



GANDHIAN POLITICAL THOUGHTS AND ITS RELEVANCE: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *In this article the researcher has focused on the political philosophy and the the political ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. The article also discusses the relevance of Gandhian political ideas in today's context. The name M. K. Gandhi is synonymous with the concepts of nonviolence and humanism. He was an important figure in the fight for liberation and harmony. He imparted a wealth of knowledge on matters of social and political significance. Since Gandhi drew most of his inspiration from the world's greatest thinkers, his thoughts tend to be philosophical in character. Gandhi came up with plans to improve society. By analysing his mind, we may learn new things. He was, without a doubt, a social engineer who sought to create a new human civilization in which all people might live in harmony. Gandhi's goal, in the face of societal upheaval, was to create a welfare state based on nonviolence and honesty.*

Keywords: *humanism, greatest thinkers, philosophical, social and political.*

Introduction: It is widely acknowledged that Gandhiji, the proponent of non-violence, was a great revolutionary leader who helped his nation gain its independence and establish equality with the rest of the world via the implementation of his method of non-violence and self-suffering. The traditional, western definition of the word "political philosopher" did not apply to Mahatma Gandhi. He never claimed or pretended to have the ability to advance a novel political ideology. He kept the old ideas in place while guiding people toward a more just society by using certain basic concepts and methods based on reality. Due to his evident virtues and uncomplicated way of living, he became popular throughout India. The personification of humanism on our planet was Mahatma Gandhi. In his aspirations of India, Mahatma Gandhi portrayed it as a country where all people, regardless of caste, creed, gender, or anything else, shall happily coexist. Gandhi never asserted that his views were infallible. He framed his pursuits as experiments or searches for the truth (Chatterjee, 1984).

Gandhi is justly celebrated as the founding figure of modern Indian nationalism. The national movement gained significant momentum under Gandhi's leadership. If we look at Aurobindo as the previous stage in India's development as a country, Gandhi is the next natural step. The ideas of Aurobindo and Gandhi are quite similar. Gandhi does not fit the typical profile of a political philosopher. Professor Humayun Kabir argues that Gandhi

was more of a tactician than a philosophy. He was a psychologist as well as a philosopher. He grasped the collective mindset. So, it was clear that Gandhi would be the most effective leader of the people. Gandhi goes through a change. Gandhi, too, developed a spiritual outlook. He evolved from a brilliant tactician into the great Mahatma. A guy of action best describes Gandhi. Gandhi never claimed omniscience. Gandhi was a constant source of motivation for truth seekers. There is no such thing as Gandhism, Gandhi said. However, Gandhism cannot be disproved since so many people identify as such. Times magazine found that, second only to Jesus Christ, Gandhi is the most popular historical figure.

Objectives: The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives-

- ✓ To study the political thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi.
- ✓ To find out the relevance of Gandhian political thoughts in today's context.

Significance of the Study: Gandhi's contribution to Indian political thinking cannot be discounted, despite the fact that he did not provide a systematic and well-worked-out political philosophy in the western sense and instead offered only practical solutions to cope with the many social, economic, and political difficulties. He advocated for change in both politics and ethics, stressing the need of truth and nonviolence in addressing global issues. In a society filled of hostility and torn by misunderstanding, Gandhi was the "immortal symbol of love and understanding," as put forward by Dr. Radhakrishnan. However, Gandhi's attempts to bridge the gap between politics and ethics have been roundly criticised. Regarding the concepts of nonviolence and trusteeship in the current environment, Gandhi has been criticised for his lofty idealism and utopianism. The importance of this research cannot be overstated.

Gandhiji's Political Thoughts:

Gandhiji strongly disagreed with Western culture and its attendant democratic institutions. He questioned the realistic assumptions of contemporary Western culture. The flashy, aggressive, and promiscuous elements of contemporary Western culture fought against him. He thought that the current state of civilization was equivalent to anarchy and illness. He was quite harsh in his criticism of western democratic politics, saying that they were dogged by a triple contradiction. The belief in the infinite potential of capitalism led to the exploitation of the oppressed classes. They even resorted to fascist and dictatorial methods in certain cases. The British did not capture India by democratic means, he said openly. He also spoke out against the racist policies of both South Africa and the American South. Gandhi was a firm believer that a nonviolent approach might achieve true democracy. There was no middle ground between democracy and violence. The nationalist articulation of the liberation fight and the increasing democratization of political processes that already brought in socioeconomic and cultural distinctions provided an especially fertile environment for the growth of swaraj as an ideology and tactic.

