

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN MODERN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

2nd October every year is a great day for India as well as for the world. On this day India celebrates the birth anniversary of the father of the nation Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi and International day for non-violence is observed to pay respect and acceptance to the true spirit of non-violence promoted by Gandhiji throughout his life. Gandhianism starts with the famous line – ‘Simple living and high thinking’ and its objective is to transform the individual and society. Therefore, in the turbulent times where the world is grappled with so many problems, it is imperative to strive to inculcate Gandhian philosophy in various facets of life and governance.

Keywords: Gandhi, Philosophy, Governance, Simple Living, High Thinking, Non-Violence

INTRODUCTION

Major Gandhian Ideologies

Truth and Non-violence: They are the twin cardinal principles of Gandhian thoughts. For Gandhi ji, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth - the ultimate reality. ¹This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality - the moral laws and code - its basis. Nonviolence, far from meaning mere peacefulness or the absence of overt violence, is understood by Mahatma Gandhi to denote active love - the pole opposite of violence, in every sense.²Satyagraha: Gandhi ji called his overall method of nonviolent action Satyagraha. It means the exercise of the purest soul-force against all injustice, oppression and exploitation. It is a method of securing rights by personal suffering and not inflicting injury on others. Sarvodaya: Sarvodaya is a term meaning 'Universal Uplift' or 'Progress of All'. The term was first coined by Gandhi ji as the title of his translation of John Ruskin's tract on political economy, "Unto This

Last". Swaraj:³ Although the word swaraj means self-rule, Gandhi ji gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life.⁴

For Gandhi ji, swaraj of people meant the sum total of the swaraj (self-rule) of individuals and so he clarified that for him swaraj meant freedom for the meanest of his countrymen. And in its fullest sense, swaraj is much more than freedom from all restraints, it is self-rule, self-restraint and could be equated with moksha or salvation.⁵Trusteeship: Trusteeship is a socio-economic philosophy that was propounded by Gandhi ji. It provides a means by which the wealthy people would be the trustees of trusts that looked after the welfare of the people in general. Swadeshi: The word swadeshi derives from Sanskrit and is a conjunction of two Sanskrit words. 'Swa' means self or own and 'desh' means country. So swadesh means one's own country. Swadeshi, the adjectival form,⁶ means of one's own country, but can be loosely translated in most contexts as self-sufficiency.

Swadeshi is the focus on acting within and from one's own community, both politically and economically. It is the interdependence of community and self-sufficiency.⁷

DISCUSSION

Application of Various Facets of Gandhian Ideology

Civil Services: Truth lies at the core of Gandhian philosophy as he himself has tried to remain truthful throughout his life. Gandhian view of truth was irreversible in different contexts irrespective of the urgency of the situation. This was why Gandhiji cancelled the Non-Cooperation movement after the satyagrahis deviated from the path of truth and a violent incident of Chaurichaura took place.⁸ This principle of truthfulness to self and to the public is essential for civil servants in the current context to rampant corruption. Peace And Stability in the World: Non-Violence is a key component of Gandhianism, which was the great weapon used by Gandhiji during the freedom movement of India against British Raj. Gandhiji believed non-violence and tolerance require a great level of courage and patience. In a world that is moving through the phases of war marred by violence and terrorism, there is a significant requirement of Gandhian idea of Non-violence more and more today than the past days. Secularism: Gandhianism was tolerant towards all religions and the world today needs more and more religiously and faith wise tolerant people in societies where violence is committed in the name of religion.⁹ Tolerance in the society will help in neutralizing the ethnocentric bias in the globe that is taking place day by day on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity and region etc. Creation of Casteless Society: Gandhiji was against the caste system and coined the term Harijan to pay respect to the lower caste people. As the Caste system is still prevalent in the Indian society, the Gandhian philosophy is useful to create a casteless society where everyone is treated equally irrespective of their caste. Gandhian Socialism: Gandhian view of

socialism is not political but more social in its approach, as Gandhiji thought of a society with no poverty, no hunger, no unemployment and education and health for all. These Gandhian ideologies will continue to act as the lighthouse for Indian policy makers.¹⁰ From poverty alleviation to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and universal health care (Ayushman Bharat) to skill India programs everywhere the core inspiration comes from Gandhianism. Decentralization: Gandhian idea of decentralization of power can be implemented in democracies through empowered local self governments at grass root level.¹¹

