

Mahatma Gandhi Relevance of His Ideas in Contemporary Time

Anu Khanna

B.B.K.D.A.V.College for Women, Amritsar, Punjab.

Abstract

The youth of today is facing the problems of unemployment, poverty and society is disgusted with terrorism, politics, religious intolerance, material attitude, rampant corruption, complete moral crisis and spiritual vacuum. Youth is being used for destructive purpose rather than constructive. That's why today's youth is unhappy, unsatisfied, disgusted and in pathetic condition. In this scenario the teaching and philosophy of Gandhi gives them hope, encouragement and sense of confidence to change the prevailing systems. The greatness of Gandhiji, put a sense of self-confidence in the common man to fight against any wrong with just two weapons- Truth and Nonviolence. He gave us the most valuable weapon of Satyagraha and swaraj. The weapons that this great man gave us were not just to drive away the Britishers but to drive away all the evils and fight back against the wrong even today.

Keywords: *Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Truth, self-sufficiency, sarvodya*

Reference to this paper
should be made as
follows:

Anu Khanna

*Mahatma Gandhi
Relevance of His Ideas
in Contemporary Time*

*RJPP 2017, Vol. 15,
No. 3, pp. 8-15
Article No. 2 (RP559)*

Online available at :
*[http://anubooks.com/
?page_id=2004](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=2004)*

Live as if you were to die tomorrow,
learn as if you were to live forever.

Gandhi ji was the philosopher of his own politics, organizer of his own cadre of politician and a timeless propagandist of his ideas- which involved difficult interpretation of new brand of politics he introduced in the country. If contemporary opinion is regarded, Gandhiji would be placed along with the greatest men of history. Gandhiji's greatness lay not in his achievement but in his character. It is unusual for a single person to combine in himself so many diverse and distinctive qualities. If one wants to understand Gandhiji's life and his works, one must try to understand his spiritual ideas and ideals in the light of which he conducted his struggle against group injustice and tyranny. Gandhi's ideas grew and developed as he had to face practical situations and find solutions to the problems which confronted him throughout his life. He was karmayogi as described by Gita. In accordance with its teachings, he held that good work must be performed in the spirit of sacrifice to God of humanity, especially in service of daridarnarayan, God of poor and downtrodden. He said "I am not endeavoring to see God in service of humanity, for I know that God is in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone". For Gandhiji, religion and morality were same and were interchangeable. 'Religion is to morality what water is to seed that is sown in the soil. Just as the seed is choked under the earth when it is not duly watered, so too, the morality which is devoid of the fertilizing influence of religion, gets thin and dry and is ultimately destroyed. It is clear, therefore that a true religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other". He did not believe that religious activities were separate from other activities of life which kept society together. Believing in fundamental moral values common to all religions of the world, he said he had nothing new to give to the world "Truth and non-violence are as old as hills".

The whole philosophy of Gandhiji revolves around the moral principle of truth, non violence and Satyagrahya. According to Gandhiji "This truth is not only truthfulness in word but truthfulness in thought also and not the relative truth of our conception but the absolute truth." Ahimsa literally means 'non killing' but this word has wider interpretation for gandhiji. He believed that this principle should be adopted as a way of life which means not offending anybody, not to have any ill will against any friend and foe; it means not to wish that some harm may be done to one's enemy even. According to Gandhi ji, ahimsa should be based on two main points. Firstly, according to divine reality, life is one and all violence committed towards others is violence towards oneself, towards the collective whole self and thus, self destructive,

and counter to the universal law of life, which is love. Secondly, Gandhi believed that ahimsa is the most powerful source in existence. Had himsa been superior to ahimsa, human kind would have long ago destroyed itself? The human race certainly could not have progressed so far as it has. From both view points, love is regarded as the highest law of human kind. He has always believed in non violence and lived by it there was an obvious relationship between the doctrine of truth and non violence as Gandhi says “I made the early discovery that I was to reach God as truth and truth alone. I could not do so except through a perfect vision of truth..... To see a universal and all pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as one self. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility”.

Gandhian philosophy is compatible with the view that humankind is undergoing gradual moral evolution while conflict is seen as inevitable, in fact not always desirable. Violence as a result of conflict is regarded as inevitable .Simply put; human beings do have capacity to resolve conflicts nonviolently. This might be difficult but it is possible. Liberation from a violent society has been a requirement for many decades.

