



Indian Knowledge Systems and Conflict Resolution: Exploring Non-Violent Traditions in Achieving SDG 16

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significant contributions of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions through non-violent conflict resolution traditions. It examines the strong philosophical underpinnings that are inherent in Vedic and Upanishadic tradition, and develops such concepts as Rta (cosmic order), Dharma (righteous duty), and Samvada (dialogue) as the manifestation of understanding and solving conflict as some kind of disturbance to harmony. It explores classic institutional processes, such as the Dharmashastra/Smriti legal systems, a consensus-oriented justice system of village councils (Panchayats, Nyaya Panchayats), and diplomatic tactics revealed in texts as Arthashastra by Kautilya, that emphasize the restorative approach to justice, with community participation. The modern applicability of the traditions, especially Gandhian philosophy (Satyagraha & Ahimsa) and contemporary activism non-violence, is also explored in the paper, which proves their versatility in being applied to contemporary issues such as structural



violence and social injustice. Its methodological variance with the Western approaches (community harmony vs. individual rights) becomes evident when a comparative analysis is conducted, and thus, chances are seen to have global strategies to peacebuilding integrated. The significance of the principles of IKS, which are non-violence, dialogue, ethical governance, and consensus-building, provides useful avenues to empower institutions, access to justice, and build inclusive societies that work towards the objectives of SDG 16. The paper concludes that the likelihood of successful mutual integration of the ethical and practical insight of IKS with modern frameworks holds substantial potential for enhancing conflict resolution and achieving sustainable peace globally

Introduction

India has long-standing wisdom traditions and indigenous knowledge systems that resonate with the elaboration of sustainable peace, justice, and strong institutions, as advanced in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16). Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) involves a number of mechanisms of conflict resolution, specifically, their traditional means, their moral basis, and their applicability to modern (inner) mediation practices. This shows that centuries-old Indian moral and operational systems present new ways of achieving the aims of SDG 16 via the approaches of non-violent dispute resolution and the enhancement of institutions (Bali & Dogra, 2025).

The IKS, as a part of the contemporary development of peacebuilding efforts, is not confined to the study related to curiosity. Several studies show ancient, classical, and modern traditions of mediation and conflict, delving into the Vedic and Upanishadic texts and the Spirit of Rta (cosmic order) and Dharma (righteous duty), and the importance of dialogue (Samvada) in solving disputes (Bali & Dogra, 2025). These foundational concepts provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how traditional Indian approaches to conflict resolution can inform contemporary peacebuilding strategies.

To effectively implement these traditions in current conditions, it is important to adapt them much more thoroughly, considering contemporary problems, but not forgetting the primary integrity. This involves putting up with structural violence, effects of long-past trauma, and power imbalances that did



not play a central role in the traditional setting. The interactions between the IKS and modern techniques of peacebuilding have a great opportunity in improving peacebuilding activities towards SDG 16 worldwide. The bent of the ancient and the new ways makes it feasible to devise more encompassing, culture-sensitive, and durable processes of creating peaceful and fair societies. In this regard, more research, capacity building, and policies will be critical in achieving this potential in the future. The great wisdom ingrained in IKS is a precious treasure that can be utilized by the continuing struggle of all human beings to make this world a better and just place, although it can only be realized through long-term and reflective work in order to convert this wisdom into a useful present-day operation.

Philosophical Foundations of Non-Violence in Indian Thought

In the Vedas and Upanishads, the traditions of Indian conflict resolution are strongly marked by the philosophical roots of the Vedic and Upanishadic thought, which, in turn, created the principles upon which conflicts could be resolved in the contemporary world. The notions of cosmic order (Rta) and righteous duty (Dharma) are used as pillars, and dialogue (Samvada) is key in the process of solving the dispute (Bali & Dogra, 2025). Those ancient writings did not simply view conflict as disagreement between people, but rather, these writings thought of conflict as harm to the cosmic order that must be fixed by righteous deeds and significant conversation. The principle of Rta signifies natural order in the universe, which implies that there are conflicts when the natural order is altered (Brahmani, 2024). According to conventional Indian thinking, the resolution of conflicts consists of adjusting human relations to this scheme of things. Dharma, however, offered the guiding moral filter in which the conflicts are to be addressed, focusing on duty, righteousness, and moral responsibility. The use of the concept of Samvada constituted the approach at the methodological level, and the use of coercion was no longer an option but a priority of conversation, understanding, and mutual respect (Srinivas, 2024).

