

Relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

There is great relevancy of Gandhian political philosophy. Gandhi was a practical thinker and as such it has rightly been said about him that he was a great Karmayogi. Gandhi was one of those philosophers who believed in self-sacrifice, Satyagraha or Non-cooperation. He believed that violence brought with it hatred and feelings of revenge where as in non-violence there was no such danger. Gandhian philosophy is no comprehensive that it has left no aspect of human life untouched. In his philosophy there are very clear indications of his love for individual and national freedom. Gandhi was a great social reformer. He had a many sided personality with clear vision and definite approach to the problems which faced India of his time.

In order to be able to do this, the paper will first of all present, analyze and comment on the most important concepts I consider the Gandhian thought is based on such as satya (Truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and satyagraha (as Gandhi loosely translated: holding on to truth, which in fact is the philosophy and practice of the non-violent resistance).

Key Words: Gandhi, Mahatma, Truth, Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Relevance

INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is among those few great men in the human history, who even after his death is still recognized, remembered and revered. He was a leader of his people, unsupported by any authority. His principle of non-violence became so popular that Martin Luther King adopted Gandhian principles of non-violence in the civil rights movements in the US.

However, today's generation is skeptical of Gandhi's teachings. It is also because Mahatma Gandhi has become a victim of his popularity. Many people have criticized Gandhi's

principles deeming it to be too idealistic to follow. They find his morally upright teachings irrelevant in these pragmatic times.

In a world full of conflict, tyranny, oppression and anarchy in personal, social and political life, how far his concept of non-violence is helpful in maintaining peace and harmony? What is the challenge to the principle of ahimsa? Is the principle of nonviolence still relevant or useful in today's time?

There is a frustration in the society that can be seen, felt and acknowledged. This frustration could be personal, societal or economical. When people do not have a proper channel to address this frustration, it leads to disastrous consequences like mob lynching, violent protests, hate crimes etc. When people resort to any violence, it means two things: First, there is an evident lack of faith and conviction in the existing legal system making it easier to resort to violence when the need arises. Second, there is a sense of confidence in the minds of people committing violence, that they would remain unscathed from the reach of the law. (Gupta, 2018)

According to a recent count, there have been 24 incidents of lynching and vigilante violence, resulting in the murder of 34 persons and rape of 2 women, (mostly 2015 onward), in the state of Haryana alone (Lokhande, 2017). In 21% of the cases, the police filed cases against the victims/survivors. Thus police inaction and complicity has given new kind of confidence for people to resort to violence. Rampant hate and violence are evident in the society. A protest is deemed ineffective if there is no use of violence. Public transports are burnt, stones are pelted on school children's buses, and people are lynched on the basis of rumours. Thus, I believe Gandhi's principle of non-violence is very much relevant and essential. India achieved independence through means of non-violence. It's ironic that our society is at a stage that violence has become an accepted means to achieve an outcome.

We the people are in the 21st century. The 21st century is commonly known as "The Era of development". Aren't we know, leading for a disaster in this blind race of development? Amidst all sort of problems such as rapid population of growth, production and consumption, unemployment, poverty, racial discrimination, untouchability, economic inequality, social injustice, corruption. With present phase of globalization, which cannot be stopped the third world need to look into the evil effects of globalization? Industrialization is going to be curse for

mankind. At present political, economic, social and moral rights as well as values are downgrading and exploiting. In the course of development we have to think of these problems and try to find out the solutions best suited to our needs. The best suited solutions for the above problems of contemporary world are to follow Gandhi's principles. It is Gandhi's philosophy can save us from this predicament. Gandhi's profuse writings, speeches and talks cover every conceivable aspects of Indian life of his time as well as present world. This paper aims to tell the relevancy of Gandhian philosophy in the 21st century. Gandhian Philosophy Gandhi is universally known as the most renowned theorist, philosopher and also the practitioner of truth, love, non-violence, tolerance freedom and peace. He was a leader of his people, unsupported by any authority. He was very much concerned with the nature, poor deprived and the downtrodden and he has intender to alter the evil, political, social, and economic system of the people. His mission was to reconstruct India from below upwards a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India's myriad villages as its base. Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a political philosopher; it is a message and philosophy of life. Gandhi is a spirit of profound wisdom and captivating humility, armed with only an iron will and inflexible resolve and a frail man who confronted the brutality of military strength with the dignity of a simple human being. Gandhian philosophy is the religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Gandhi first in South Africa and later of course in India.

The other most defining feature of the 20th century related to the two world wars. As the world belatedly realized the importance of avoiding such disasters in future the importance of Gandhiji's insistence on nonviolence as one of the most basic precepts of life became even more important. It was also realized by perceptive observers that the roots of colonialism, as well as world wars, can be traced to never-ending greed and the conflicts created by this greed. Here again the insistence by Gandhiji on simplicity and voluntary frugality as a way of life and as one of the basic principles of life tied up very neatly with his commitment to non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi would have made many great contributions with these ideas and thinking in the emerging post-colonial and post World War II world if he had lived for another 15 years or so but his life was very tragically cut short by an extremely stupid and narrow-minded assassin and his co-conspirators who had absolutely no understanding of how much the world, and not just the nation, needed the broad vision of Gandhiji in those critical years.