The idea of satyagraha is logical culmination of ideals of truth and nonviolence . Gandhi used satyagraha –a passive resistance as a strategy very successfully during freedom struggle and in fact it remains the most important aspect of Gandhian thought The novelty of this concept was reinterpretation of both ,the political action and political aim in religious terms .This is the principle of purity of means .He holds that ends and means are convertible terms, If the latter deviate from the moral law ,the end whatever its outward appearance, will not be desired and worked for. Gandhiji strictly believed in karma theory of Gita according to which if a man acts in a sacred manner, then the fruits of karmas is going to be pure. A satyagrahi should perform good karmas ,the end of which will surely be good .Unlike Marx who believed in adopting violent means or revolution to bring about change, Gandhiji believed that a social transition should be brought about by nonviolent and peaceful means because the sanctity of the end cannot be separated from the purity of the means

Bapu was against satyagraha campaigns launched for trivial and unworthy causes. He called them duragraha. Indulgence in violence, stone throwing arsons and looting are denounced by him time and again .He maintained that “ Satyagraha excluded the use of violence in any shape or form whether in thought or deed.” The basic idea is to convert the heart of the opponent through love and suffering. In satyagraha there could be no place for gheraos, which are definitely coercive in nature. He called them barbarous because these were crude ways of using coercion. Restoring to frequent fasts for minor and selfish causes was also frowned upon by Mahatma. He said”Ridiculous fast spreads like a plague and are harmful.”In brief

fasting should be deemed to last weapon in the armory of satyagrahi. Needless to say satyagraha should be peaceful and nonviolent and in accordance with Gandhian ideals. The people should have right to resort to satyagraha when all other remedies fail to achieve the objective. A truthful satyagraha campaign demands courage, self discipline and humility. On the part of satyagrahi, it brings to bear tremendous moral pressure on the opponent and can bring remarkable transformation.

As already observed Gandhi's thoughts are equally a philosophy of self transformation and transformation of the heart of tyrant. The individual's task is to make a sincere attempt to live according to the principles of truth and nonviolence. They include resisting injustice, developing a spirit of service, selflessness and sacrifice emphasizing one's responsibilities rather rights, self discipline, simplicity of life style and attempting to maintain truthful and nonviolent relations with others.

Gandhiji was not merely satisfied with a nonviolent method for settlement of political and international conflicts and redressing wrongs but he also showed the way by which a conflict could be minimized, if not altogether eliminated. Take for instance; his scheme of decentralization of industry minimizes conflict in economic field. To Gandhiji, economic exploitation was the essence of violence in society and wars of future could be eschewed only by following a bold policy of decentralization through the organization of largely self sufficient village communities. "Self sufficiency" stated Gandhi ji, "does not mean narrowness" "man is as much self dependent as interdependent as when dependence becomes necessary in order to keep society in good order, it is no longer dependence but becomes co-operation where each is equal to others". He did not believe in the efficacy of atom bomb instead he pleaded for the evolution of atomic or soul force and regarded the world as his own family irrespective of any distinction of race, language or religion.

The ideal society envisaged by Gandhi would be a classless where every village will be sufficient unit. Political power will be completely decentralized and voluntary co-operation will characterize economic, political and social relations.

In Gandhian thought the emphasis is not on idealism but on practical idealism. It is rooted in the highest religious idealism and is thoroughly practical. Gandhi ji used to call himself 'practical idealist'. Gandhian philosophy is considered to be universal and timeless. It holds the ideals of truth and non violence which is relevant to all human kind. It is universal despite being fundamentally religious, as its religious position stresses not so much the Hindu interpretation of reality but to the beliefs which are common to all major religions.

Gandhi's can be relevance understood by taking a look at senseless development which led to contemporary problems of the world. The world is facing

today primarily emanates from human wants. Industrialization and high technologies have resulted in very high quantities of waste. The nuclear weapon states have collected deadly weapons capable of destroying the world several times over. In 1927 Gandhi wrote “a time is coming when those who are in mad race rush today of multiplying their wants will retrace their steps and say what we have done?” Gandhi believed violence multiplies violence, wants multiply wants, and arms against arms create injustice and inequality. Take for example; if only, a part of the money blocked in useless arms could be available to fight poverty and disease, the world could be hunger and disease free.

Exploring Gandhi’s economic thought one comes to conclusion that it was based on moral and spiritual approach to economics, sarvodya, bread labor and emphasis on wantlessness. Due to ever-growing globalization today, the hegemony created by Developed Nations under the grab of ‘Protectionism’ has somehow dented much bilateral relation. Corporate, industrialist, moneylenders are changing all the rules of game when it comes to pocketing profits. They are doing this at the expense of degrading environment, living patterns and above human choices. Consumerism has been redefined. On the other hand Gandhi was in favor of development which must start from the smallest to reach the zenith but with self help, own resources. For Gandhi economics and ethics are inseparable. The economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation is immoral and therefore sinful was in a way he was advocating theory of protectionism at that time.