Contemporary expression of these ancient values shows astonishing resonance with SDG 16, which focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies. In the scheme of dominating goalposts that define the basis of its methodology, positive criminology needs to be grounded on the principles of convergence, universal humanism, non-violent conflict solving, and the establishment of a healthy society (Nomokonov & Sudakova, 2020). It is an indication that the ancient wisdom traditions of India could offer something to present-day justice and institutional growth practices. The most important opportunity in terms of increasing the effectiveness in the implementation of SDG 16 constitutes the role played by integrating these philosophical roots with contemporary peacebuilding endeavors. Institutions will be



able to create more effective ways of settling disputes due to the presence of time-tested philosophical systems put in place to guide the contemporary conflict resolution mechanisms.

Dharmashastra and Smriti texts were the sources of the legal frameworks and governance systems, assuming that kings, elders, and the village councils had a crucial role to play in the preservation of peace. Such ancient writings put in place complex systems of governance which coexisted between centralized powers and local autonomy and provided, as such, various levels of conflict resolution. The Dharmashastra tradition, especially, evolved elaborate protocols of settling disputes of all kinds, but with a bias to restorative rather than penal methods (Olivelle, 2005).

It is impossible to overestimate the role of village councils in the traditional Indian society. The local communities were more interested in local indigenous dispute resolution systems practiced at village councils which were based on consensus-based decision-making. These institutions were representations of participant governance that go back further than centuries of democratic principles and that show how local societies were capable of relatively apt governance of conflicts using inclusivity.

Diplomacy and conciliation are also emphasized by the Arthashastra of Kautilya and the Indian medieval traditions (Bali & Dogra, 2025). Arthashastra, which could be compared with Machiavelli's work 'The Prince,' was in fact promoting well-developed policies in diplomacy, which involved more diplomacy and compromise than the use of military force (Matruni, 2024). Multiple methods of conflict resolution and ways of achieving political aims without using violence were proposed in this ancient text, among which were economic incentives, the formation of alliances, and the use of strategic communication. The customs of diplomacy that developed out of these writings stressed the significance of realizing there is more than one side to a problem, the necessity of basing trust in reliable conduct, and developing win-win answers, which foresaw the meeting of underlying interests of both sides. These strategies are directly intersecting with the modern conflict resolution strategies and can be extremely informative in modern diplomacy.

Significance of the Integration of IKS in SDG 16

The impact of Indian traditions of mediation on modern Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practices, with a particular focus on the non-violent negotiating philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, is significant in contemporary times (Bondurant, 1988). The philosophy of Gandhi and his method of conflict resolution was essentially an ancient Indian concept through which the wisdom of the past was applied to be put



into effect in the present time. These tactics of satyagraha (truth-force) and ahimsa (non-violence) gave real ways of responding to an individual and also to structural conflicts. Conflict resolution was the key approach developed by Gandhi, and it had some vital principles that are applicable in the modern-day building of peace. They include the significance of confronting the root causes of the problem instead of its symptoms, the strength of a moral authority in any negotiation, and the efficacy of the non-violent struggle against any injustice. The fact that Gandhi was able to use these principles to manage large-scale political conflicts proves his ability to scale and effectiveness (Anand, n.d).

Modern phenomena of non-violent activism keep proving how effective the systems of knowledge in India can be when it comes to solving contemporary conflicts. Civil operations that revolve around non-violent leadership emphasize collectivity, collaboration, flexibility, genuineness, and interaction in a community. They are, as such, central to democratic actions and very realistic as far as the multiple pressures within civic spaces are concerned (Ari, 2024). These new applications demonstrate that some of the old Indian methods of solving conflicts could be modified to fit in the solutions to the modern world, and at the same time, continue to uphold traditional ideas.

