

Amid war, it's time to take a position — for the oppressed

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The war in Palestine is as old as the biblical record.

Mindless wars that have turned the beautiful Arab world into a militarised territory have been the feature of modern times. The unfortunate damage caused by the attacks of opposing groups is alarming, exposing world peace to near-permanent damage and inflicting everyday casualties by the thousands — of children, women, and men.

The war in Palestine is as old as the biblical record. The Abrahamic faith is riven with faithful differences between the creator and the condemned. The Jewish people followed the direction of their prophet, Moses, to escape war. Their life has been that of displacement and recovery. In an amazing demonstration of calibre, the Jewish people have bounced back at an impressive speed.

The Jewish nature of work and industry has derived from their long biographies of oppression and violence. They have not forgotten and are neither made to forget. Their existence, it seems, is defined by being pushed into chambers of violence.

However, the right-wing crude elements running the government in Israel currently have no sense of solidarity and empathy for their own ancestry. Prime Minister Netanyahu has time and again proven that he is not the right man to hold peace accords together.

The most important sites for the ancient religions are in Jerusalem, where Judaism, Christianity and Islam stake their claim. The fight for their ownership has changed the region's portfolio. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim conflict has overtaken the historical tribal relations that were essential for the region's trade and history.

Mohandas K Gandhi had taken a principled position against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land. He saw this as a recipe for long-term disaster. He pointed towards the culprit in charge, the British administration. However, there were sympathies with the condition of the Jews. He called them "untouchables of Christianity", equating them with the "untouchables of Hindu faith". He saw emigration into Palestine furrowing the divides between Arabs and Jews.

The hatred against the Jews is catastrophic. They are hated by their junior theological partners, the Christians, and their youngest cousins, Muslims.

This was so violent that mosques in my region, Maharashtra's Nanded, were rife with toxic Yahuddi hatred. In Nanded, there would be public exhibitions with graphic photographs of mutilated bodies of children in Palestine. It was surprising that such an exhibition was being held in an otherwise disconnected city, far from the mainstream of even Indian politics, let alone global. Led by devout Muslim youth, such an event would educate us about a faraway country called Palestine. They had a visceral hatred for Yahuddis, calling them the most evil people. I did not know what this meant then or the consequences of it until I was exposed to the international politics of World War II.

The unfortunate character of this was the fanatic propaganda driven by Islamist ideology that would only see a faraway land in Palestine as suffering but not lend an iota of sympathy for their neighbours fallen by caste atrocities.

Incidentally, the Hindu supremacist and Muslim radicals did not support the Jewish people but for very different reasons and points of reference. The Hindus found inspiration in Hitler's agenda, while the Muslims hated them for the occupation of Palestine.

Dr Ambedkar had expressed his appreciation for Moses, drawing parallels to the Jews and Dalits. He admired how Moses worked hard to unite the Jews, providing them leadership in times of extermination under Pharaohs. Moses, who argued for "undertaking the thankless but noble task of leading Jews out of their captivity", was an inspiration to Ambedkar. As Israelites followed their leader in desperation but with hope, Ambedkar also saw himself as the 'Moses' of his people. He was not wrong. He remains the prophet of his people who resurrect his memories at every catastrophe or celebration, seeking approval in his words.

We need to take Gandhi and Ambedkar's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The idea of two states was imposed on the modern apparatus of Palestine. It did not mean that Jews had no relation or genealogy to that land.

In the war between the strong and the weak, our solidarity is with the weak. We can relate to the pains of resourceless people. Even though the fragmented Palestinian people, divided between PLO and Hamas, may not have the wherewithal to fight against the might of the state backed by the world's most militarised country, they are the people with strong convictions for their future. The mothers birth their offspring into their own land, proudly asserting their right to belong.

The colonisation of land is a real matter. Since 1948, the size of Palestinian land has been shrinking, overtaken by the settler. The agenda seems to either expel the Palestinians, which has been happening since 1948, eliminate them or make them second-class citizens. These options are not viable and acceptable to any self-respecting human being whose sovereignty is tied to their motherland.

This does not cede the right of Jews to have their homeland.

The Dalit community has a moral and political responsibility as leaders to extend solidarity to the oppressed people of the Arab land, not just Palestinians but also those in Yemen's war-torn hinterlands, with the native tribes of Arab countries who remain largely second-class citizens ruled by invading tribes that have established their rule, as well as the Jews. We do not support the terrorism imposed by minuscule ideologues who make the majority suffer.

Our politics has to align with sincere efforts to end warfare and advocate for absolute peace in international geopolitics for the Israelis, Arabs, and tribes of the dry land.

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