

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN THOUGHTS IN THE PRESENT POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Politics is only a pathway to the service of God by Mahatma Gandhi. The originality and depth of his political thought was closely connected to action. He was not just adept at translating ideas into action. In trying to make Satyagraha effective, he grasped some elemental truths about the nature of politics. This was not a philosophy of and for the cave-dweller, but for popular politics in the street, Maidan and the village. This paper examines the relevance of Gandhian thought in the present politics.

Index Terms

Politics, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Non-Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

“I am not a saint who has strayed into politics” Gandhi once wrote “I am politician who is trying to become a saint”. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of the greatest and admired personalities of the 20th century has a lasting legacy for India and the world. He successfully led India’s national movement with his unique style of leadership, and well regarded for his commitment and contribution to Ahimsa and Satyagraha. Gandhi whole life was an experiment with truth. Gandhiji was attempt an entirely new kind of politics based on the transformative spirituality of non- violence. It is difficult to find an answer to the question, how much relevance of Gandhian thought in the present politics? The reason is that, there are pro and anti- opinions related to this. Great scholar, George Bernard Shaw says, “Gandhi was the most influential political personality, he was not an ordinary person but a person of unique ability”.

2. RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES

Gandhism starts with the famous line-“Simple living and high thinking”. Although Gandhi is known worldwide as a political leader, he was also a renowned theorist, philosopher and practitioner of truth, non-violence, tolerance, and freedom. He was a spirit of profound wisdom with an iron will and an inflexible resolves that shook the British’s strength to the core with the simplicity and humility of his life. Though he was considered a frail naked man, his principles and ideologies are revered worldwide. Despite the fact that, on the superficial level, his principles are based in Indian contexts, his philosophy is considered universal and eternal by the world.

2.1 Non-Violence (Ahimsa)

Gandhi was an apostle of non-violence. It was weapon used by him which gained our country independence. Instead of relying on violence, he taught the world a lesson that one can achieve anything through the weapon of non-violence, toleration and perseverance. It is sometimes said that non-violence is a weapon of the weak but relying solely on non-violence takes a lot of courage and patience. Non-violence, for him, didn’t mean just the abstinence from violence. It was much more profound in practice and even in its connotation. It entailed remaining in accord with nature and transforming the whole way of life. This identification of the individual with the whole cosmos and at the same time retaining the individuality is what constituted non-violence. This realization will make the individual overcome his or her shortcomings and will spur him or her to constantly strive for refining his or her thoughts or actions. In a world that is

moving through the phases of war and is marred with violence and brutal killing of innocent lives due to the menace of terrorism, the significant requirement of Gandhi an ideal of non-violence is now more than ever.

2.2 Gandhian Concept of Swaraj

When Mahatma Gandhi and other Indians talk about swaraj, they meant it in the sense of self-governance. Swaraj meant to be free from external influences and foreign control. Now the country is independent and free from any external control. But can we truly say that the people are independent? In the present times, having control over one's own self. Our actions are governed by the opinions and judgements of other people. What we need today is freedom from outside control. It is crucial that we exercise self-discipline and self-control and should free ourselves from worldly temptations. In today's competitive and fast-paced world, we must have control over our inner conscience. Self-empowerment is the need of the hour. Every person should search for their own identity, and shouldn't try to fit themselves in the moulds created society.

2.3 Satyagraha

Satyagraha means to be firm with truth. Gandhiji successfully designed and developed Satyagraha as a political weapon against British rule in India. Satyagraha means "the exercise of the purest soul force against all injustice, oppression and exploitations". Satyagraha contemplates concerted mass action for paralysing the entire structure of a despotic government. Satyagraha is based on the theory of self-suffering. It upholds the truth not by inflicting suffering on the opponent but on oneself. Satyagraha is twice blessed; it purifies the sufferer and the person whom against it is directed. The satyagrahi appeals to the reason or heart of the opponent by self-suffering and sacrifice. Satyagraha is a method of solving conflicts. Conflicts can be resolved through the unison of hearts. The conscious suffering of a satyagrahi evokes favourable public opinion for the cause of the conflict.

The ultimate aim of Satyagraha is to achieve success, despite his extreme sufferings, with cheerfulness and love unlike passive resistance that is undertaken in a situation of weakness and despair. Ultimately, Satyagraha offers a substantial and effective opposition to injustice and tyranny in comparison to passive resistance.

2.4 Relevance of Gandhian thought in politics

As Gandhi was not a visionary but a practical man, his political thoughts present a living philosophy capable of solving many problems that the contemporary world presents. There is an element of universality in his thoughts- the zeal with which these ideas were used back in those days makes us realize its significance in contemporary times.

