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## The Philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam for Peace and Reconciliation Amid the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

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### ABSTRACT :

The Sanskrit term 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' literally referring to 'The World Is One Family,' is an ancient Indian philosophy that focuses on the greater common good and encourages global conscientiousness and peace among different societies in the world. It inspires nations to put aside their disagreements and work together for the sake of humanity. It also urges individuals to focus on their shared humanity rather than clinging to their limited allegiances based on race, nationality, or religion. At present, many parts of the world are experiencing severe humanitarian crises due to violence and conflicts, Israel and Palestine being two such regions. Of late, Israel's military action in Gaza in reaction to Hamas's recent terrorist strike on the former has received significant global attention in the wake of mass killings of civilians of both sides. The present paper examines the historical background and contemporary socio-political dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and explores how the theory of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam addresses this age-long conflict and offers a reasonable perspective to resolve the issue.

**Keywords** Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Hamas, Peace, Reconciliation

### Introduction:

The phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' of Sanskrit that translates to 'The World Is One Family,' finds mention in Hindu scriptures like the Maha Upanishad and Hitopadesh and can also be found in several verses throughout the Bhagavad Gita. Because it emphasizes the need of having an inclusive macro perspective and prioritizes the interests of the community over those of an individual or a family, this term has acquired even more significance in today's turbulent world plagued by conflict and violence. Notably, "The Gandhian vision of respect for all forms of life, nonviolent conflict resolution and holistic development is an extension of the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (Pathak and Tewari 152). By promoting regard for the welfare of others, particularly when addressing significant issues like peace, tolerance for diversity, sustainable development, and climate change, the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam promotes world harmony and conscientiousness. It motivates nations to set aside their differences and cooperate for the good of humanity as a whole. It exhorts people to rise above narrow allegiances based on race, nationality, or religion and to concentrate on their common humanity. This shift of perspective has the power to strengthen human empathy and the desire to end the suffering and injustices that the human race face all throughout the world.

Unfortunately, the world we live in is in a restless and frantic state. In several parts of the world people have been facing severe humanitarian crises. Currently, there are so many countries engaged in war. While the scope and nature of these conflicts vary greatly, they all have a devastating impact on the local population, resulting in severe human distress and deaths.

The terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas—a political and military Palestinian Sunni Islamist group that rules the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories, which are under Israeli occupation—and, in response, Israel's military action on Gaza have garnered considerable international attention recently. This paper looks at the Israeli–Palestinian conflict from historical, socio-political, and religious perspectives and considers how the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam approaches the problem and provides a workable solution.

### Historical Background of Israeli–Palestinian conflict :

- The conflict between Israel and Palestine is among the oldest and most persistent ones in the world. The late 19th century national movements including Zionism and Arab nationalism in the laid the groundwork for the conflict. The Jews mainly living in Europe, and a few of them from the Middle East began talking more keenly about going back to Israel and re-establishing the Jewish Nation between 1859 and the 1880s, primarily in response to the prevalent anti-Semitism and Jewish persecution in

Europe and Russia, even though the desire to return to Zion [a place name in the Hebrew Bible, frequently used to refer to both Jerusalem and the whole Land of Israel] had been a component of Jewish theology philosophy for over a thousand years.

- Zionists aimed to create a homeland for Jews in Palestine under Ottoman rule, somewhat comparable to the Land of Israel according to Jewish tradition. Hence, The Zionist movement, a modern political organization was established with the goal of creating a nation-state for the Jewish people. The Zionist movement promoted establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine to act as a safe haven for Jewish people worldwide where they can have the freedom to self-determination.
- Following World War II and the Holocaust, there was an increasing demand on a global scale for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created, and the first Arab–Israeli War started. Following Israel’s victory in 1949, 750,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes, and the area was divided into three parts: the State of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.
- Over the next several years, there was a rise in tensions throughout the region, particularly between Israel and Jordan, Egypt and Syria. Expecting the possibility of Israeli army mobilization, since Israel had invaded the Sinai Peninsula during the 1956 Suez Crisis, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria signed agreements for mutual defence.
- But with the formation of Israel as well as the various conflicts that preceded and ensued from it, an extensive battle had begun between Israeli and the Palestinian people, forcing a large number of Palestinians into exile. Numerous peace negotiations have taken place throughout the years, but a durable peace agreement has proven difficult to achieve. The conflict has been typified by violence, encompassing both terrorist activities by Palestinian militants and actions of Israeli armed forces. The status of Jerusalem, the issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and the ultimate fate of Palestinian refugees are only some of the many obstacles that still beset peace initiatives spearheaded by the US and other countries.

