*: "Gandhi's movement, which was at once spiritual and political, was one of the greatest historical novelties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." He added: "In an impious country such as ours, the figure of Gandhi is almost a miracle. We ought not to judge him. Saints are not judged, they are venerated" (Paz, 1997: 111-113).

#### KINSHIP BETWEEN THE INTERNET AND GANDHI'S SPINNING WHEEL

Since we began this discussion by positing that the chariot of mankind's march towards a future without wars and violence needs to move on the two wheels represented by the internet and the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, let's now ask ourselves the question: Can there be any kinship between the internet and the Gandhian spinning wheel? My answer is in the affirmative.

This answer may seem odd because some might ask: How can there be any relationship between the internet, which is the most advanced offering of modern science and technology, and the spinning wheel, which occupies the most primitive place in the evolution of science and technology?

It is important here to note that Gandhi was not opposed to modern science and technology, and to modernity in general. He was opposed to the misuse of science and technology for violence and wars, exploitation of the poor by the rich, and also exploitation of Mother Nature to satisfy man's endless wants and desires. He staunchly believed in the power of modern science and technology to promote peace, human welfare and happiness. In 1940 he had predicted: "We are constantly being astonished at the amazing

discoveries and inventions in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence.”

It is my firm belief that the internet is the greatest scientific discovery and invention so far in the field of nonviolence. In this sense, I have metaphorically described the internet as an *avatar* (reincarnation) of Gandhi’s spinning wheel. Of course, as I have stated earlier, for the enormous nonviolent potential of the internet to be harnessed — in other words, for its misuse to be prevented and for its proper peace and development promoting uses to be maximised — it has to be guided by the ethical principles propounded by all the great wise sages and saints in mankind’s past and present, Mahatma Gandhi being one of them.

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