Indian government, for instance, has implemented local self government by adopting the Panchayati Raj and Municipality system in rural and urban areas respectively. Cleanliness: Gandhiji laid great emphasis upon cleanliness or Swacchta, as he used to say- 'Swacchta Hin Seva'.¹² The recent Swacchta Bharat Abhiyaan, the biggest cleanliness drive of India, is to fulfill the dream of Bapu by making India clean. However, this cleanliness drive is more than physical cleanliness and the need to lay more emphasis upon the internal cleanliness of the individual. Thus, along with clean roads, toilets for a clean India we require a corruption free society with greater levels of transparency and accountability too. Sustainable Environment: Gandhiji held that¹³ "Earth has enough for Human needs, But not for Human greed's". These lines of Mahatma Gandhi reflect upon how human behaviour destroys nature and how a sustainable way of living is the need of the hour. The world is whirling under the burden of global warming, climate change and resource crunch and all environmental conservation treaties and sustainable development efforts must implement this Gandhian philosophy. Ethical Importance:¹⁴ On the ethical and behavioural part Gandhianism has much significance today because society is witnessing the degradation of values. Societal values have degraded to such an extent that people don't hesitate to kill someone

for the gratification of their own needs. Respect for women is one of the major ideas of Gandhian philosophy and the world is witnessing the increased level of violence¹⁵, subjugation women face nowadays in society. Thus, Gandhian dream of a safe country necessitates social consciousness and women emancipation.

RESULTS

Gandhiji's political contributions offered us Independence but his ideologies enlightened India as well as the world even today after so many years. Every individual, thus, should follow the key Gandhian ideologies in their day to day life for a happy, prosperous, healthy, harmonious and sustainable future. Looking at the present state of affairs in India, the birthplace of Gandhi, one would probably surmise that Gandhism,¹⁶ whatever the term may mean, cannot have any relevance in this twenty-first century. Gandhi is rightly called the Father of the Nation because he single handedly stood up against the mighty British Empire, without any arms, and brought her independence. However, today, Gandhi is mostly forgotten and his relevance questioned even by his ardent devotees. Today Gandhi is remembered in India mostly on his birthday which is celebrated as a national holiday rather as a ritual.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, India is not following any of Gandhi's teachings which are mostly confined to text books. In fact, since independence, the country has witnessed many violent communal riots in this multi communal country. ¹⁸Gandhi's message of 'swabalambi', self-sufficiency with home spun 'khadi' cloth is not used now a days even as a social slogan. Statistics show that the country is definitely not following 'sarvodaya', a broad Gandhian term meaning 'universal upliftment' or 'progress of all' reaching the masses and the downtrodden.¹⁹ On the contrary, India today has the unique distinction of being the only country in the world which has the richest man in the world while at the same time more than 30 per cent of its population lives in dire poverty.²⁰

The above shows that today, Gandhism is a very confused 'ism' in India. Today many politicians in India use the term merely as a slogan and the common man make Gandhi almost out of reach of the younger groups by making Gandhi an unwilling 'avatara'. That may be one reason why the only photo we see of Gandhi in India is always that of an old man which brings the image of a very simple and pious man who was meek and mild like Jesus Christ. While Gandhi was not a simple man to say the least, the above does not give the right image of Gandhi and does not bring any inspiration to the younger group, the group most relevant for Gandhi.²¹

In real world, Gandhi was a politician, a shrewd politician, who was trying to bring peace and harmony to India on one hand while trying to bring her independence at the same time. For Gandhi, the process of change was very important which must be ethical, nonviolent and democratic giving rights to all minorities. In this respect, he resembles the Buddha for whom the noble eightfold path (of right wisdom, right conduct and right effort), itself is the goal and essence of life.²²

Once we realize this, we realize the essence of Gandhism and realize that it would be wrong to premise that Gandhism is dead in the world. Like Buddhism, which is mostly prevalent now-a-days outside India, the country of its birth, Gandhism today is alive and active outside India. In fact, today there is hardly any country in the world where some activities are not going on along Gandhian lines.²³ There are very few countries in the world where something or the other is not being done, achieved or organized in the name of Gandhi. In short, there is a global non-violent awakening and awareness after Gandhi. The name of Mahatma Gandhi transcends the bounds of race, religion and nation-states, and has emerged as the prophetic voice of the twenty-first century. Today, Gandhi is remembered for his passionate adherence to the practice of non-violence and his supreme humanism, in every corner of the world.²⁴

One would wonder, what may be the relevance of Gandhi in this all-pervading materialistic, agnostic and consumerist culture?

