



## Ethics and society in Gandhian Philosophy

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### JETIR Abstract

The present world is the world of science. Man developed his intellectual ability in course of time. In the present technological and scientific achievement there is less importance of value and ethics. Consequently there is an alienation of man in the present world. Man is no longer foresighted but profit mentality tends to take interest in the trifling things. There is a need for greater attention to explore the importance of value and ethics in the society.

Gandhi is a man of practical idealist. He believes in an ideal which is spiritual and he is a practical philosopher because he always tries to put his ideas into practice. His entire thought-system is based on two moral cardinal values, namely, **truth and non-violence** which are more relevant today than before. Gandhian concepts such as, social equality, universal love, non-possession, purity of means, value oriented education, satyagraha, classless society, removal of untouchability, global peace are having great relevance and significance in modern times. The modern society has become more aggressive, acquisitive, exploitative and violent due to the imperfection in the human institution. There is no other alternative than to adopt the ethics of Gandhi to get rid of evils of the modern society. Whatever may be a problem, however complex-modern-ultra modern, Gandhism had always a remedy. Gandhi's ideal leads us to the path through which we can achieve our goal of life. Gandhi's social philosophy became more and more relevant in the establishment of new peaceful world.

**Key words:** Non-violence, social equality, universal love, non-possession, Self-sacrifice, Truth & Righteousness, spiritual values, eliminating violence, inequality, removal of untouchability, global peace.

**Introduction:**

The present world is governed by materialistic values and utilitarianism. In the present context of technological and scientific achievement there is less importance of value and ethics. Consequently there is an alienation of man in the present world. Man is no longer foresighted but profit mentality tends to take interest in the trifling things. There is a need for greater attention to explore the importance of value and ethics in the society. This paper tries to show the possible way out of this situation which has already been advocated by M. K. Gandhi. I shall try to find out the Gandhian ways which are essential to lead a pious and moral life.

**Social and political views of Gandhi:**

Gandhi is a practical idealist. He believes in an ideal which is spiritual and he is a practical philosopher because he always tries to put his ideas into practice. His entire thought-system is based on two moral cardinal values, namely, **truth and non-violence** which are more relevant today than before. Gandhian concepts such as, social equality, universal love, non-possession, purity of means, value oriented education, satyagraha, classless society, removal of untouchability, global peace are having great relevance and significance in modern times. The modern society has become more aggressive, acquisitive, exploitative and violent due to the imperfection in the human institution. There is no other way than to adopt the ethics of Gandhi to get rid of evils of the modern society. Whatever may be a problem, however complex-modern-ultra modern, Gandhism had always a remedy. Gandhi's social philosophy became more and more relevant in the establishment of a new peaceful world-order.

**Origin of society:**

Gandhi never bothers about the origin of society rather he derives a moral issue in this regard. Morals become the ethical basis of society. The origin of society rooted in man's realization that complete selfishness has no place in life. It lies in man's conscious effort to transcend his egoistic ways and to rise above his selfish motives. So the formation of society led to avoid violence. The very basis of society consists in **Non-violence and Self-sacrifice**. The principle of love and cooperation is the basic foundation of the society.

**Religion and society:**

According to Gandhi man should seek the permanent element in his life. It touches the truth which creates an atmosphere for an ideal evolution of society. He defined religion as a belief in the ordered and the moral government of the universe.

Morality is the basis of human life. In fact, the real progress of society depends on morality, In. other words; it contributes to peace, happiness and progress and creates an atmosphere for an ideal evolution of society. In the terrestrial world, moral values determine the way of life to be led. For Gandhi, Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Gandhi took every aspect of human life only from moral stand point. He even suspended non-cooperation movement in 1921 as he believed that people are not morally qualified to conduct the movement. He believed that morality is not possible without religion. He declared emphatically that there is no religion higher than Truth & Righteousness. He further opined that if we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. His humanism believes in doing good to others as the way of highest moral life. He pointed out that as long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. He expressed his feelings clearly in Harijan.