It would have been very interesting to see Gandhiji with his far-reaching ideas and tremendous moral force reaching out to the world troubled by the Cold War and the arms race. In independent India he would have had the support of his nation and its government in reaching out to the wider world which he did not have under the colonial government. All that is the history of lost opportunities. But coming to the present times the most defining feature of the 21st century is that there is nothing less than a survival crisis caused by a number of very serious environmental problems on the one hand and accumulation of weapons of mass destruction on the other.

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY

Gandhism is a body of ideas that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Mohandas Gandhi. It is particularly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance. The two pillars of Gandhism are truth and non-violence. The term "Gandhism" also encompasses what Gandhi's ideas, words and actions mean to people around the world, and how they used them for guidance in building their own future. Gandhism also permeates into the realm of the individual human being, non-political and non-social. A Gandhian can mean either an individual who follows, or a specific philosophy which is attributed to, Gandhism.

Gandhi is universally known as the most renowned theorist, philosopher and also the practitioner of truth, love, non-violence, tolerance freedom and peace. He was a leader of his people, unsupported by any authority. He was very much concerned with the nature, poor deprived and the downtrodden and he has intended to alter the evil, political, social, and economic system of the people. His mission was to reconstruct India from below upwards a decentralized socio-political and economic order with India's myriad villages as its base. Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a political philosopher; it is a message and philosophy of life.

Gandhian philosophy is certainly considered by Gandhian as a universal and timeless philosophy, despite the fact that on the more superficial level it is set in the Indian social contexts. Gandhian philosophy is double-edged weapon. Its objective is to transform the individual and society simultaneously, in accordance with the principles of truth and non-violence. It is apparent that Gandhi's philosophy has much in common with several western philosophies which uphold the ideal of a more just and equitable society. Truth, non-violence,

freedom, equality, full -employment, bread labour, trusteeship, decentralization, swadesh, service and co-operation are perceived as cardinal principles of Gandhi. As the base of the Gandhian social order is religious or spiritual, economic and political question are seen from the moral or humanistic perspective. The welfare of human beings, not of systems or institutions, is the ultimate consideration.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN RELIGION

Gandhi gave a practical colour to the superior principle of religion in individual life and in the social and political plane. Gandhi's family belonged to Vaishnavism. Thus, from his family, especially from his mother, he learnt the truth, i.e., mukti is possible by devotion to God and service to humanity. Here Gandhi was influenced by the Ramayana, the Gita, the Holy Qur'an, and the Bible etc. Gandhi referred to the Gita as his mother. In his own words, "Today the Gita is not only my Bible, or my Koran ...it is my mother." Even Gandhi was influenced by Buddhism, Jainism, Tolstoy and Ruskin. Besides, as a seeker of truth Gandhi was influenced by Socrates and Thoreau. As a result, Gandhi transformed Thoreau's civil disobedience into civil resistance or non-violent resistance.

Gandhi means religion as self-realization. The basic conviction of Gandhi is that there is only one reality, i.e., God is Truth. If Truth is God then sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Therefore, religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher or absolute power. However, he was not against such a description of religion. He only qualifies it further by saying that the higher principle being Truth, devotion to truth is religion. He said that "What I mean by religion is not the Hindu religion...but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within..."

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN POLITICS

Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a political philosopher; he is a message and philosophy of life. His political ideas are stateless and party less democracy, decentralization, freedom of speech, abolition of untouchability, moral politics, secularism etc. There is great relevance of Gandhian political ideas or values in the present age of increasing violence and intolerance. Gandhi was a practical thinker. Gandhi was one of those philosophers who believe in self sacrifice, Satyagraha or Non-cooperation. He believes that violence brought with it hatred and feelings of revenge where as in non-violence there is no such danger. Gandhian philosophy is so comprehensive that

it has left no aspect of human life untouched. In the field of politics he understands the issues with special consideration based on Indian nature of socio-economic and politics. Thus he defines politics as the best means to regulate the national life and also he concluded that its power should decentralize in equitable manner. He thinks that the state in concentrated form of power structure is more coercive than individual. So he suggests the political power decentralization in the democratic form of governance. Because decentralized democracy gives the scope to the public participation and representation. It ensures the liberty and autonomy to the individual, village and nation in its extensive application of the welfare world will be attainable.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN DEMOCRACY

The Gandhian ideas were a peculiar type of proletarian Socialism combined with non-violent democracy by bringing about refinement of the average man's nature to the demands of social service. Thus, he believes in an unrealizable idea that is internal democracy based on pacificator discipline. But democracy cannot make fools wise men necessarily. His constructive programme required a change of heart and was highly idealistic in character. He himself had witnessed the failure of his scheme during his lifetime. It also seems impossible and impracticable in the contemporary materialistic world of ours to envisage a kingdom of God on Earth.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN ECONOMICS

