

Davut Hanveliyev

March 31, 2023

Kishwaukee College
21193 Malta Road
Malta, IL 60150

Violence, social injustice, and racism are some of the terms I hear populating discussions about racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Learning about such injustice makes my heart bleed. Growing up in an Asian country until I was 12 years old, where the population was mostly homogenous, I do not recall witnessing such hatred and violence between people who are different from one another. Therefore, it never occurred to me that certain terms should be used to differentiate people from one another. So, when I started learning about violence on the news after I came to the U.S., I wondered why we should treat one another as not being equal or worthy of respect just because some of us have certain skin colors or do not share the same cultural values.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.” Gandhi’s message had a centripetal force pulling diverse people together, unifying them in peaceful resistance against oppression. My thoughts resonate with his beliefs about people being equal, regardless of their racial, ethnic, and religious differences, because we all have divine nature. Differences should be celebrated, not discriminated against. In this regard, Gandhi said, “Civilization is the encouragement of differences.” It is the diversity of people that adds an enriching element to any society, making it vibrant. Therefore, this enriching element should be acknowledged as an achievement. Societies that celebrate diversity have the privilege of serving as places where people from diverse backgrounds choose to live.

History taught us the invaluable lesson that violence was not the tool to build a democratic society. However, nonviolence and respect showed us their potential for building a new society. This attitude was manifested through Gandhi's satyagraha, nonviolent resistance. Gandhi said, “Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of humankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” Martin Luther King, Jr.’s statement on peace and nonviolence runs parallel with Gandhi's words. He saw nonviolence as a starting point for attaining peace, stating, “Those of us who believe in this method can be voices of reason, sanity, and understanding amid the voices of violence, hatred, and emotion.” Both leaders believed that only nonviolence could lead us to build a society whose members can thrive, developing themselves intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

King said, “You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” So, as a student, I have started expanding my knowledge of racial and social injustice issues so that I can advocate for myself and others. Raising my consciousness about these issues will help me better understand people’s experiences with racism and other “isms” and join their fight against social injustice. It is because, as Gandhi said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”