### **Religious Dimensions of the Conflict :**

Interestingly, while a number of elements, including ethnic, national, political and historical ones, contribute to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, religion is by far the most important and is, therefore, the trickiest. In fact, both history and contemporary developments indicate that the religious aspect of the struggle is fundamental to this issue.

A closer look reveals that the concerns such as control over Jerusalem, Jewish settlements in the West Bank, mutual recognition, boundaries, security, and refugees are strongly related to the religious beliefs of Muslims and Jews. As Jerusalem is home to sacred sites for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, there is intense debate regarding who originally owned and controlled the city. In the course of this conflict, Jerusalem has been attacked fifty-two times, taken and retaken forty-four times, captured twenty-three times, and ruined twice. The city was ruled by the following peoples before it was split into Israeli and Jordanian sectors between 1948 and 1967: the Canaanites, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Byzantines, the Islamic Caliphates, the Crusaders, the Ottomans, and finally the British.

In the history of the Jews and the Bible, Jerusalem served as the capital of Israel during King David’s rule. Moreover, it is the site of two immensely sacred locations in Judaism: the Temple Mount and the Western Wall. In Islamic history, the city served as the first Muslim Qiblah, or the direction in which Muslims face while they pray. It is also the site of Prophet Muhammad’s Isra’ and Mi’raj, or the night journey, also referred to as his ascension to heaven, according to the Qur’an. Therefore, not just Palestinian Muslims but also many other Muslims across the world respect Jerusalem’s holiness.

The dispute over West Bank settlements also has a religious component. It has to do with the physical restoration of Israel—the country described in the Bible—before the Messiah’s arrival since it is a fundamental tenet of a few classic Jewish beliefs. Since 1967, this region has been under Israeli occupation and the Jews continue to struggle with the indigenous Palestinians as they colonize the West Bank in order to fulfil this prophecy. Contrarily, the Palestinians regard it and the Gaza Strip as the centre of their own dream state.

Hence, while Israelis are convinced about the Land of Israel, the Fundamentalist Islamic schools believe that Israel and Palestine should eventually fall under Islamic sovereignty. Though briefly alluded to in the Qur’an, prophecies pertaining to this matter have their roots in certain versions of hadith, or legendary sayings of the Prophet. Thus, as noted by Mark Tessler:

The history of the Jews is the history of a people intertwined with that of a religion, and the history of the Muslim religion is equally central to that of the Arabs, such that both Jews and Muslim Arabs established early political communities which they believed to be an expression of God’s will. (3)

Some Jewish extreme organizations rationalized their involvement in the 1948 war by claiming it was all part of a divinely mandated return to Israel’s sacred land. On the other hand, a number of Muslim extremist organizations, including as the Muslim Brotherhood, defended their involvement in the 1948 conflict by citing it as an eschatological development relevant to the imminence of the Day of Judgment. The use of force directed at Israel in the name of Islam has been advocated by various terrorist Brotherhood offshoots who do not distinguish between targets that are military and civilian. They persist in disseminating the catastrophic narrative through religion in order to garner support in Gaza and other places. This philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is practiced in many Arab (and some non-Arab) nations, aims to usurp power in order to restore Islam and the medieval Islamic Caliphate. During the 1987 Palestinian uprising known as the First Intifada, Hamas was founded by the Palestinian section of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas is committed to overthrowing Israel via armed resistance and instituting an Islamic Palestinian state in its place. This group still supports using force against Israel because they see it as a “foreign object” that must be destroyed in order to establish a future Islamic Caliphate.

Alongside this radical Sunni faction, Iran has been the most adamantly opposed nation to Israel ever since Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. Its extremist leadership openly demands Israel's annihilation and claims that this mission is required from a religious stance. It provides funding, arms, and training to Hezbollah—a political party and terrorist organization of Shia Islamists in Lebanon—and Hamas, and it backs Syrian forces under the leadership of President Bashar al-Assad, thereby endangering Israel's security, all purportedly in the name of Islam.

