Article

Reviving Ahimsa : Gandhi's Ideas on Resisting Religious Authoritarianism and Fostering Interreligious Peace in India

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Abstract

This article aims to describe religious authoritarianism in India towards Muslim groups and the important role of the concept of ahimsa in creating interfaith peace in India. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a literature review. The data sources used include texts, manuscripts, documents, and literature that discuss religious authoritarianism in India and Gandhi's thoughts on the concept of ahimsa. The results of this study indicate that the concept of ahimsa, which is the principle of non-violence espoused by Gandhi, has strong relevance in dealing with religious authoritarianism in India. Ahimsa is a catalyst that promotes religious peace by emphasizing the importance of mutual respect, dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution. It is hoped that the results of this research can become a basis for promoting religious harmony and reducing religious tensions, especially in India.

Keyword

Ahimsa, religious peace, Gandhi, religious authoritarianism, India

Pendahuluan

The conflict caused by multiculturalism is one of the main triggers for the peace crisis in India. India as a country with a long history and religious diversity has faced challenges in achieving peace. One issue that has attracted the world's attention in this context is Hindu authoritarianism, namely the practice of domination or oppression by Hindu groups over other religious groups (R. Kumar, 2022). Persecution and marginalization of religious minorities, especially Muslim groups, were exacerbated again after a prolonged conflict between the two major authorities at the time, Hinduism and Islam (Lestari, Zahidi, & Aufiya, 2023).

The two authorities are divided into Hindu authorities in India and Islamic authorities in West Pakistan and East Pakistan. After the three regions separated and became independent states on August 14, 1947, tensions between India and Pakistan continued over the struggle for territory and issues of persecution of Muslim groups in the Indian Kashmir region. Because the figures for the separation of Pakistan from India were Muslim groups such as Ali Jinnah, and Abu A'la Al-Maududi. It led to further persecution by Indian Hindu nationalist groups within India's own internal body against Muslim groups (Mahsyar, 2022).

This conflict re-emerged and was further exacerbated by hate speech by extreme Hindu religious leaders and the policies of Indian political figures who had interests. One of the issues that has caught the attention of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its report in 2022, is that even the police are unable to take action against persecution by extreme Hindu groups (Human Right Watch, 2022). This condition was exacerbated by the policy of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi which revoked the sovereignty of the state of Kashmir thus separating the Indian constitution, in another sense in Kashmir no constitution regulates and provides protection for human rights.

On the other hand, extreme Hindu groups are increasingly spreading hatred against Muslim groups which affects all Muslims in India, not just in the Kashmir region. As said by Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, a Hindu priest who called for taking up arms and fighting to conquer Mecca and turn the Kaaba into a Hindu temple (T. | C. Indonesia, 2023). It is these two variables, both from the Indian government and extreme Hindu religious leaders, that are the main cause of the conflict in the name of religious authoritarianism in India which is increasingly proliferating and it seems as if there is no room for a win-win solution on this side. But on the other hand, Gandhi with his non-violence or ahimsa thoughts that have been recorded by history is increasingly relevant to predicting various conflicts caused by the authoritarianism of the Hindu-Indian majority religion, especially against Muslim groups.

Gandhi's contribution to formulating peace during multicultural conflicts

in the past cannot be doubted, such as the humanitarian movement against racist groups in South Africa and the movement against British colonialism in India which is clear evidence of non-violent resistance (McCain, 2009). The humanitarian crisis due to conflicts of difference became Gandhi's stimulus to try to become an intellectual as well as a down-to-earth religionist. Ahimsa became one of the principles of the movement which became Gandhi's solution at that time to overcome the humanitarian crisis caused by prolonged conflict (Evitiyani & Subaryana, 2022).

In facing this challenge, the re-actualization of the concept of ahimsa as a catalyst for religious peace becomes very relevant. The concept of ahimsa, which means non-violence, has roots in the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, a spiritual and political figure who advocated for peace and religious tolerance in India (Iryana, Sujati, & Gemini, 2022). But unfortunately, the concept of ahimsa initiated by Gandhi was not able to be transmitted by previous researchers as a solutive offer amid the violence of religious authoritarianism.

