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Relevance of Gandhian Attitude in the Current Socio-Political Scenario

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Abstract

Our Contemporary world is a world of flux and vicissitudes. Especially under the increasing pull and compel of ever growing market forces our society is losing traditional marrow of stability. In our day to day life also we are witnessing an overall change in our frame of guiding values and morality. In this sway of modernity a lobby of newly developed intellectual is discarding and questioning the practicality of Gandhian philosophy. Moreover Gandhi is remembered only at occasions to celebrate leftover rituals while his words and teachings are dump deep down in dark corners of history. On the other hand people are still taking interest raising statues of Gandhi not only in India but all over the world. In such a duality about the Gandhiji's heritage an obvious question boggles our mind about the relevance of Gandhian attitude in current time and situations. Hence, an objective study is the need of the hour to go through the Gandhian literature to find out the traits that not only suits our today's world but also can be pointed as cardinal light houses for a safe voyage of humanity on the ripples of threatening high tides in our ever complex water of Socio-Political scenario.

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Introduction

Gandhi is not a name for grabbing a gamble through abscess chanting and nor a face for hiding high-rising dunes of opportunistic greed. He also cannot be discarded as a preacher of outdated moralities and must not be looked upon as a philosopher of redundant worshiping. Gandhism is a time tested holistic approach of life percolated from age old humanistic values. We cannot hold Gandhi in some inert words or reluctant frames as he never preached to follow him but himself followed the path of his inner consciousness. He even summed up his autobiography with the words, "My Life is my Message". Throughout his life action rather than mere contemplation was important for Gandhiji. Truth and non-violence was practical attributes of his personality. For us Gandhiji is the father of Nation but in reality he is so universal that he cannot be measured, weighed, or estimated in boundaries. He is the measure of all things that have some sort of universal appeal. He was not only the cardinal freedom-fighter for India but the liberator of universal injustice. At the All India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay on 8th August, 1942, that is, on the eve of **Quit India Movement**, Gandhiji himself declared, "I want to live full span of my life and according to me, the full span of life is 125 years. By that time, India will not only be free but the whole world will be free." In this accord Gandhi stands for invoking the inner strength of men for the good of one another, his spinning wheel for dignity of productive labour, and broomstick for abolition of social inequalities based on birth. He wanted freedom from rule of merchandise. He wanted rationality in productive system, which should be humanly oriented for the benefits of masses. His plan was peace, security and progress for human race as a whole. He believed that the planning should be based on 'Man Power' rather than 'Horse Power'. These issues are not restricted to traditional India, but are global in nature.¹

Looking at the present state of affairs in India and in the world, one would probably surmise that *Gandhism*, whatever the term may mean, cannot have any relevance in this twenty-first century.² Today, most of the world including India is facing terrorism and cross boarder tensions. A number of international terrorist organizations and groups as **Islamic State, Taliban, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Lashkar-e-Omar, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen** etc. are constantly threatening peace, prosperity and sovereignty of independent countries. Countries like Pakistan are openly supporting such terrorist groups to create cross boarder tensions. In this situation the concept of practicing non-violence is looking irrelevant. Likewise under the pressure of globalization and mechanizing way of production is looked as an essential strategy to survive on the economical front. It turns the Gandian approach of using more and more man power in production. These new changes and developments in our contemporary society not only put a question mark on the relevance and sustainability of Gandhian thoughts

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among masses but even the ardent devotees of Gandhi are losing force behind suggesting Gandhian solutions for contemporary problems. Consequently today Gandhi is remembered mostly not as a visionary but rather as a ritual and that is too only on his birthday and on the day of his assassination. Gandhi's teachings are now-a-days mostly confined to text books only. As a growing military super power in Asia, and to defend many an external and internal threats, India is definitely not access to the teachings of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) in dealing with its hostile neighbors, be it Pakistan or China; and also can't avoid the use of modern technologies in the field of production.