Due to increasing income inequalities which widens the gap between the rich and the poor, growing incidence of poverty associated with liberalization, privatization and globalization, Gandhiji's economic philosophy appears to be relevant forever in this materialistic, agnostic and consumerist culture. His thoughts and economic ideas can be adopted in this 21st. The Gandhian Economics continues to be relevant in the context of sustainable development. If we closely examine his economic philosophy it is found that sustainability is the core of his economic thought which appears to be a best, alternative and viable model of development in the recent years. In the 21st indispensable to the development of human civilization due to limited resources. This concept of bread labour advocates the people to be self sufficient and it strengthens the notion of sustainable development. If all people do labour for their bread, there will be no rich and poor and inequality will be reduced. Therefore, the need of the hour is to follow the Gandhiji's concept of bread labour to achieve self sufficiency and social justice. His

concept of Gram Swaraj clearly implied that each village should be self-reliant by making provisions of all necessities of life such as food, clothing, clean water, housing, sanitation, education etc. Gandhiji was in favour of empowerment of women. He encouraged women to join politics with man and also wanted women to be independent of their thinking. Gandhian Economics stressed on development of cottage and rural industries for better use of labour and decentralization of small units of production. He was not in favour of large scale industrialization which is responsible for many socio-economic evils. After almost 64 years of martyrdom, Gandhiji is now more relevant on global level than before. The need of the hour is to implement his deeds, actions unquestionable and unchallengeable.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN EDUCATION

Gandhi through his basic scheme of education wanted to bring social transformation in the country. His basic scheme of education is designed to make individual self-reliant and self sufficient through child-centered, activity-centered, craft-centered and community-centered curricular activities. Regarding social order, Gandhi advocated that ultimate aim of education is not only a balanced and harmonious society but a just social order, in which there is no unnatural divide line between the haves and have-nots and everybody is assured of a living wage and right to freedom. Gandhi was of the opinion that all subjects should be co-related to the craft of the locality. Accordingly, co-relation will integrate and coordinate the subjects with the socio economic, cultural, and environmental and life like conditions. Gandhi wanted to develop community life through education which consisted of manual labour, tree planting, agriculture, simple life and crafts. The running and recurrent principle of the community life was to live according to the rhythm of the nature and in harmony with what nature offers. It was because of his experience of dealing with environmental and development issues that Gandhi, when asked if he would like to have the same standard of living for India's teeming millions as was prevalent in England, remarked, "it took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will India require?"

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

M.K. Gandhi was a saint and moral revolutionary. He has exercised the most powerful influence on modern world. While Gandhi lived most of the people thought that his ideas are relevance only to win freedom for India. But there is a great relevancy of Gandhian Philosophy in the

contemporary world also. Gandhi is one of those philosophers who believed in self-sacrifice. His philosophy is so comprehensive that it has left no aspect of human life untouched. In his philosophy there is very clear indication of his love for individual and national freedom. He had a many sided personality with clear vision and definite approach to problems which faced India. Gandhi is believed to have greater relevance in the present world of modern science & technology that produced geographical neighborhood but become highly individualistic co-operation has been replaced by competition and consumerism.

Gandhi very exhaustively dealt not only with political or economical but also with social problems of Indian society. It is very difficult to discuss all the theories of Gandhi to examine its relevancy. I make attempt to show the relevancy of Gandhian theory by some of his most important principles. They are:

1. Non -Violence: According to the Gandhi non-violence does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil doer. It is the soul force or truth force. Non-violence is regarded as the highest law of human kind. It was the unique non-violent movement under his leadership that earned for India freedom from the colonial rule. In spearheading the campaign against the alien rule, Gandhiji adopted the innovative techniques of civil disobedience and social transformation, which had several exemplary features.

2. Satyagraha: The central concepts of Gandhi's philosophy are 'Satyagraha'. It is itself a whole philosophy of non violence. A Satyagraha campaign is undertaken only after all other peaceful means have proven ineffective. An attempt is made to convert, persuade the opponent. Any violence inflicted by the opponent is accepted without retaliation. The purpose of Satyagrah is to fight against injustice and tyranny. Satyagrahi should have moral force; he makes understand by means of reason. There is no place for physical force.

CONCLUSIONS

After many years of martyrdom, Gandhi is now more relevant on global level than before. In contemporary period Gandhi is remembered more with reverence than merely casually. He is being recognized as a great leader of action, a Liberator and a Prophet Martyr all over the universe. What is needed at the hour is to implement his deeds, actions and thoughts into practice and thus, his relevance in different fields is unquestionable and unchallengeable. For the very

survival of human being, it is imperative on our part to act upon his advice because only on his relevance, we shall survive together or if we fail in our venture, we are bound to perish together. To conclude, Gandhian philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral and religious, it is also traditional and modern simple and complex. There is much in it that is not at all new. After many years of martyrdom, Gandhi is no more relevant on global level than before. His relevance in different fields is unquestionable unchallengeable. For the very survival of human being, it is a imperative on our part to an act open his advice because only on his relevance, we shall survive together or if we fail in our venture, we are bound to perish together.

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