

THE GANDHIAN WAY OF LIFE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT : Mahatma Gandhi was not an inspired political philosopher destined to propose a new political philosophy and contemplate the world in the light of his creative vision. He was a common man whom the accident of circumstances had brought into the political field. But once he drifted to the field of politics, he made his mission sublime through his truthful nature, his sincerity, his tenacity, his industry, and his shrewd practical ability. Through his force of will and vital energy he grew by an evolutionary process to be a superman and was universally acclaimed the known, the Doer, and the Sayer. He practiced old philosophies and adhering to certain fundamental principles based upon truth, he led men to the realization of a better order of society than the destructive and cruel chaos in which mankind had hitherto existed. His mission was to purify politics, to rekindle love in the human breast, to rehabilitate the freedom of man, and to restore and teach the dignity of human labour.

Keywords : Gandhism, satyagrahis, Ram Rajya, Ahinsa, Doer, Sayer.

A leader of his people unsupported by any outward authority, a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor mastery of technical devices but simply on the convincing power of his personality, a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force, a man of wisdom and humility armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and betterment of their lot a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being and thus at all times risen superior.

Wherever, he walked a temple grew. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this even in flesh and blood trod upon this earth."¹

Einstein

Mahatma Gandhi was not an inspired political philosopher destined to propose a new political philosophy and contemplate the world in the light of his creative vision. He was a common man whom the accident of circumstances had brought into the political field. But once he drifted to the field of politics, he made his mission sublime through his truthful nature, his sincerity, his tenacity, his industry, and his shrewd practical ability. Through his force of will and vital energy he grew by an evolutionary process to be a superman and was universally acclaimed the known, the Doer, and the Sayer. He practiced old philosophies and adhering to certain fundamental principles based upon truth, he led men to the realization of a better order of society than the destructive and cruel chaos in which mankind had hitherto existed. His mission was to purify politics, to rekindle love in the human breast, to rehabilitate the freedom of man, and to restore and teach the dignity of human labour.

Gandhism is, thus, "not a set of doctrine or dogmas, rules or regulations, injunctions or inhibitions, but it is a way of life. It indicates a new attitude or restates an old one towards life's issues and offers ancient solution for modern problems."² There is no ism Gandhi, Ism means a distinctive doctrine. Gandhi never claimed finally for his opinions. He was always experimenting with truth. He styled his activities as search for, or experiments with truth.³ Consistency, Gandhi said, "is a hobgoblin". No theory guided his thoughts and actions. He always strove to keep his mind open and he very often differed with himself. There was no rigidity with him and his life was an unending experiment.

Gandhi himself had told the members of the Gandhi Sangh at Saoli in March 1936; "There is no such thing as 'Gandhism' and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I don't claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. The opinion I have formed and conclusions I have tried are not final. I may change them tomorrow I have nothing to teach in the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast scale as I have sometimes erred and learnt by my error well, all my philosophy, if it may be called by that pretentious name, is contained in what I have said. You will not call it gandhism'; there is no ism about it."

There is, therefore, no such thing as gandhism. It is only the gandhian way and outlook which is neither rigid nor formal nor final."⁴ The things he said had been said before, the truth he uttered, or even the principles he claimed, had been said and practiced in earlier days also.

He held these cardinal principles - truth and non-violence - religiously and based all his transactions on these principles. Gandhi's originality lies in the application of these principles on a mass scale covering the whole of life, individual and social, moral and material. No one before him had even done so. The principles of truth and non-violence had been previously applied on individual scale to mould personal life and acts. But for Gandhi to separate the individual from society was to do violence to both. The individual and society, in his opinion, act and react upon each other and have to be raised simultaneously.

A casual reference may be made to the statement which Gandhi made at a public meeting at Karachi soon after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been concluded, and just before the Karachi session of the Congress. Gandhi is reported to have declared that "Gandhi may die but gandhism may live for ever."⁵ "Apparently", says Dr. Sitaramayya, "he then and there coined the term gandhism as an expression which succinctly but comprehensively summaries the philosophy that underlines his cult of truth and non-violence."⁶ The Gandhi-Irwin Pact, or the Delhi Pact, as the biographer of Lord Irwin calls it was a triumph of truth and non-violence. It was tribute to his power of Satyagraha, because the Pact, according to Gandhi, had established the basis of equality in principle between India and Britain.⁷ It was a new basis of relationship between the two countries, though the Pact neither promised independence nor Dominion status. The success of the Pact depended upon the behavior of the British government and the outcome of the Round Table conference. And Gandhi was doubtful of the good results. "There is every chance of my returning empty-handed," he said on-going aboard the Rajputana which took him to London to participate in the second Round Table conference as the sole delegate of the congress.

It will be too much to assert that Gandhi had claimed to establish a distinctive doctrine of his own when he said “gandhiism may live forever.” The only logical meaning which can be given to it is that he desired to keep the torch of truth and non-violence burning forever and glowing the path of true satyagrahis in reaching the goal of independence, and established a non-violence society or Ram Rajya. Perhaps, Gandhi was in a mood to renewed his listeners at the Karachi meeting of the ordeals ahead of them, because the moment the Pact was signed, complaints of its non-fulfillment were levelled against the government and Gandhi was again negotiating with the viceroy, this time the new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, well known in India for his professions and deeds.

It would, therefore, be presumptuous to give the statement a meaning other than the natural explanation in the context of the circumstances. There was no gandhiism with Gandhi. Being a growing and evolving personality there could be no finally fixed modes of thought and action for him. As regards the two cardinal principles of truth and non-violence, there was no rigidity for him in their application. Even his closest associates could not make any positive forecast of how he would act under a particular set of circumstances. Gandhi himself freely admitted that Ahinsa might be applied differently in different circumstances and situations. In fact, all isms, as Acharya Kripalani rightly said, “come into existence, not all the initiative of those in whose names they are preached and promulgated, but as the result of limitations imposed upon the original ideas by the followers. Lacking the creative genius, the followers systematize and organize. In so doing they make the original doctrines rigid, inelastic, one-sided and fanatical depriving them of their original freshness and flexibility, which are the signs of y Gandhi simply indicated the direction without trying to fill in the details finally or for all times to come. It was only a gandhian way and outlook. When his impatient followers fill in the details making his ideas and technique rigid, it becomes gandhiism. Then, the principles he preached and the modes he practiced become rigid and extreme. Gandhi had always condemned extremism and taken instead, a little genuine spiritual religion and a few psychological principles,” Gandhi said,” they would be at once shaking hands with each other or even running into each other’s arms. All these ideologies and isms have great things to their credit, all have great crimes to their debit too.” Gandhi’s views are equally applicable to all varieties of ism, religious, economic and political.

Eventually it can be said in the words of Pandit Nehru that Gandhi jee was a man of the keenest intellect, of fine feeling and good taste, wide vision, very human and yet essentially the ascetic who has suppressed his passions and emotions, sublimated them and directed them in spiritual channels, a tremendous personality drawing people to himself like a magnet and calling out fierce loyalties and attachments-all this so unlikely and beyond a peasant. In short he was the spirit of India.

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