What is the significance of Gandhi to the modern world and what is the secret of his success? Gandhi has been a great light for the Tibetan leader Dalai Lama who puts Gandhi's success in right perspective. He said, "Many ancient Indian masters have preached ahimsa, non-violence as a philosophy. That was mere philosophical understanding. But Mahatma Gandhi, in this twentieth century, produced a very sophisticated approach because he implemented that very noble philosophy of ahimsa in modern politics, and he succeeded. That is a very great thing."²⁵

And that is precisely the greatness of Gandhi and that is the message of Gandhi to the modern world. In the past century many places in the world have been drastically changed through the use of brute force, by the power of guns - the Soviet Union, China, Tibet, Burma, many communist countries in Africa and South America. But eventually the power of guns will have to be changed by the will of the ordinary people. As Dalai Lama said, "We have big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism." To fight these big wars the common ordinary people in this modern age need Gandhism.²⁶

If we try to analyze the secrets of Gandhi's success, we would probably find Faith and Action and Populism, the three most important aspects of his life. Gandhi's extra ordinary communion with the masses of ordinary people was another of his secrets. In contrast to many of our present-day leaders of this highly democratic world, Gandhi was a true leader and friend of the people. Disaku Ikeda, the Japanese Buddhist leader who takes great inspiration from Gandhi has this to say about him. "His activism is not mere action but contains many aspects of a spiritual 'practice' that is inspired by the inner urging of the conscience".²⁷

The phenomenal success Gandhi registered in far-away South Africa fighting for human rights and civil liberties has great significance when we find that later his teachings were adopted not only by Nelson Mandela, the South African freedom fighter,

but it was also subsequently revealed that the former South African president De Klerk was greatly influenced by Gandhi's principles. In fact, from Dalai Lama to Desmond Tutu and from Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, many world leaders were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, all in their own different ways.

Dr. Martin Luther King was very much inspired by Gandhi. Like Gandhi, King liked Thoreau's idea - 'that men should not obey evil or unjust laws'; and he found that Gandhi had won freedom for his country from British rule acting on that very principle. Like Thoreau, Gandhi believed that men should gladly go to jail when they break such laws. He told the people of India to resist the British by peaceful means only. They would march, they would sit down or lie down in the streets, they would strike, they would boycott (refuse to buy) British goods, but they would not resort to violence. There is great resonance of the historic Salt March at Dandi with the courageous Montgomery Bus Boycott against racial segregation in United States. Dr. King said, "...If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought, acted and inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony."²⁸

Barack Obama, the present US President, sees Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration and has a portrait of the apostle of peace in his office. He commented, "In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things."

Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader who was under house arrest for many years, derived great deal of inspiration from Gandhi. From Gandhi she learnt that for a doctrine of peace and reconciliation to be translated into practice, one absolute condition needed is fearlessness. Aung San Suu Kyi knew this, and that was the secret of her success amid all the darkness and loneliness against a brutal and hostile regime. One of her essays opens with the statement that "it is not power that corrupts, but it is fear." It is from Gandhi that

Jawaharlal Nehru and all the Indian leaders for independence learnt how 'not to fear' the British gun. Nehru also described Gandhi "A powerful current of fresh air ... like a beam of light."²⁸

And so Gandhism is alive and active in the modern world. Gandhi has inspired and will continue to inspire many political, social and religious leaders all over the world. Whether is Joan Baez, the American folk singer and human rights activist, or Cesar Chavez, the American social activist, or Joanna Macy, the environmental activist, or Mubarak Awad, the non-violent Palestine leader and many others get different inspirations from Gandhi in their fight.²⁹