Social change actors navigate cultural and structural barriers to implement non-violent strategies, offering compelling examples of grassroots peace building, with findings underscoring the efficacy of context-based leadership practices in promoting non-violent organizing for peace, particularly in hyperlocal settings (Ari, 2024). This demonstrates the continued relevance of traditional Indian approaches to conflict resolution in addressing modern challenges.

A comparative analysis between Indian and Western approaches, offering insights into their integration for global peacebuilding. Traditional Indian approaches to conflict resolution differ significantly from Western models in several key areas. While Western approaches often emphasize individual rights and adversarial procedures, Indian traditions prioritize community harmony and consensus-building. This fundamental difference in orientation leads to different methodologies and outcomes. IKS typically approaches conflict as a community concern rather than an individual problem. This perspective recognizes that conflicts affect not just the immediate parties but the entire social fabric, requiring solutions that address broader social implications. Western approaches, while valuable in protecting individual rights, may sometimes overlook these community dimensions of conflict (Laws Learned, 2024).



A combination of the methods of the Indian and Western spheres can serve as a huge chance to make the world peaceful. Ethical and positive politics can maintain a sound strategic conjunction between science and religion and boost the resolution of worldwide problems and hostile habits (Hadi, 2023). This integration can draw on the strengths of both traditions while addressing their respective limitations. The IKS also contributes holistic views, focuses on maintaining relations, and provides a mature perception of social life. The Western systems provide methodologies, protection of the rights of individuals, and institutionalized structures. A combination of these strategies can generate more effective and more thorough conflict resolution mechanisms.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Contemporary problems, such as structural violence and social injustices, need to be addressed in the contemporary application of IKS. The transformation of the power balance as a human structural violence must be encompassed by non-violent opposition to global problems, whereas liberation should concentrate on social justice, social political stability, and vital human security. This requires adapting traditional approaches to address modern forms of inequality and oppression. The issue of structural violence, which means the structural means through which social institutions may hurt or disadvantage others, must be answered in a complex way, and traditional IKS would be quite fit to answer the same. This focus of dharma (righteous duty) furnishes a framework through which to confront an unjust system without losing social cohesion. This could inform indigenous peacebuilding that is inherently influenced by contextual factors (Ari, 2024).

The application of IKS to global conflicts requires careful attention to cultural context and local conditions. While the underlying principles may be universal, their application must be adapted to specific cultural, political, and social contexts. The effectiveness of the Indian solutions to the conflicts in various Indian societies shows that they can be applicable and used to solve global issues. The type of diversity in India, especially linguistic, religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, thus offers a good example to peace-builders around the globe.

Implications for Implementation of SDG 16

Goal 16 of the SDG focuses on the importance of strong institutions that are in line with conventional Indian ideas about governance and solving conflicts. The models which can be created to develop strong institutions that can effectively help to resolve conflicts. This include the legal frameworks given by



Dharmashastra and Smriti texts where peace was maintained by the role of the king, elders and village council and the indigenous methods of dispute resolution practiced by the village councils based on achieving decision through consensus. All these characteristics of these traditional institutions are important examples that can be followed by modern institutions that want to achieve the goals set by SDG 16. The high resilience of these institutions throughout centuries implies their efficacy in social stabilization and problem-solving of conflicts.

Target 16.5 of SDG 16, which emphasizes equal access to justice, has significant support in the traditional Indian ways of resolving conflicts. The village council system specifically availed affordable, accessible, and culturally relevant mechanisms for resolving conflicts (Chatterjee, 2025). The contemporary use of said principles may be used to eliminate the impediments to justice that deprive many individuals of the possibility of using a formal legal system. Traditional Indian systems also put a lot of emphasis on consensus-building and dialogue, which are also gaining a lot of credence in the modern criminal justice system. The approaches emphasize reconciling relationships as well as finding solutions to the causes of the problem instead of merely punishing the wrongdoer (Bali & Dogra, 2025).

The ultimate goal of SDG 16, creating peaceful and inclusive societies, requires approaches that can address diversity while maintaining social cohesion. In India, the coexistence principle has played a significant role in the development of a multicultural and multiethnic society. Despite challenges, India's experience managing diversity provides valuable insights for building inclusive societies. Traditional IKS offers several principles that support inclusive societies, recognition of multiple valid perspectives, emphasis on dialogue and understanding, focus on common interests rather than differences, and commitment to non-violent approaches to addressing disagreements.