Looking at the teachings of Gandhiji on one hand and the modern threats as well as the developmental requirements on the other hand, a huge gap is seemed between these two identities. It subrogates our faith in *Gandhism* and so in the vast traditions of India. As Gandhiji was the ardent follower of great grand traditions of India and accepted this simple reality in many ways. As Dr. S. Radha Krishan also pointed this fact profoundly, "Gandhi's life was rooted in India's tradition with its emphasis on a passionate search for truth, a profound reverence for life, the ideal of non-attachment and the readiness to sacrifice all for the knowledge of God."³ Thus, denying Gandhi is denying the zest of universally accepted values of Indian traditions. The traditions of India cannot be denying just on the developmental changes of the modern world; as a matter of fact Indian traditions are not rigid and stationary pillars but are so evolutionary that accepts many different angles and dimensions of all universal truths. This great strength of Indian traditions kept India unchanged through ages.⁴

Gandhiji was not and never a blind follower of whatever comes in his way but he chooses only those practical traits which succeeded on the time tested testimony of truth and nonviolence. Throughout his life he experiments with different situations and possibilities regarding all walks of his own life and out of these synthesizes the most suitable social truths in the light of common wellbeing.⁵ Gandhiji himself revealed this fact and wrote, "I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject."⁶ Thus, Gandhism is not a fixed philosophy but is a wise evolutionary growth around some cardinal universally accepted truths. In this sense it is not important what Gandhiji had said and did in some specific situations but more important is his way of looking different things.

The universally cardinal truths that Gandhiji holds are belief in non violence, belief in strengthening humanity through self reliance and hard work, belief in universal brotherhood and belief in trusteeship. One must not understand all such beliefs of Gandhiji only in terms of his speeches and lifestyle but must have to develop such an insight that can decipher the true message of Gandhiji in his ever intensified calm feelings exhibited through many a situational vicissitudes.

Let us first scrutinize the relevance of non violence mostly practiced on socio-political front through Satyagrah i. e. non co-operation in Gandhian philosophy as it is the commanding traits of Gandhism. Non-violence, according to Gandhiji, “blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used”⁷ At another place he recognized non-violence as, “the law of our species (human) as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law to the strength of the spirit.”⁸ Thus, in Gandhism Non-violence is an essentially active human virtue and not the synonym of cowardliness; as the practitioner of Non-violence is always ready to join the fray non-violently wherever and whenever there is injustice or wrong. He neither tolerates nor compromises with injustice, wrong, tyranny, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, dictatorship.⁹ His task in life is not to destroy the evildoer but to redeem and to convert the evildoer by love. Gandhiji himself had shown this courage many a times.

Recently it is claimed that Mahatma Gandhi wanted to spend August 15, 1947, the first day of freedom, in breakaway Pakistan rather than in India. This was, however, neither tokenism nor a gesture of support for a country carved out of multi-faith India in the name of one religion, Islam but it is because Gandhi simply did not believe in the partition of India, and the creation of new, ‘unnatural’ borders by an arbitrary scalpel in a fit of what he described as momentary madness.¹⁰ This simply describes the courage of Gandhiji behind his faith in non-violence. Gandhiji, a devout Hindu, believed faith could nurture the civilizational harmony of India, a land where every religion had flourished, and Gandhiji was longing to experiment with this fact. In reality Gandhi’s immediate concern after independence was the fate of partition’s principal victims, the minorities: Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India. So he wanted to set a concrete example through his non-violent act. Infact, Gandhiji was not pleased with the two nation theory of Islamic oriented Jinnah that was cunningly materialized by receding Britishers.

Although it seems contradictory that how the principles of Gandhi’s non-violence can be applied to a world full of violence and constantly threatening peace loving peoples. It is also said that Violence has been with us from the beginnings of life on earth and is likely to continue in one form or another. Especially today there are not only AK 47s and hand grenades but also warships and fighter planes for