Thich Nhat Kanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist leader takes great inspiration from Gandhi's action which stresses on the process more than the end. Nhat said, "I think we may fail in our attempt to do things, yet we may succeed in correct action when the action is authentically non-violent, based on understanding, based on love." And that is Gandhism.³⁰

Gandhi left many valuable sayings for the modern man to fight for goodness in society in a non-violent way. "Good" Gandhi said "travels at a snail's pace." "Non-violence" Gandhi said "is a tree of slow growth. It grows imperceptibly but surely." And then "Mere goodness is not of much use." Gandhi stated. "Goodness must be joined with knowledge, courage and conviction. One must cultivate the fine discriminating quality which goes with spiritual courage and character." The modern man can also take great wisdom from what Gandhi said the seven social sins: Politics without principles; Wealth without work; Commerce without morality; Education without character; Pleasure without conscience; Science without humanity; Worship without sacrifice.³¹

Was Gandhi a Saint? Gandhi objected when people called him "a saint trying to be a politician." He said he would rather be "a politician trying to be a saint." Gandhi was not a Saint. He was a common man, but a common man in modern world in the footsteps of Buddha and Jesus. He said, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Non-

violence are as old as the hills". It may be said that, after the great Buddha and Jesus, Gandhi once again demonstrated that non-violence could also be an effective instrument of social change in modern times. Gandhi successfully demonstrated to a world, weary with wars and continuing destruction that adherence to Truth and Non-violence is not meant for individual behavior alone but can be applied in global affairs too.³²

If we say that the twenty-first century is the century of the common man, then we see that Gandhism has even more relevance in this age, and Gandhi will inspire generations of individuals fighting for goodness of the society. If today we find that Gandhism is in severe test in countries like India, it is not because there is certain inherent weakness in Gandhism, but it is because we have not seen in India strong leaders with the required courage and conviction to fight the evils in society. We may borrow Gandhi's own words on Ahimsa, and say that Gandhism is only for the courageous people.³³

I would like to conclude with a tribute to Gandhi that Albert Einstein gave: "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth".³⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Mahatma Gandhi - the greatest of our leaders. He lit the imagination of the entire nation. There is a basic lesson of Indian History. Our people have always taken their moral standards from their rulers; the people have risen to great heights when they have basked in the glow of noble kings or leaders. The present generation is waiting for a leader who will make it relearn the moral values, and who will inculcate in the people, as Gandhi did, a sense of the responsibilities which fall on every citizen of a free society.³⁵

The waste of human ability energy and money on armament will continue unabated, and diversion of world resources to development will

remain a pipe dream, so long as man does not learn the great lesson which Gandhi preached so convincingly in our own times-viz. non-violence is the law of our species. The diversion of world resources to development stands no practical chance of being heeded unless and until the balance of terror is replaced by the balance of reason.³⁶ Although it is true that India has been an integrated nation since olden times; it is also true that on the present context Gandhian values have special significance for national integration. Today communal amity has become essential for national integration and hence Gandhi gave it the highest priority. By communal unity Gandhiji did not mean merely paying lip service to 'bhaibhai-ism'. He meant it to be an unbreakable heart unity'.³⁷ In the religious context Gandhi emphasized that communal unity has to be based on equal respect for all religions. Everyone, Gandhi said, must have the same regard for other faiths as he had for his own. Such respect would not only remove religious rifts but lead to a realization of the fact that religion was a stabilizing force, not a disturbing element. Gandhi's basic axiom was that religion since the scriptures of all religions point only in one direction of goodwill, openness and understanding between men and men and between community and community.³⁸

