

Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was a great soul. He played a significant role in India's struggle for freedom. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi on the course of human history is almost without a parallel. It will be wrong to say that none of the Gandhian principles holds significance in the present times. It is rightly said that Gandhi belongs not only to India but to the whole world. Gandhi and his philosophies are always more than we ever know. Although Gandhi is known worldwide as a political leader, he was also renowned theorist, philosopher and practitioner of truth, non-violence, tolerance and freedom. His philosophy is considered universal and eternal by the world. The emancipation of mankind from the evils and ills of contemporary lives seems to depend on some of the key principles propagated by Gandhi. This paper analyses Gandhian philosophy and principles with a view of their relevance in 21st century globalized world. Various important teachings of Gandhi imbibing values like peace, truth and non-violence will be discussed. Today Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy is looked at as a live experience with potential for transformation leading to a global awakening. Irrespective of time, geographical space and cultural background, his values such as truth, non-violence, human dignity and respect and the love for our fellow beings are more relevant today.

KEYWORDS: Mahatma Gandhi, Philosophy, Crisis, Non-violence, Truth

Introduction

The world economic order is in "crisis mode". The modern world is facing a multi-dimensional crisis; a crisis that poses challenge to each and every aspect of our life. Among the outstanding aspects of this crisis are; over-militarization, nuclear proliferation and global reach of arms, overdevelopment and under development resulting in mal-development, a vast number of people suffering from poverty, hunger and marginalization. Added to these are environmental degradation in the forms of abuse and overuse of nature and pollution and growing paucity of resources, denial of human rights, gender bias and injustice, crisis in the field of energy, mounting insecurity and violence, terrorism, war and conflicts, drug trafficking, AIDs. Besides, there are corruption, communalism, unemployment, regionalism, problems of language, ethical and moral degradation in private and public life. All these together pose a grave challenge to the world. Peace is far away so long as these problems exist. In this context, it is worthwhile to have a look at the thoughts of M.K. Gandhi.

Gandhian Solution of Political Crisis

Among the various political ideologies, democratic governance appears to be best because it is this very system which provides maximum opportunities of public progress and development. People can themselves decide the mode of their welfare. But, is the democratic system of governance free from above problems? Therefore Gandhian Philosophy is very much contextual today on this accord. Gandhism is a mixture of Gandhi's concepts and practices. The basic ground ship happens to be "Non-violence". He practiced and prescribed non-violence as a remedy against all social evils. It is the most ancient eternal values and culture of India.

Non-Violence

Total non-violence consists in not hurting some other one's intellect, speech or action per own thought, utterance or deeds and not to deprive some one of his life." In essence, abstinence into to from violence is non violence.

- Non-Violence is **perpetual**. Non-violence and Truth both are complementary to each other. The derivation is that Truth stays with permanence and that Truth is permanent. Non-violence on account of being permanently present stays to be true. Non-violence is both a means and an end in itself.
- Non-Violence is **the strongest weapon**. It is an active force. Non-violence is impossible without bravery / courage/ fearlessness. Doing at any cost something that one ought to do. The courage of dying without killing. Non-Violence has individual and social aspects too. It fosters co-operation and cooperative progress.
- **Non-Violence is not utilitarianism**. It is all-timely and all welfaristic. A non-violent is always ready to face punishment for the maximum benefit of all whereas a utilitarian is not. Complete unity and integrity of body, mind and soul are in the individual human being.

Means are at least as important as, and often more important than, ends. It is, of course, desirable that ends should be good and reasonable. They give direction to life while the means adopted constitute life itself. The relationship between the two is organic. There must be purity of means. Those who grow out of violence, they will end in violence. This is what makes Gandhi distinctly different from Kautilya, Machiavelli, Bentham, Karl Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and others.

Examination of Gandhi's view on State may, perhaps, lead to a better understanding of his vision of democracy. Gandhi ji was certainly a staunch supporter of democracy. He believed that state is best which governs least and this is his second best ideal. He held the view that there were certain things which could not be done without political powers, even though there are numerous other things which do not at all depend upon political power. Democracy should be intermingled with non-violence in even manner and governmental interference is minimum. The present democratic systems can overcome the problems most importantly "violence and terrorism" only when non-violence is accorded supreme status in practice as well as in principle and at social as well as individual plane. Only such a democracy can be successful in its real goal. The existing democratic deficit can be overcome by incorporating "Gandhism in democracy". Violence is not sacred, pure or welfaristic from any point of view. Whatever is gained on the basis of it is impure and temporary. Democracy and violence can never be mutual. The basis of democracy is non-violence into to. The more the individuals have imbibed the spirit of non-violence, the less the necessity of state. This is the implication of Gandhi's concept of Swaraj.

"The attempt to win Swaraj is Swaraj itself. It is a developing ideal and is "better than the best". Gandhi ji called it "indefinable". Whatever political institutions Gandhi accepted, he did so as a transitional device, to be transcended by better ones. Gandhi ji believed that politics could remain pure and free of corruption only if it was based on ethical principles- ethics which are common to all religions. He stood for the spiritualization and secularization of politics. The democracy must be such that it should not warrant power of punishment. In it people should certainly be conscious of their duties. Peace requires peaceful method. There is no alternative to non-violence.