Major burning problem which India is facing today like Naxalite problem Kashmir issue, internal security issues needs solutions like peaceful dialogue, alternate dispute resolution, above all Gandhian Non-violent approach. Kashmir problem which is taking away a lot of our resources and manpower needs a deeper and sincere effort from all sides to make things better for times to come as already we have lost many young ones under the incitement of some vested interest of religious fanatics who themselves never comes into open and deploy snow palter to make situation worse from bad. Interestingly Gandhi was completely against two nation theory, the relevance of which can be seen today why he felt two nations would tear apart the spirit of Hinduism. For instance, if only we could stop the money spend in Siachen glacier by India and Pakistan only for a week, we could feed millions.

Gandhi’s educational philosophy was all around development, character building, and individual self-reliance and forces workings towards communal harmony. He felt that education should not only increase knowledge but develop the culture of heart and hand. In Gandhi’s opinion all should be carried on through concrete life situation related to craft or to social and physical environment. We see that this kind

of learning is assuming more and more relevance today.

Gandhi had spent over 54 years fighting against social discrimination. He relentlessly fought for the removal of untouchability and principal of reservation as affirmation action was introduced. From the very start, Gandhi had worked for gender equality. He said that a woman is companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has the equal right of freedom and liberty with him. That's why he drew out women in masses, including illiterate and rural women, into his political and constructive movements. The history of Gandhi's struggles for social equality will remain a great source of inspiration as long as there are ethnic, gender and other social discrimination in world

Gandhi had recognized the finite character of earth's resources and needs for sustainable social order long before these concerns became prominent. He belonged to the school which believes in remedy rather than cure. It is quite important to understand what Gandhi once said "we cannot have ecological movement designed to prevent violence against nature, unless the principle of non-violence becomes central to ethics of human culture". Detection of depletion of the ozone layer, reported recurring of acid rain and the warming up of earth as a result of green house effect are serious pointers to the existential problems.

His indictment of modern civilization in Hind Swaraj was intended to caution mankind against this calamity. Gandhi called for limitation of wants so that man's stress on nature would be least possible. He wanted mankind to act as trustees of all creations. His concern for cleanliness and sanitation and hygiene is noteworthy. His ashrams were models of simple living and sanitation.

Gandhi always defined nationalism and patriotism in inclusive terms. He said 'isolated independence is not goal of world states. It is voluntary interdependent but not domination. He wanted independent India to work for world federation. Gandhian approach to nationalism and internationalism can become a manifesto for the 21st century world order based on tolerance brotherhood peace and mutual respect.

On June 14, 2007, the United Nations General assembly had unanimously decided that henceforth 2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, would be observed as a 'International Day of Non-violence'

Prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh aptly referred to relevance of Gandhi's message for today by saying 'Genocide, ethnic cleansing, religions and territorial wars and the ever growing menace of international terrorism are afflicting many parts of the world. In this background, the Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of peace tolerance and interdependence of humankind are surely even more relevant than hundred years ago'.

Gandhi wanted a free India which will not tolerate – politics without principles – wealth without work – commerce without morality – education without character – pleasure without conscience – science without humanity - worship without sacrifice. Today's India, Let us honestly confess, is coming to represent a negation of the values and purity in public life which Gandhi stood. Let us break the word Gandhi into six constituents.

'G' stands for Generosity

'A' stands for Affection

'N' stands for Non-violence

'D' stands for Dedication

'H' stands for honesty

'I' stands for integration

All these shows the growing relevance today of what Gandhi did and said. We all must try to his ideals and work for Non-violent, equitable, humane, sustainable, harmonious, prosperous and happy world. It is not enough that people proclaim that there is need to change : we have to ponder whether we can become the change or at least initiate the change that we want to see.

We must walk the talk of Mahatma, if we are to lead our country from poverty to prosperity, from rivalries to reconciliation, from hostility to harmony and restore the grandeur and natural beauty of our country. Martin Luther King said, "If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted , inspired by the version of humanity evolving towards a world peace and harmony. We may ignore him at our risk.

To sum up, Gandhian philosophy is not only political, moral and religious but it is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. The four words truth, Non violence, sarvodaya and satyagraha and their significance constitutes Gandhi and his teachings. These are the four pillars of Gandhian thought.

Permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence.

References

Dr. Y.P Anand, "*Gandhian legacy: its Relevance in 21st century*, *World Focus*, June 2010

Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, *New Delhi*

S.Radhakrishnan, *Great Indians*, *New Delhi 1973*

Y.N. Pathak, "*Why Gandhi Relevant Even Today*, *World Focus*, 2010

K.Swaminaha, *Relevance of Gandhi and other Essays*, *GandigramTrust 1998*

N.A.Pakhivala, *Relevance of Gandhi Today*, *New Delhi 1984*

RJPP, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2017, ISSN (P) : 0976-3635, (e) : 2454-3411, Impact Factor 4.0000 (ICRJIFR)

UGC Approved Journal No. 43279

Kumar, Ravindra, *Theory and practice of Non-violence, New Delhi, 2002*

V.P Verma, *“The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi”*