They are transfixed by the inspiring Quotes, his life story, and his contribution to addressing humanitarian crises in the past without being used as a principle in overcoming various authoritarianism movements, especially religious authoritarianism in India. Like the study conducted by Louise Du Tuoit and Jana Vosloo (2021) "When bodies speak differently: putting Judith Butler in Conversation with Mahatma Gandhi on nonviolent resistance" (Du Toit & Vosloo, 2021), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (2019) "Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his life and work" (Radhakrishnan, 2019) and Charles Freer Andrews (2022) "Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story" (Andrews, 2022). Unlike previous studies, this article will not explain broadly without real implications, but this article will try to transmit only one of Gandhi's teachings, namely ahimsa.

Through a deeper understanding of Gandhi's thoughts, it is hoped that this article can make a positive contribution to promoting religious peace and overcoming authoritarianism. This article aims to reflect on Gandhi's thoughts on resistance to Hindu authoritarianism and the importance of re-actualizing the concept of ahimsa as a catalyst for religious peace in India. Through a study of Gandhi's thoughts and teachings, this article will analyze the relevance and practical implications of the concept of ahimsa in dealing with Hindu authoritarianism. This approach will not only help build mutual understanding between religious groups but also promote dialogue, tolerance, and sustainable peace in India.

Research methods

This study uses a qualitative research approach to explain the conditions of resistance to religious authoritarianism in India and the role of ahimsa as a catalyst. The qualitative research approach aims to deeply understand the interpretation, meaning, and social context of this phenomenon (Moleong, 2018). This research

method collects data that is descriptive, non-numeric, and not directly measurable.

To understand the theoretical and conceptual background of this research topic, a type of literature review research was used (Darmalaksana, 2020). Our data sources include texts, manuscripts, documents, and literature dealing with religious authoritarianism in India and the concept of ahimsa advanced by Gandhi. This data is collected through a desk review to study and evaluate the information found.

Furthermore, the data and information collected will be analyzed descriptively and in-depth to describe the problem of resistance to religious authoritarianism in India and the concept of ahimsa. This analysis will provide a deeper understanding of these conditions and the important role of ahimsa in creating religious peace in India. By using qualitative research methods and types of literature review research, it is expected to provide in-depth insight and explain the relationship between resistance to religious authoritarianism in India and the concept of ahimsa as a catalyst for religious peace.

Examining Hindu Majority's Authoritarianism Towards Muslim Minorities

The portrait of the authoritarianism of the Hindu majority towards the Muslim minority in India refers to arbitrary authoritarian treatment without regard to the human side of Muslim groups which must be respected (Van Der Veer, 2021). The authoritarian treatment carried out by Hindu-Indian authoritarianism is included in the social, political, and religious context. And the most important thing to note is that this treatment is only carried out by Indian extreme Hindu groups and Indian political figures who have interests (Mukhopadhyay, 2009).

In the context of resistance to religious authoritarianism in India, it is quite a complex matter to explain. Some treatments of authoritarianism that lead to communal, systemic persecution and marginalization, identity politics, and Indian government policies hit the Indian Muslim minority simultaneously (Wilkinson, 2008). This led to the collapse of religious tolerance in several parts of India.

On the side of the communal violence that occurred in 2021 which was perpetrated by the hardline Hindu community against Muslim groups in the Muzzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh in 2013. On the same side in 2020 in New Delhi, the capital city of India, the same communal violence occurred between extreme Hindu nationalist communities with Muslim groups which caused 53 Muslims to be killed and buildings destroyed, as well as looting of Muslim group leaders.

At the same level, systemic discrimination is also practiced by the extreme Hindu community. In 2022, several Muslim students will hold a joint action by studying outside of school because they are not allowed to enter the classroom wearing headscarves. The boycott of halal products by India's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) then also includes systemic discrimination supported by India's

despotic regime (Ekowidi, 2022).