Direct peace negotiations with Israel were successful for two Arab nations—Jordan and Egypt. But they did not entail social or cultural normalcy that is believed to go in tandem hand with reconciliation for several reasons, including religious ones. In Arab states, consenting to peace with Israel may be viewed as a religious betrayal and contradicts the opinions of radicals as well as many moderates as well. It is crucial to keep in mind that these forms of religious causes of conflict are linked to far larger social bases than just particular religious groupings.

The recent events in the contested Middle East area are the result of decades of conflict. The formation of the present state of Israel was opposed by both the Palestinians and the Arab neighbours. Hamas has served as the de facto administration of the Gaza Strip ever since it ousted the Palestinian Authority (Fatah party) in 2007. Ismail Haniya, the head of Hamas, was named prime minister. Israel placed restrictions on Gaza and started detaining Hamas lawmakers in the Palestinian parliament. Hamas has persisted in attacking Israel from Gaza, mostly with rockets, until the latest ground incursion. Due to an intense Israeli blockade, living conditions and poverty have gotten worse in the region.

The role of religious factors in the conflict is definitely highlighted by issues like the sacredness of places and the apocalyptic prophecies found in Islam and Judaism that pose danger to any possibility for enduring harmony between the two parties. Extremely devout Zionists in Israel see themselves as defenders and judges of what the Jewish state should be, hence they are extremely cautious and inflexible when it comes to reaching any form of agreement with the Arabs. On the other hand, Islamist groups in Palestine and other Islamic regions incite violence and hatred towards Israel and Jews arguing that the 'holy' places and areas need to be liberated from the latter for religious reasons. Breger et al. rightly observes:

For both Israelis and Palestinians, the level of sacredness is strongly connected to the political centrality of the holy places, even in a modern and non-religious context. Both in pre-modern times, when there was no separation between religion and politics or between Church and State, and in modern times, when these realms are separate, political considerations continue to influence the centrality of a holy place, both in religious conviction and in inter-communal relations, often exploiting the emotional intensity generated. These tensions are heightened by religious rumours propagated by radicals on social media and in the media regarding the opposite side's hidden religious intentions. For instance, there have been claims of a "Jewish Plan" to destroy the Al Aqsa Mosque and erect the Jewish Third Temple on its remnants, and rumours that the main tenet of the Muslim faith is the extermination of the Jewish people.

Furthermore, a growing number of young people are being lured to politics inspired by religion and fanaticism as socioeconomic conditions worsen in the Arab and Islamic world, which in turn feeds the growth of religious radicalism.

The Arab Spring, which swept through the majority of the Arab world in the early 2010s and resulted in violent uprisings, upheavals, and anti-government protests, also threatened the harmony between Israelis and Arabs because extreme political philosophies often toppled established, stable administrative regimes. A notable instance was the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which upon assumption of the 2012 presidential office, vowed to undermine the peace deal with Israel based on its Islamic beliefs, though it did not destroy the peace agreement right away.

Thus, two conceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict emerge when one traces its history chronologically: the existentialist conception, which sees the conflict as a zero-sum game between the two sides, and the territorialist conception, which sees the conflict as a dispute over territory. Stated differently, 'existentialists,' who maintain that there is no peaceful resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and that peace will only be achieved through the destruction of one side, are opposed to 'territorialists,' who argue that the conflict can be resolved through a territorial compromise. This clarifies why some people think that Israeli–Palestinian peace is attainable, while others maintain that it cannot be attained.

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### **Peace Initiatives:**

Nevertheless, peace efforts have been made in the past though without much success. The status of Jerusalem, safety, Israeli settlements, water rights and borders are among the final status issues in any kind of potential peace accord. The freedom of movement and right of return for Palestinians are other issues. The region, which is home to many places of global historical, cultural, and religious significance, has seen a lot of carnage during the conflict. Security issues, human rights issues, and historic rights have all been discussed at several international conferences. The 1993–1995 Oslo Accords already marked the beginning of the two-state solution. Most peace proposals revolved around the two-state option, which advocates for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. Previously, both Israeli Jews and Palestinians supported the idea. However, public support for a two-state solution has decreased recently.