“For me, morals, ethics and religions are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand”<sup>1</sup>

The highest moral life is doing good to others. From this, it follows that in a society there cannot remain any opposition between ‘individual good’ and ‘social good’. Gandhi advocated some cardinal virtues of life which are very essential to lead a moral life. These cardinal virtues are for the good of individual as well as the good of the society. The five virtues are ahimsa (nonviolence), satya (truthfulness), aparigraha (non- possession) and celibacy (bramhacharya). Gandhi added Abhaya (fearlessness). In understanding the social implications of the Gandhian view of cardinal virtues, it is absolutely necessary not merely to define his cardinal vows and establish proper relation between them, but also to focus on the nature of peace he has preached and practiced.

#### Ahimsa (Non- Violence)

Literally speaking non-violence means non-injury and non-killing. Gandhi gave a new interpretation to the concept of non-violence According to Gandhi, non-violence is the law of human nature & race. He held that non-violence as a moral virtue is a law of being. One may not harbour any evil thought. His concept denies enmity. The doctrine of ahimsa according to Gandhi, tells us that ahimsa requires far greater physical and mental courage than that required for delivering physical blows. Physical power has obvious limitations. He clearly stated. “Ahimsa is a positive state of love, doing good even to the evil doer ... .. it requires you to resist the wrong doer by disassociating yourself from him”<sup>2</sup>.Gandhi opined that non-violence is not only for the rishis and saints but it also meant for common people. Real harmony in the society lies in Ahimsa but not in Himsa. Thus, the Concept of Ahimsa emphasized by the Father of the Nation contributes to the highest good of mankind not only in present times but also in future. Good derived out of violence is temporary and the evil it does is permanent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harijan 3.10.1936,p ,268].

<sup>2</sup> .Young India.25.8.1920.p-2

<sup>3</sup> ibid.21.5.1925.p-178

### Satya (Truthfulness)

Gandhi held highest regard for Truth. His life was a series of experiments with Truth. To him, Truth is not merely truthfulness in word, but in thought and deed. He identified Absolute Truth with God. The word Satya comes from Sat, which means to be and to exist. He worshipped God not as Brahma but as Truth only. He stated that lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood are to be avoided to practice truth.

### Asteya (Non-Stealing)

It forbids the keeping or holding in possession of such things which are not needed. It also means not taking away the property or anything belonging to anybody unless it is given by the person concerned. He stated that people must reduce their wants. He emphasized that person is qualified to follow this virtue only if he leads simple life.

### Aparigraha (Non-Possession)

It means contentment. A man being contented with the necessities of life and not to pine for more. But absolute non-possession is impossible in life. Even the body is possession. Even so it has to be practiced to the best of one's capacity for the welfare of social life. He emphasizes that love and aparigraha go together. Without perfect love aparigraha is not possible.

### Celibacy (Brahmacharya)

All Indian spiritual works gave more importance to celibacy. It has been practiced as a cardinal virtue. Etymologically speaking, this virtue is a way of life for the realization of Brahma. All kinds of restraint have been associated with it. Gandhi says that Brahmacharya means control in thought, word and action of all the senses at all times in all places. An individual who practices brahmacharya is free from all passion.

### Abhaya (Fearlessness)

Gandhiji added another virtue, Abhaya. Fearlessness. According to him, a seeker cannot seek truth without fearlessness. Gandhi asserts that cowards can never be moral. A seeker is ready to sacrifice, patiently and fearlessly everything including life for the sake of good of other people.

### Transformation of society:

Gandhian methods insisted on people's initiative, in the transformation of society. So he wanted that man should reach the height of consciousness and moral strength. Gandhian methods are not merely reason; through self suffering, he

tried to raise the consciousness of people. Social transformation cannot be brought through military power. Gandhi tried to rouse the consciousness of the people through constructive programme and bring about social changes.