Identity politics has also boomed and sparked violence against Muslim groups in India, as happened in 2021 when the house of the former Indian foreign minister Salman Khursid who is a congress party figure was burnt by hard-line Hindu militia after Khursid published a book that compared types of Hindu nationalism which flourished under the government of PM Narendra Modi with extremist Islamic groups such as ISIS (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

And in the end, the problem of religious authoritarianism in India has been exacerbated by the discriminatory policies of the Indian government. Such as the policy of releasing Kashmir from the state of India and releasing its autonomous rights, resulting in a legal vacuum and causing the arbitrariness of extreme Hindu groups to carry out persecution, looting, and even sexual violence against the rights of Kashmiri Muslim groups (Rosdiana, 2020). On the other hand, the controversial policies implemented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has been in office since 2014, are increasingly pushing Hindu nationalist ideology. This has great significance in the context of modern Indian society. In February 2020, there was tension and conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Delhi after the Indian parliament amended the Citizenship Act by accelerating the naturalization of immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who adhere to religions other than Islam, this clash was very detrimental, with more of 50 people died (Human Right Watch, 2021).

Mahatma Gandhi and His Role in bridging religious conflicts in India

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, commonly known as Mahatma Gandhi, was an influential political and spiritual leader who played an important role in India's struggle for independence from British rule (Goswami, 1916). He was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, a coastal town in present-day Gujarat, India. Gandhi was a nationalist figure, spiritual leader, and pioneer of the movement for India's independence from British colonialism in the 20th century. He is known as the Father of the Nation of India and also as a pioneer of non-violent civil action or satyagraha. (Wolpert, 2001)

Gandhi came from a middle-class Hindu family and received his early education in India. In 1888, he went to London to study law and was called to the bar in 1891. After completing his studies, he returned to India and started practicing law in Bombay (now Mumbai). (M. H. (Mahadev H. Desai, 1968)

In 1893, Gandhi went to South Africa to pursue legal cases, and it was while there that he first encountered racial discrimination and injustice. This experience deeply influenced him, and he began to fight for the rights of Indians living in South Africa. (Dalton, 2012) He developed a philosophy of non-violent resistance, which he called Satyagraha, which means "force of truth" or "force of soul".

After spending about 20 years in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and became actively involved in the Indian independence movement. He advocated nonviolent civil disobedience and peaceful protest as a means to achieve political and social change. Gandhi believed in the power of truth, love, and self-suffering to awaken the consciences of oppressors and bring about reconciliation (Chakrabarty, 2008).

One of the most important events in Gandhi's leadership was the Salt March, which took place in 1930 (Lelyveld, 2011). In protest against the British monopoly on salt production, Gandhi led a 240-mile march to the Arabian Sea, where he and his followers produced salt by the evaporation of seawater. This act of civil disobedience sparked widespread concern and marked a turning point in India's struggle for independence.

Gandhi's commitment to non-violence and his emphasis on social justice, equality, and religious tolerance made him a respected figure not only in India but also internationally. She advocated for the rights of the untouchables (Dalit), women's empowerment, and communal harmony. Gandhi's principles of nonviolence influenced many civil rights leaders and inspired movements for social change around the world (Ghose, 1991).

One of Gandhi's most significant contributions to bridging religious conflicts in India was through the principles and practices of non-violence. He believes that conflicts between religions in India can be overcome through dialogue, tolerance, and unity. (Hardiman, 2003) Gandhi stressed the importance of respecting religious freedom and respecting the values of different religions.

In 1925, Gandhi founded the organization known as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The organization's main goal was to promote national unity among Hindus, but Gandhi also supported their efforts to strengthen harmonious relations with other religious communities in India. (M. Karamchand. Gandhi, 1995) He believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was essential for the progress of India as an independent country.