Gandhiji regarded education as the light of life and the very source from which was created an awareness of oneness. Gandhi believed that the universality of religion can best be realized through the universalization of education, and that such universalization was the spring board for national integration. Harmony is not brought about overnight. Gandhi advocated the process of patience, persuasion and perseverance for attainment of peace and love for harmony and was firmly convinced of the worth of gentleness as panacea for all evils. Communal harmony had the pride of place in Gandhi's constructive programme. He taught us the dignity of labour as a leveling social factor that contributed to a national outlook in keeping with the vision of new India. he always believed that a nation built on the foundation of

non-violence would be able to withstand attacks on its-integrity from within and without.³⁹ Gandhi pleaded for the humanization of knowledge for immunization against the ideas of distrust among the communities of the nations and the nationalities of the world. He wanted to take the country from areas of hostility into areas of harmony of faiths through tolerance, so that we could work towards understanding each other. His mass contact programme was specifically aimed at generating a climate of confidence and competition and eliminating misgiving and misconceptions, conflicts and confrontation.⁴⁰ Gandhi also held that bridging the gulf between the well off and the rest was as essential for national integration as inter-religious record. HE said that we must work for economic equality and social justice, which would remove the ills caused by distress and bitterness. He said that we must work for economic equality and social justice, which would remove the ills caused by distress and bitterness. He stressed that the foundation of equality, the core of harmony will have to be laid here now and built-up brick by brick through ethical and economic satisfaction of the masses.⁴¹

Gandhian Relevance - A Phenomenal Success: It is 54 years since Gandhi was assassinated and there are all kinds of discussion in India and abroad on what Gandhi left for humanity and whether many of his teachings would survive the test of time. What even the passionate critic of Gandhi cannot miss is the string of activities along Gandhian lines one can see in almost all countries of the World now. If not in very significant measure there are very few countries in the world where something or the other in the name of Gandhi is not being organized. In short there is a global non-violent awakening after Gandhi. What is the relevance of Gandhi in this all-pervading materialistic, agnostic and consumerist culture? It is precisely these three tendencies Gandhi fought all his life.⁴²

There is no denying the fact that Gandhi was deep rooted in his cultural and religious traditions. The phenomenal success Gandhi

registered in far away South Africa fighting for human rights and civil liberties and later the adoption of the Gandhian techniques by Nelson Mandela and the subsequent revelations made by the former South African president De Klerk that he was greatly influenced by Gandhi's principles.⁴³ The year 1994 bore witness to the efficacy strategies and philosophy as could be seen from the manner in which the fight Gandhi began 100 years ago in South Africa i.e. in 1903 bearing fruits when the blacks and the whites in South Africa were able to work out a satisfactory solution to a peaceful transfer of power which resulted in the holding of elections and Dr. Nelson Mandela taking over the reins of power. In the American continent Martin Luther King's heroic fight for civil liberties on the Gandhian lines and his own admission that it was from Gandhi that he learnt his operational tactics also is not an isolated instance of the relevance of the Gandhian tactics. Martin Luther King (Jr.) said, "If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of a humanity evolving towards a world of peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our own risk."⁴⁴ Gandhi's contribution to the political awakening and freedom movement in different parts of the world and adoption of non-violence strategies which help both the opposing groups respect each other's sentiments and accommodating the views of others as much in common with UNESCO's decision to propagate the message of tolerance for humanity survival. Asia and African Continent particularly has seen peaceful transition of power and social change, thanks to Gandhi's initiatives and teachings.

The name of Mahatma Gandhi transcends the bounds of race, religion and nation-states, and has emerged as the prophetic voice of the 21st century. He is remembered for his passionate adherence to the practice of non-violence and his supreme humanism. After the great Buddha and Jesus he once again demonstrated that non-violence could also be an effective instrument of social change.⁴⁵

Gandhi successfully demonstrated to a world, weary with wars and continuing destruction

that adherence to Truth and Non-violence is not meant for individual behaviour alone but can be applied in global affairs too.

I can do no better than to quote the immortal tribute of India's first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, at the time of Gandhi's passing, "The light has gone out of our lives". Now we have to try and see what we can do with our limitations to overcome what Gandhiji described as the seven social sins:⁴⁶

Politics Without Principles.

Wealth Without Work.

Commerce Without Morality

Education Without Character

Pleasure Without Conscience.

Science Without Humanity.

Worship Without Sacrifice.⁴⁷

We can sum it all up by saying that it was Gandhi who, through his dedication, lifted the country from the British policy of 'divide and rule' and let the Indian masses form rivalries to reconciliation and from hostility to harmony. And in this the Mahatma was ably supported by his great disciples- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and many others.⁴⁸

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