Stateless democracy: For Gandhi, the ideal form of government is a stateless democracy in which satyagrahi village communities cooperate peacefully and voluntarily. A world without states, as Mahatma Gandhi envisioned them, is not attainable now or in the foreseeable future. People in state organizations have an obligation to

cultivate the nonviolence that is inherent to them and bring it to a suitable degree, even if this is not possible. In addition, the democratic system should foster the growth of nonviolence throughout all spheres of life and all levels of society. Without progress, we will never be able to rid ourselves of the climate of dread, the erosion of life's values, and the issues we've reaped so abundantly.

He admitted that a democratic government and institutions were essential in his perfect society. Although he envisioned a stateless society in which autonomous village groups formed a voluntary federation, he saw that the continued existence of this federation necessitated some kind of authority. Therefore, contrary to popular belief, his ideal state is primarily a non-violent state rather than a non-violent and stateless community. He was opposed to authoritarian rule and the notion of state sovereignty, but not to the concept of an ideal nation-state. The ideal state, in Gandhi's view, was a peaceful democracy in which social life was left to self-regulate. Every citizen rules himself in a democracy. Gandhiji believed that the true measure of democracy was not the participation rate at the polls, but rather the degree to which the general populace embraced nonviolence and selfless service.

Trusteeship: Gandhiji's notion of trusteeship is a novel and important addition to political theory. The primary goal is to utilize the world's natural and social resources equitably by seeing them as a public trust of which humanity is the trustee. The idea was to share property without nationalising it, combining the best features of both capitalism and communism. Even as early as 1942, Gandhiji issued a warning, saying, "I see coming the day of the rule of the poor, whether that rule be through the force of arms or nonviolence," and he recommended trusteeship administration as a viable option to class conflict. Gandhi said that all property existed in the form of a social trust. The proprietor was not obligated to take more than was necessary to provide a bare minimum standard of living. The property's neighbours were expected to help with maintenance and community programmes in addition to the property's owner. Everyone in the community, including the owner, was to consider themselves trustees of the land. In his editorial in Harijan (3rd June, 1939,) the concept of trusteeship was stated as "Suppose I have come by a fair amount of wealth either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me, what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others, the rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community."

Decentralisation: In his plan for an independent India, Gandhiji advocated for a system of administration founded on the principle of popular sovereignty. Only a decentralized democracy, in accordance with the principle of swaraj, can be both effective and legitimate. When asked for his opinion, he said that "centralization as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society." He advocated for a shift of power away from urban centres and towards rural areas. Mahatma Gandhi's Experiment with Truth and Nonviolence reached its logical conclusion with the concept of decentralization. It plays a crucial part in realising Gandhiji's vision of transforming India from the ground up, making communities more self-reliant and democratic. Understanding Gandhiji's view of decentralization requires situating it within the framework of his core beliefs, faith, and convictions, all of which converged in his unyielding belief in Truth as God. Truth, for Gandhiji, was the

'Sovereign Principle' that guided all else he did in life. Truth, in his view, was Universal Reality, which included all other truths. Truth is absolute, and it must be observed in thought, speech, and action. Relative truths are only stepping stones to Absolute Truth. Truth is God, and it's also what all morality boils down to.

Relevance of Gandhi's Political Ideas:

The government of India is a democratic one. Because of its size, India requires competent and efficient leadership. There is no country in the world where nonviolent democracy as Mahatma Gandhi envisioned it exists. In the context of Indian democracy, his vision of a stateless democracy in which satyagrahi village communities operate on the basis of voluntary collaboration and dignified and peaceful co-existence is instructive. In the words of G. N. Dhawan: "The ideal non-violent society of Gandhiji, unattainable due to human imperfection, indicates the direction rather than the destination, the process rather than the consummation." Gandhi's ideas were shifting towards the development of a mostly nonviolent state since the ultimate aim of a stateless society was unrealistic. He was more than just a dreamer. Gandhi, ever the pragmatic idealist, reasoned that until the people were ready and worthy to be free of the state and government, it was necessary to continue with the existing state, but modifying and purifying it with nobler and virtuous ideals of Sarvodaya (Chatterjee, 1984). According to Srivastava (1968), Gandhi did not advocate for the abolition of all states but rather for a non-violent state.