Gandhi's ethical system focused on the greatest good for the greatest number in society. He meant by social justice as fairness to the individual, and priority to disadvantaged people.

Gandhi has not favoured industrial capitalism on the plea that it promotes economic materialism of the West. He argued for swaraj self-rule from spiritual point of view. The use of ethical and spiritual values in social work practice is reflected in Gandhian thought and constructive programme which he endeavoured to implement throughout his life for elimination of the evils in the society and his approach to development of weaker sections in the society.

Gandhi wanted to bring about a social order in which, there is greatest good of all, the last and the lowliest. The society which he contemplated is free from moral degeneration, social injustice and economic exploitation. Though he has not spelt out a social order of his conception, he had a definite concept of casteless and stateless society based on truth, non-violence, equality and moral and spiritual values. The constructive programme which he enunciated is intended for eliminating violence, domination, and inequality.

#### **The dignity of labour:**

Now it is clear that Gandhi wants every man to be treated as equal. He comes to think of certain ways to eradicate social inequality. He initiated a doctrine of bread labour in this regard. Gandhi got this idea from the writings of Tolstoy and Ruskin and also from the Gita. Gita says that he who eats without laboring for it eats stolen bread. Gandhi feels that this idea can be useful for bringing a feeling of equality among the members of a society. Bread labour means that in order to live man must work. The other benefit of this labour is that one would be able to keep his body fit.

The supreme condition of morality is attached to bread labour. Everyone must take bread labour voluntarily. There is no compulsion because it gives rise to discontent and revolt. Social life is based on love and willing co-operation. So the doctrine of bread labour can be socially beneficial only when individuals take to it voluntarily.

Gandhi insisted on labour. He says labour is superior to capital. That is why it is able to give to the person doing labour a kind of dignity. He is not in favour of inciting labour against capital as we find it in Marxism. He believes that society has to be based on love and mutual trust and not on struggle. As a firm believer of ahimsa Gandhi would not permit any fight against the capitalists. In spite of everything society must be based on moral considerations. Class struggle will bring hatred and once these forces are let loose, they will be going out of control which brings violent effect on society. That is the reason why Gandhi introduces the doctrine of Trusteeship of the rich. The rich people should be made to realize that the capital in their hands is the fruit of the labour of the poor men. This realization would make them feel that the good of the society lies in using capital and riches for the good of others and not only for personal comfort. Then the capitalist would function as trustees for the poor. The surplus wealth will be given by the rich as trustees for the poor. In this way economic solidity and economic equality will be established. Gandhi believes that economic basis of society must be moral one and hence based on love and trust.

**Sarvodaya -An Ideal Government:**

The ideal society aims at bringing about a good, peaceful and happy state where every individual would be able to get equal opportunity and comfort. The society which is based on strict moral sense and mutual cooperation there will not remain any reason for lust or greed and consequently life will be more peaceful and there will remain no scope for exploitation of any kind. Then perfect democracy will prevail. Sarvodaya means the betterment of all. It is compared and contrasted with utilitarianism. The greatest good of the greatest number is the motto of Utilitarianism. The former is based on love and altruistic in nature whereas the later one is hedonistic and selfish in nature. Gandhi aims at the establishment of an ideal government in which peace and happiness will reign supreme.

**Conclusion:**

Gandhi as a man of action practiced what is moral, truthful and non-violence after thoroughly examining those values. The whole philosophical thought is based on two moral cardinal values truth and non-violence. These values are more relevant today than before. Besides these the other concepts are social equality, universal love, purity of means, non-possession ,satyagraha, sarvodaya, removal of untouchability ,global peace etc. are having great relevance and significance in the modern world. The modern society has become more aggressive, exploitative and violent due to the imperfection in the human institution. To get rid of the evils of the modern society the ethics of Gandhi is most effective and best remedy for the same. Gandhi's social philosophy is more and more relevant in the reconstruction of a new peaceful world order.