During the Partition Period of India in 1947, when India gained its independence from the British, Gandhi was actively involved in maintaining peace between Hindus and Muslims. He voiced the importance of coexistence in harmony and emphasized the need to respect the rights of religious minorities. (Publications, 2009) Gandhi traveled to various violence-stricken areas to hold dialogues with religious leaders and help reduce tensions between religious groups.

However, although Gandhi's efforts to bridge the religious conflict in India were invaluable, there was still sectarian violence involving Hindus and Muslims during the division of India. On January 30, 1948, Gandhi himself was killed by a Hindu extremist who felt that Gandhi was too friendly to Muslims (T. A. Gandhi, 2007).

The life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi continue to inspire people today. He is remembered as one of the greatest leaders and supporters of non-violent resistance in the world (I. Desai, 2011). His philosophy and methods of peaceful protest remain relevant in the pursuit of justice, equality, and human rights.

Exploring Mahatma Gandhi's Concept of Ahimsa

Ahimsa is etymologically a belief system that comes from Sanskrit which means "non-violence". (Bush, 2017) The most important aspect of the traditions of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism is Ahimsa itself. The concept of Ahimsa was first used in the Hindu religious texts known as the Upanishads, the main part of which dates back to 800 BC. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Puranas, and later in the writings of the Buddhas, this concept is explained in greater detail. According to the Manusmrti book, everyone who practices Ahimsa must be a vegetarian who does not consume or harm animals (Turner, 2000). The main value of every Hindu is Ahimsa. Mahatma Gandhi, explained this concept to Western society, according to some powerful people, Gandhi's anti-violence campaign weakened Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign. and Nel Son Mandela, among other humanitarian leaders (Lawgiver, 2008).

Mahatma Gandhi has one of the most famous and significant concepts of thought developed by him. This thinking is based on non-violence or what is commonly called Ahimsa. Ahimsa is a foundational principle in Gandhi's philosophy and practice, and a moral cornerstone in his struggle for social justice, peace, and Indian independence (Debjani Ganguly, 2008).

Gandhi saw Ahimsa as a very powerful and effective force in social change. For him, Ahimsa is not just abstinence from physical acts of violence but also encompasses a deeper emotional and spiritual dimension. He taught that Ahimsa involves self-control and conquest of the ego, as well as developing strength and courage that come from within one's self (S. Kumar, 2010). For Gandhi, Ahimsa was not just a political tactic, but a moral principle that must be applied in every aspect of life. He argues that violence will only fuel the cycle of revenge and ongoing conflict. Through Ahimsa, Gandhi sought to change people's hearts and minds and bring about lasting social transformation.

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa is a goal that must be achieved by every individual. He argues that any form of violence, whether physical, verbal, or emotional, will only result in an endless cycle of violence. Conversely, by practicing Ahimsa, individuals can create positive changes in themselves and society as a whole (Allen, 2019).

Gandhi used Ahimsa as a central principle in his movement, especially in the Satyagraha campaign. Satyagraha is a method of non-violent resistance that achieves its power through moral truth and voluntary steadfastness of suffering. Through

Satyagraha, Gandhi mobilized the masses to fight British colonialism in a peaceful but very effective way. Gandhi also used Ahimsa in his campaign against racial discrimination in South Africa and India's struggle for independence from British colonialism. (Slate, 2023) He trained his followers to use non-violent methods, such as boycotts, hunger strikes, and peaceful protests, as tools to overthrow an unjust system and demand justice.

Ahimsa is also closely connected to Gandhi's belief in unity and tolerance between different religions and communities in India. He stressed the importance of respecting and understanding differences, as well as promoting dialogue between people of different religions. Gandhi saw religious pluralism as India's wealth, and Ahimsa as a means to bridge differences and achieve harmonious unity. (Unger et al., 2002)

However, it is important to remember that Gandhi's ideas on Ahimsa also faced criticism (Lawgiver, 2008). Some argue that the application of Ahimsa in highly violent or authoritarian situations may not always be practical or effective. In addition, the Indian context of Gandhi's time was different from today's social and political context, and the challenges faced by modern society can raise questions about the universal applicability of Ahimsa thought.