Gandhian Solution of Social Crisis

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa became his laboratory where he conducted experiments and formulated his worldview. The discovery was Satyagraha. The policy of apartheid by the white Minority Government made the lives of the millions of the coloured people deplorably miserable. Colonialism was legitimized. He valiantly fought against racialism, apartheid and colonialism. From the beginning of the Non-cooperation Movement, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the view that free India would have friendly relations with other countries. Gandhiji advocated "voluntary inter-dependence" of nations as against their isolated independence", and "universal interdependence rather than independence".

Gandhi ji was in favour of building up of a "World Commonwealth". Pandit Nehru formulated India's foreign policy adopting Gandhian prescription. It found its expression in the formulation of Panchasheel. Panchasheel are five principles of peaceful co-existence signed between India and China in April 1954. These are:

- i) Mutual respect for each other's territorial Integrity and sovereignty
- ii) Mutual non-aggression
- iii) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- iv) Equality and mutual benefit and
- v) Peaceful coexistence.

The policy of Non-Alignment reflected the essence of Gandhian prescription and reiteration of 'Panchasheel'.

Gandhian Solution of Economic Crisis

Mahatma Gandhi was a practical idealist. He was not a pacifist. He also deserves to be considered as the first public figure who sensed and articulated the common concern in respect of environment. He taught "Earth is our mother and we are her children". A mother can satisfy the needs of her children but not greed, hence limitation of human wants. He strongly pleaded for liberation and upliftment of women. If women are empowered and reign the world, it would be a peaceful world. Gandhi ji is a postmodernist in the sense that he has harmoniously balanced the multiple identities. There is no private Gandhi and public Gandhi. He has prescribed basic education for cultivating and nurturing moral life.

These days, many people tend to ridicule the Gandhian thought as "old fashioned and anti-progress". Gandhiji visualized a total socio-economic reconstruction, so his economic thoughts must be viewed in this context. Gandhiji, believed that "Economics sans morality is wrong". He doesn't give any theoretical model regarding economic development but gives some basic tenets based on which we can decipher what kind of economic structure is the need of the hour. Following are the basic tenets –

- Contrary to the popular perception, voluntary reduction of wants is an indication of development and not the desire to satisfy unlimited wants.
- Each person is not always bent on "Maximizing" his/her profit but wishes that he/she gets enough to save for a rainy day after meeting the day to day requirement.
- Co-operation and not competition is a better principle of life.
- It is inappropriate to look down upon physical labour.
- There is latent talent in all individuals. Each person must have access to enough resources so that his/her basic livelihood needs can be taken care of.
- Too much dependence on the "state" is fatal.

Based on these principles, Gandhiji has given the concept of constructive work. Here too, concepts like amity among all communities, lack of untouchability, prohibition (of liquor), Khadi and Village Industries, focus on Basic Education, Gram Swarajya, Adult Education, Women's Empowerment, training on how to maintain health and hygiene, knowledge of mother tongue/national language find eminent place. With practical experience and his unique experiments, Mahatma Gandhi has emerged as an economic reformer and not a professor of economics. Gandhiji strongly advocated that above mentioned are necessary social inputs without which economic growth is not possible. In simple words, in Gandhiji's schemes of thoughts, the non-economic components of economic development are perhaps more important than strictly economic concepts.

Reconstruction of village economy based on "Gram Swaraj" is the pillar of economic development. In his vision, each village is a totally autonomous and self-sufficient unit which will be totally self-reliant in fulfilling the basic needs. A cluster of mutually dependent (in some matter) villages forms the basis of economic order. In Gandhiji's vision of Gram Swaraj, human beings will be most important, labour will be given due importance, there will be decentralization of power and owners of property will consider themselves as trustees. Along with that he also mentions Satyagraha, secularism and self-reliance as necessary aspects of social ethos.

Gandhiji never opposed machines. He was critical of too much dependence on machines. In Gandhiji's vision, the priority of any system which doesn't want to thwart growth should be 'man' and not 'machines'. He wished that money was not centered in the hands of few rich people, but was accessible to all.

Conclusion

The ultimate ideal of 'Non-violence and Truth' is unrealized and unrealizable; its value consists in pointing out the direction, not in their realization. Striving after the ideal is the very essence of practicing Gandhi's philosophy. This consciousness should make one strive to overcome the imperfection. Mahatma Gandhi did not have a shadow of doubt that the world of tomorrow will be, must be, a society based on non-violence.

Gandhiji died in the year following India's Independence. The ruling class of Independent India neither had the conviction nor courage to walk on the path shown by Gandhi. Though India initially followed

the principle of mixed economy, after eighties, India embraced Capitalism and is now engulfed by forces of Globalization. The rich have become richer and poor have become poorer, all over the world. One may ask, "Is Gandhi relevant, even now?" The answer is, more so, then ever before. He taught us how to reclaim our freedom from the state by giving us the concept of 'Satyagraha'. His economic thought centers on sustainable growth, focus on man against machine and reducing economic inequality. These are answers to the problem of Global Warming and lead us to 'inclusive growth' which has become a buzz word. His approach and concepts are the only solution if the mankind wants to survive. Gandhi is not only of our times but of all times and he will continue to have relevance throughout the coming ages. Irrespective of time, geographical space and cultural background, his values such as truth, non-violence, human dignity and respect and the love for our fellow beings are more relevant today.

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