Gandhi lived in a time characterized by political upheavals and fermentation. At that time, earlier ideologies which were entrenched in the society began to lose their significance and new thoughts and ideologies were taking shape. It was in this context, that Gandhi came up with his political principles and tested their strength in the furnace of his own experiences. He came up with the idea that the institutions can be defeated with the weapon of truth without causing any ranking in them. In the post-world war times, he came up with a panacea to these problems and was one of the foremost thinkers of the idea of one world-one government. He thought that the only solution to the problems like world-wars is the realization of the feeling of oneness of a man as a whole. He said that regardless of political boundaries, economic divide and cultural differences, spiritually and morally, we are all humans. He even called for a federal world state based on social and economic justice, and the self-determination of people. This concept of oneness of humans and a world government is more important than ever in the contemporary times, when countries are at a cut-throat competition with each other, ready to even sacrifice the lives of civilians. The organizations like the UN are no more than a puppet in the hands of few countries. The world government will help in keeping a check on these countries. And when there is a rise in terrorism, people should realize that irrespective of religion or race, we all are humans and should try to protect each other.

In a world where rulers relied more on brute force and the governments worked against the law and brotherhood, Gandhi was an exception. He was followed by millions, not because of his wealth or special police or power but he appealed to our conscience which made the people realize that once when spiritual power seems to assert its influence, it

reduces the values of the material world to impotence. He was as unique among the spiritual leaders as among the rulers in general. His way of fighting was unique and thus inspirational. This was reflective in his fifteen years of struggle against South Africa for Indians.

The government imprisoned him and his followers and treated them as sub-human beings, but whenever they needed help, he never turned his back. When the government was involved in a dangerous war, he arranged a special corps of Indian stretcher-bearers for them and this proves that he was a true leader. And also he didn't claim himself to be infallible.

He always paused and reconsidered the righteousness of his actions. When his followers used violence in the Chauri-Chaura incident, he instantly called off the movement. He not only helped his enemies in the creed but also recognized his fallibility, which brought him reverence. But in contemporary times, when leaders are moved by self-interested attitude and turn their backs to the government when they are proved wrong, Gandhi's principles can help them steer in the right direction.

No doubt, people see him as a mystic and religious leader but he was best known as the political leader of India. His idea was that of establishing a new social order hinged on non-violence and truth, which is unknown to present-day modern democratic, communist or socialist states. He advocated the establishment of a just socio-political order in the political realm. As justice for him was the eternal synthesis of non-violence, freedom and equality, it would be a stateless society with the maximum consummation of truth, non-violence, justice, freedom, and equality.

His ideal society would be a nonviolent stateless society and he repudiated the state as antagonistic to liberty and justice of an individual. He dismissed the notion of the state on the premise that it poses a threat to the freedom of the individual and it represents violence in an organized form. He didn't want to abolish the state, as the anarchists did, but he was strictly opposed to the oppressive authority and absolute sovereignty of the state. He, in fact, said that the present society would see representative institutions and government. Thus, he meant a nonviolent society and not a nonviolent stateless society.

He prescribed a nonviolent society where voluntary organizations would be the substitute of state. The society would consist of self-sufficing, self-regulating village communities joined in a voluntary federation where cooperation is the key to a dignified life. Every village will be a panchayat or republic with full powers, which would be self-sustained and competent of even defending itself against the world. He regarded the village as a republic within a republic. His ideal state was a nonviolent democratic state where social life was self-regulated. He preached nonviolence as the greatest of all virtues. He said democracy doesn't lie in how many people vote but democracies in its truest sense means to what extent people are saturated with the idea of non-violence and truth. He says that in an ideal democratic state the powers are to be decentralized and equality is to prevail in every aspect of life.

He was of the view that most of the functions of the state must be transferred to these voluntary organizations except the maintenance of the federation, for which government would be required. He said that power doesn't enlighten the individual rather it frustrates his inner genius. He stated that every individual has a responsibility to the society and hence must be given the opportunity to become as good as the other which is only possible in a decentralized system. Decentralization, in the present times, is observed in our country by diffusing powers to local self-government bodies.

He also believed in the least interference from the government. He said that true democracy exists where people do their activities with the least interference from the government. He also detested the monotony of machine production and took pride in the creative work done by people for which they were famous in the past.

Conclusion

To summarize, the political ideas of Gandhiji has remarkable consistency and continuity. He considered man as exemplifying the spiritual principle in him which is divine. He discussed that the divine nature of man makes religion to engage itself positively with the world. Gandhi was an activist. He worked for the enhancement of society. In the field of politics, he comprehended the issues with special consideration based on Indian nature of socio-economic and politics. He defined politics as the best means to regulate the national life and also he determined that its power should decentralize in unbiased manner. According to Gandhiji, the happiness of every individual is the end. He found different types of Satyagraha and non-violence as the best way to attain the ends. He articulated the noteworthy theories in politics in order to attain his ultimate end of welfare of all. He thought that the state in concentrated form of power structure is more coercive than individual. So he recommended the political power decentralization in the democratic form of governance. Because decentralized democracy gives the possibility to the public contribution and representation. It guarantees the liberty and autonomy to the individual, village and nation in its extensive application of the welfare world will be attainable.

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