Politics, as practised in the modern day, has always been rife with dishonesty and deception, and this has only become worse. Violence begets violence, and hatred begets hatred. Thus the need of the hour is to "moralise politics." "Unless the moral and spiritual qualities of the people are appropriate, the best of political system and constitutions will not work." "Morals serve the cause of progress. Morality serves the great task of the social revolutions of our times" Gandhi's prophetic emphasis is "there is no politics devoid of religion." All through the Indian Freedom Movement, it was Gandhi and Gandhi alone who, in reality, practiced politics on religious foundations as he always used to put emphasis on his often repeated saying i.e. "Politics bereft of religion is a death trap" (Das, 2012). But the thing to remember is that for Gandhi, "religion is nothing than universal religion of toleration, Politics without morality is a thing to avoid." Gandhi forged the independent moral power of the people as a third force to complement physical force and legal force. Gandhi represents the politics of the people, not the politics of any one party. In reality, it is necessary that authority and responsibility be transferred to the general populace. Without parties, he says, democracy can thrive. Swaraj (Self Rule) is required from below as the emergence of people's democracy ushers in a new age of democratic decentralization. The Gandhian approach to politics emphasizes popular sovereignty over state institutions like the police and military. Therefore, violence and a democratic society are incompatible. Hence Gandhi pleads for the "Moralization of Wishes." and "Voluntary Action must remain the basis of democratic life and culture. Through Satyagrah (Non-Violent Resistance), Gandhi resists injustice and exploitation and thus purifies the politics. Thus Gandhian Politics has a dominant and constructive role to play. He was against narrow nationalism. His concept of politics was for higher values (Gandhi, 1928).

Mahatma Gandhi also expressed his view on rights of citizens. These are- Right to Speech, Right to Press, Right to form Association, Right to Conscience, Right to Religion, Right to Cultural and Language, Right to Equality, Right to Public Service, Right to Profession, Right to use Public Road, Educational Institutions and other Public Institutions Rights. These all rights Gandhiji mentioned before the preparation of Indian Constitution. But ultimately these rights have been incorporated in the Indian Constitution. No doubt, there are some restrictions on these rights but that could not take us away from gandhian path. Gandhiji himself accepted these restrictions in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of the country. From that point of view it is clear that rights which Gandhiji mentioned many years ago still relevant in contemporary India (Das, 2012).

His critiques of modern science and his idea of an alternative living on the pattern of the traditional Indian village communities have all along been popular with a good number of environmentalists, in and outside India, and with many of the action groups, the nongovernmental voluntary organizations (the NGOs) (Jodhka, 2002). Gandhi did not yield to the attraction of modern civilizations claim of progress. Gandhi idea of civilization was characterized by the „good conduct“ that makes it possible to attain mastery over mind and our passion”. In recent years it becomes urgent need that limiting growth has become a condition for global survival, like more production of goods and services results in emerging patterns of global warming. (*Rudolph and Rudolph, 2015*).

In India, the ideals of Gandhian democracy live on. The 73rd amendment to India's constitution makes it very plain. This new law solely affects how rural areas in India are governed. The devolution of authority to the rural level is an important part of that legislation. That change is already in effect in India. The modern Panchayati Raj, however, seems extremely different from both the conventional and Gandhian perspectives in terms of its contents and functions. We probably won't follow the Gandhian ideals with this Panchayati Raj. Its primary function is either as a political tool or as a means by which to carry out developmental initiatives. The government sees Panchayati Raj as a useful mechanism for communicating with rural residents and ensuring that the programmes it has put up for them are carried out effectively. Panchayati Raj would have been implemented differently in a Gandhian system, with the goal of informing politicians of the needs and priorities of the rural populace and allowing for bottom-up national resource assessment and planning rather than the top-down approach used today (Chatterjee, 1984).

Conclusion: In conclusion, Gandhiji's political principles show extraordinary continuity and consistency. Man, in his view, typified the divine spiritual force. He argued that religion's beneficial engagement with the world is a result of the divine character of man. Gandhi was a social reformer. He made an effort to better the world for everyone. When it came to politics, he had a deep understanding of the problems at hand, taking into account the unique socioeconomic and political context of India. He posited politics as the most efficient method for controlling national affairs and argued that political authority should be distributed fairly. Gandhiji believed that the ultimate goal of life was for each person to be happy. He concluded that various forms of Satyagraha and nonviolence were the most effective means to his aims. In his pursuit of his ultimate goal—the well-being of all people—he formulated the notable ideas in politics. He held the view that a centralised governmental apparatus

was more threatening than any one person. That's why he advocated for spreading the wealth around politically under a democratic system.

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