Furthermore, it is argued that even a one-state solution also called a bi-national state of Israel–Palestine—a homeland for both Jews and Palestinians—will also exacerbate the problem. The establishment of a bi-national state would lead to the creation of imperium in imperio—a state within a state—that would endorse competitive communalism and would render Israeli Jews an ethnic minority given the Palestinian population's high overall fertility rate along with the repatriation of Palestinian refugees.

## **Embracing Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: A Conflict-Resolution Philosophy :**

It seems that the 75-year cycle of war-halt-war cannot be broken until a paradigm change occurs away from the overused solutions of having two states or a bi-national single state. The philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a logical resolution in this regard by putting in perspective the questions of Israeli–Palestinian existence and separate identities of both nations. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World Is One Family), a Vedantic principle of universal humanism, may be difficult to internalize if one does not want to break free from the violent cycle into which Israel and Palestine have been descending with unceasing regularity. Given that the two traditional models of states—the two-state and the bi-national state—are not viable, an unconventional, rather heretical idea of a single state, Israel, where Muslims may live with Jews on equal grounds in terms of rights and provisions as are accorded to citizens in modern civilized nations, may still be considered.

The primary obstacle to envisioning such a political system is the monotheistic ideology that is adhered to by both Muslims and Jews. Dissent, multiplicity, and difference are not tolerated by monotheism. Thus, the indigenous inhabitants of America and Australia were wiped out by European Christians having the same Abrahamic heritage.

In India, however, despite several waves of invasion, modifications and allowances have always been made. Regardless of whether the newcomers were immigrants or invaders, neither the native people nor the invaders could imagine driving the other out. This could be possible only due to the classic Indian idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which promotes accepting difference and diversity, acknowledging the veracity of all religions, and viewing everyone as a part of one family.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is actually a symbol of shared existence and the collective psyche that shapes the spirit of harmony, acceptance, and tolerance among human beings. According to this philosophy, “If we delineate our differences and the roots of our conflict within this larger context, the relationship of conflict itself begins to change, to be interpreted differently” (Martin 81).

With the outbreak of Israel–Hamas war on October 7, 2023, thousands of Israeli civilians have been slaughtered by Hamas, and thousands more have been killed in Israeli bombings on the Gaza Strip in retaliation which has taken the clash into hitherto unexplored terrain. Everyone’s attention is once again focused on what could happen next. Several actions have been suggested as potential solutions to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

However, both sides will not be able to escape the cycle of bloodshed unless they take something away from Indian culture because neither Western secularism nor Abrahamic religion could point the way. Any other religion is viewed as false and its adherents as misled by a monotheistic faith. It makes sense that Arab Muslims and Jews, who are both descendants of Abraham, monotheists, and circumcised, could not establish a common political system. Regarding secularism in the West, although it is true that it has greatly assisted them in reducing Christian anti-Semitism, it is also a fact that their present-day Judeophilia surfaced following the Diaspora’s departure from Europe for Palestine.

Jews and Muslims must thus migrate toward the example from India, where individuals belonging to different religions, many times with tumultuous histories, co-exist with equal rights in a single country. The family model of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam demonstrates how to triumph against societal evil. The foundation of the global family ought to be unity, respect, and selflessness. We can find happiness in our family life. It comforts us as well. Personal growth requires tranquillity, which can only be attained in the family. Likewise, we must foster truth, unity, and harmony among all people if we want the world to function as one big family. By adhering to the meaning conveyed by this term, we can resolve several issues and can also stand the test of time with ease. The fundamental idea underlying the phrase is ‘share and care.’ Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is among the basic concepts of Indian philosophy that precisely advocates the idea that since everything in the cosmos is one, what is mine is also yours and thus suggests overcoming narrow-mindedness. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is the ideal of that person who is *udaracharita*—someone who is kind and giving by nature, or someone who understands how the world is interrelated. Apparently, the entire world is one family to individuals who possess a noble mentality. They realise that we complete each other in this way and that everyone needs to be content and coexist peacefully.