Overall, Gandhi's ideas on Ahimsa played a very important role in his movement and became a valuable legacy in the struggle for peace, social justice, and conflict resolution. Ahimsa remains a relevant and inspiring moral principle, encouraging individuals and society to seek non-violent ways to achieve life goals (Gandhi, 1970).

Revitalizing Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Ahimsa: A Key Instrument for Religious Peace in India

Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa have become an important foundation in the Indian independence movement and resistance against colonialism (Siswadi, 2022). However, his thoughts on Ahimsa are also relevant in the context of religious peace in India today. The re-actualization of Gandhi's thought refers to the renewal or re-understanding of the concept of Ahimsa which can be applied to deal with religious conflicts and promote harmony among different religious groups.

India is a country rich in religious diversity, with many religious groups coexisting. However, religious conflicts and tensions between religious groups also occurred. In this context, Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa became an important instrument for promoting religious peace. Ahimsa teaches the importance of avoiding physical and verbal violence, as well as building a dialogue of mutual understanding and tolerance between religious groups (M. Gandhi, 1965).

Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa are relevant because he emphasized the importance of creating social justice, equality, and harmony among various

religious groups (Hazama, 2023). Gandhi's principle of non-violence also teaches how to resolve conflicts peacefully and avoid authoritarian attitudes in dealing with religious minorities. This relevance can help overcome religious tensions and promote sustainable peace in India.

Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa can serve as an important instrument in achieving religious peace in India. As a principal of fundamentals, first, Ahimsa is a teaching in religions in India including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism (Roy, 2012). This principle emphasizes the importance of avoiding physical, verbal, and mental violence against all living things. In the context of resistance to extreme Hindu authoritarianism in India, Hindus who understand the teachings of Ahimsa should make it the basis for building relationships of mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for all religious groups.

As a non-violence teaching, ahimsa supports interfaith harmony by emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and understanding of religious differences (Kaushikee, 2014). In the context of acts of violence committed by Hindu extremist groups in India, it cannot be justified that they represent Hindu religious teachings. Because the principle of ahimsa teaches that every individual has the freedom to practice their religion and no single religion has the right to dominate or persecute other religions. This is what Gandhi exemplified when he gathered volunteers for victims of British colonialization in South Africa, where he respected humanity beyond racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

So at this point, by understanding ahimsa, it is hoped that constructive ways will be created in dealing with conflicts in major and minor relationships (Low, 1997). Such as open dialogue, listening to each other, and finding common ground between religious groups. Thus, Ahimsa is very relevant for every religious group in creating a safe space for dialogue, understanding each other's points of view, and seeking win-win solutions.

By adopting the principles of Ahimsa, such as mutual respect, mutual understanding, and cooperation, Indian society can create a climate conducive to interfaith harmony. Gandhi's thinking also emphasizes the importance of liberation from authoritarian attitudes and domination to create sustainable peace.

In conclusion, the re-actualization of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa has important relevance in the context of religious peace in India. Gandhi's thoughts on Ahimsa can be an important instrument in overcoming conflict, promoting dialogue, and creating harmony among various religious groups in India.

Conclusion

India, as a country rich in religious diversity, often faces tensions between religious groups. In this context, practicing Ahimsa can have a positive impact. Ahimsa offers a peaceful approach to resolving religious conflicts. This principle teaches

the importance of avoiding violence in dealing with tensions and conflicts and encourages resolutions based on dialogue, mediation, and negotiation. Ahimsa also involves personal transformation, in which individuals seek to overcome violence within themselves, including in thoughts, words, and actions. By personally practicing Ahimsa, individuals can become agents of peace and contribute to overall religious peace. Namjun what must be noted is that the implementation of Ahimsa in resolving religious conflicts requires commitment from all parties involved. It also requires awareness of the complexities and challenges of existing religious conflicts. Although Ahimsa has great potential, to achieve sustainable peace, collaborative efforts and long-term commitment from all parties are required.

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