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aggression. Not only is this but another feature of conflict and warfare today the rise of terrorism as a mode of warfare. This modern form of attrition has spread its tentacles over all globe, be it Chechnya, Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan or India. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish terrorism from open wars. For example, Pakistan has waged not only three full-scale wars against India but also has indulged in cross-border terrorism. In this situation if India shed its weapons and cut down the will to counter external and internal threats at the name of Gandhism then surely it not only seems ridicules but it will be the historical blunder that could not be rectified all the way. As in this condition states like Pakistan and terrorist groups will take no time to forfeit and usurp our sovereignty. Then what is the solution in the light of Gandhism? Mahatma Gandhi himself suggests us the way. Despite being a man of peace, Gandhiji was a pragmatist and could see the need for taking up arms for defensive purposes. He states, "I would rather have India to resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonor."¹¹ Just to show the non-violent character India has adopted policy of defense and most of the time avoided the poly proactive use of lethal weapons. It means India is avoiding innocent killings but on the same time ready for combating against any threat in the right perspective and manner. Gandhiji reinforces the idea of non-killing in the following words: "Like others, he (*a moral person*) will know that no nation has risen without suffering, that even in warfare, the true test is suffering and not killing others, much more so in the warfare of passive resistance."¹² Thus, Gandhian approach to combat violence is to mobilize people towards the morality. But this would be a long and arduous path, which in the present day, most communities are reluctant to adopt. They want quick results. In general, violence generated, as a result of forgoing the non-violent means, brings into focus the urgency of the problem. Seeing the aftermath of the violence in Kashmir and that in Maoist regions, one can indeed find this. A long and tortuous path lies ahead of us to restore trust and peace.¹³ It is a fact that non-violent Satyagraha sometimes takes longer time but causes less damage to people and property and does not leave behind any hatred or ill-will. Ultimately imbibed with Ahimsa it is the pursuit of Truth and Truth always wins.¹⁴

It is also said that excess stress of Gandhiji on human power than inhuman power in the process of production is not good for the strengthening of a developing country like India as most of the time we associate Gandhiji with a wooden spinning wheel (Charkha). But if we scrutinizing this statement in the light of real Gandhian approach than only we can realize the visionary strength of Gandhism. The wooden spinning wheel is not only the symbol of human power but it is also a symbol of self reliance. Gandhiji was not in any sense against mechanization or capitalization. In reality Gandhiji was in favor of Swadeshi, it literally means 'of one's own country.' It aims at the removal of unemployment and poverty. It doesn't advocate rejection of foreign trade, in fact it advocate a healthy and non-exploitative form of trade. In the

same lineage Gandhiji had no objection to mechanization of production if it doesn't hurt the dignity of man and self-reliance of villages. He believed that mechanization is good when the hands are few for the work to be done. In a country like India, here labour is abundance maximum industries should be labour intensive and not capital intensive.¹⁵ It doesn't mean that Gandhiji was in opposition of capitalization and industrialization. On the contrary to safeguard capitalization Gandhiji coined a new phenomenon, concept or plea, called 'trusteeship'. This was basically addressed to the capitalists or the privileged classes who owned the lion's share of wealth and resources in the society to use their accumulated wealth in the welfare of downtrodden. Through this plea Gandhiji wanted them to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labour. It is considered to be a revolutionary idea for transforming the society. In actual sense it tries to combine the best elements of both Marxist and Capitalist systems as it retains both individual initiative and collective wellbeing.¹⁶ Likewise Gandhiji was not against industrialization in so far as it is not harmful to the basic society and natural environment. In a significant book 'Hind Swaraj' or 'Indian Home Rule' he wrote in 1908: "It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared. But I make a mistake. How can Manchester be blamed? We wore Manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it." So Gandhi argued strongly in favour of going back to the self-reliant production of clothes in villages, "a task in which charkha will have the crucial role of spinning the yarn, which will be used further by the handloom weavers to produce entirely hand-made cloth, called khadi or khaddar (hard-spun, hand-woven cloth)."¹⁷ Infact Gandhiji was more in favor of labor intensive cottage industries to reduce the poverty among masses and to generate work opportunities for them to irradiate the problem of unemployment in India. As these two are still the two main socio-economic problems of India so this Gandhian treatment is very much viable in our contemporary conditions.

Gandhiji was such a towering personality that his visions and ideology called as Gandhism is evergreen. It is not only fictional today but it will remain a guiding lighthouse tomorrow. For instance, after the assassination of Gandhiji prime minister of India Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in his important radio address said, "There is darkness everywhere." Then he corrected himself and continued, "I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years; and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country, and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living truth.....the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom" Thus the relevance of Gandhian attitude is not something to be cached and removed

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through the clutches of time; it alive with the liveliness of India and always keep us on the right path. The prophetic voice of Gandhi has a universal value in its true meaning it has all the characteristics to command our values despite our ongoing progress.¹⁸

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