Prophet Muhammad attempted to unite Muslims and Jews into a single political entity—Ummah Wahidah, when he moved to Medina. Unfortunately, the trial could not succeed. But perhaps it should now be given new life. The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam serves as a mirror for our common humanity. India has been constantly promoting this philosophy at different international platforms including the recent 18th G-20 Summit held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi during 9–10 September, 2023, where Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, was the theme of India’s G-20 presidency. India’s apparent goal in highlighting this idea internationally is to argue that, in an interconnected world, using force to settle disputes should never be the first or final resort. Rather, countries should place a higher priority on cosmopolitanism, which places the welfare and peace of the whole human race as its top priority. As long as this concept is widely accepted, it might bring people from all over the world together and help them draw solutions for persistent problems.

The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam can also pave the way for peace by providing a logical viewpoint on the situation of Israel and Palestine as it, in a way, runs counter to the existentialist conception about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. While the existential view believes in the annihilation of the other side, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam advocates a cordial existence of both warring nations as one family. Further, it shuns the idea of using violence against one another and believes in peaceful resolution of conflict.

Currently, “Both Israelis and Palestinians are suffering, living in fear, and uncertainty. Hostages remain in captivity, and there is a risk of the conflict escalating in the region. There is increased polarization with a surge in anti-semitism and religious intolerance” (Bose 16). Fortunately, the philosophy

of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a resolution to this age-long conflict by urging both sides to “Participate in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogues and initiatives that promote tolerance and understanding among different faiths” (Bose 16). It proposes “Building the understanding that different faiths all lead up to connecting with the Almighty that is one. Supporting grassroots movements and organizations that are working to promote peace and human rights in the region” (Bose 16).

In the present scenario, managing such a conflict necessitates not just the capacity to create shared standards to resolve disputed matters but also the political, economic, and military might to uphold these standards. It is also crucial to instil in both parties a feeling of unity over their shared humanity, their common development objectives, and their mutual pursuit of rule-based global order. It simply says that we are a family and that we must survive or perish together. “Nations, individuals, associations, and organizations need to avoid pursuing their interests turning this into a religious and regional conflict or even postponing the talks of the 2-nation theory for a later stage as it ultimately harms everyone. Leaders must shift their focus away from war because terrorism does not respond to traditional warfare . . .” (Bose 16).

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a call to action, imploring the nations at war to acknowledge their common destiny, unite in the face of hardship, and create a society in which every person is respected as a member of this vast, international family, regardless of where they are from. In the current situation, which is rife with mistrust and division, it is imperative to recognize the significance of global kinship, which might be realized via encouraging empathy and understanding. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam promotes empathy and compassion by acknowledging that all individuals are members of one big family, which may result in more harmony and collaboration between the two countries if they follow this idea. Because one person’s actions may have an influence on the entire globe, it also promotes a feeling of global responsibility and motivates world leaders to undertake activities that benefit others in addition to themselves.

It is also crucial to realize that the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam does not advocate giving up on one’s national identity or interests. Rather, it inspires us to acknowledge that our fates are bound together and that the effects of our deeds go much beyond national boundaries. It highlights how critical communication, cooperation, and diplomacy are as the main ways to deal with mutual and global concerns.

The complexity of our diversified global terrain has been made clear by recent wars, underscoring the limitations of universally applicable solutions. With its leadership, India has a chance to promote a more sustainable worldview based on the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which regards all people as members of one global family. There is no denying the necessity for a shared ethos to bring people together in our increasingly interconnected global environment, when issues like national security, terrorism, land occupation, and cultural existence transcend national boundaries. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam does not advocate renunciation of one’s national identity or pursuits. It motivates us to realize that our actions have an impact far beyond national borders and that our fates are intertwined. It emphasizes how important cooperation, diplomacy, and communication are as the primary means of addressing common global issues.

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## Conclusion :

It is imperative that we change our way of thinking at this very moment and align it with the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to preserve world peace and harmony. In order to lessen tension, selfishness, ego, and animosity, individuals should start thinking of themselves as members of one big global family and appreciate the beauty of life by promoting love, peace, and calm among each other. With regards to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam promotes a profound message of unity, equality, and peaceful co-existence among all human beings across the globe, and hence, opens doors for reconciliation between the two disputing nations.

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