Challenges and Limitations

The effectiveness of the Indian solutions to the conflicts in various Indian societies shows that they can be applicable and used to solve global issues. The type of diversity in India, especially linguistic, religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, thus offers a good example to peace-builders around the globe. This historical experience demonstrates how traditional social structures can be exploited and manipulated by external forces. Modern applications of traditional Indian approaches must be designed to resist such manipulation while maintaining their core principles. This requires developing a sophisticated understanding of power dynamics and implementing appropriate safeguards to protect vulnerable communities.



Chronic suffering is a present rather than a past domain of structural violence, and comparative analysis of genocide, as well as other forms of massive and organized violence, can highlight shared processes as well as significant differences and looping effects between political processes and individual experience, and the reverse (Kirmayer, 2014). The traditional IKS to be used should give attention to and address historical trauma that can inhibit the capacity of the communities to participate in traditional forms of conflict resolution. This involves coming up with trauma-informed processes that are able to assist communities in healing past traumas as well as inculcating the capacity to handle the current conflict. Indigenous Indian ideas of cure and recovery can play a part in this work, but they have to be combined with the contemporary knowledge of trauma and trauma-related outcomes.

Way Ahead

The traditional systems of Indian knowledge can be blended and harmonized with modern systems of conflict resolution. There is a need to consider finding particular mechanisms and principles that were shown to be effective in various contexts and creating guidelines for their usage in the contemporary context. The successful modern use of the traditional methods is worth paying specific attention to, recording the cases of their successful application and the analysis of the factors that predetermined their success. Serious investments in capacity building and training are needed as far as the implementation of the IKS in conflict resolution is concerned. Traditional knowledge holders should be made partners in designing and offering training programs so that the original precepts and practices are not altered but are just modified to suit the current realities. The training programs must be designed to cover various audiences, such as government officials, conflict resolution practitioners, and leaders of civil societies and communities. Deviations of treatment might be implied to the type of audience he would be addressing, although the implication of the usage of the conventional principles in the contemporary context should be focal to all his audiences.

Such a normative-formative framework should ensure that knowledge is developed to advance human, social, economic, and environmental goals according to the moral principles of each tradition. Policy makers should consider how traditional Indian approaches to conflict resolution can be integrated into existing legal and institutional frameworks. This may require legislative changes, institutional reforms, and new resource allocations. The integration should be done carefully to avoid tokenism or superficial adoption of traditional symbols without meaningful integration of underlying principles. Successful integration will require sustained commitment and ongoing evaluation to ensure effectiveness.



Conclusion

The study of IKS and its useful application to conflict management shows that there exists a treasure-house worth many contributions to the SDG 16 targets. Such systems involved diverse conflict resolution systems which have moral innuendos upon modern day mediation processes based on the customs of Vedic and the Upanishadic thoughts, which brought out the notion of order in the universe, righteous action, and consultation in the process of dispute settlement. The traditions of non-violence found in the Indian philosophy and practice offer the pragmatic platforms for the development of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. These methods have been applied since ancient times through village councils and in more recent times through Gandhian satyagraha as a process that satisfies that consensus-building, dialogue, and moral authority are effective in delivering solutions to conflicts on many levels. The relevance of the traditions in the contemporary world can be seen in the way they are still applied even in modern contexts, and the way they are in line with the international norms of the peacebuilding processes. Non-violent organizing in order to make a social change is hindered by cultural and structural obstacles that actors still find a way to overcome to achieve results that present inspiring cases of how grassroots peace building can be carried out to such an extent that they point to the effectiveness of situational based leadership principles in advancing non-violent organizing as a vehicle to make a peace.

The journey toward achieving SDG 16 will benefit significantly from engaging with diverse knowledge traditions, including the rich heritage of Indian approaches to conflict resolution. These traditions remind us that the goal is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, understanding, and harmony, objectives that require both ancient wisdom and contemporary innovation to achieve.

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