



Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy : Relevance for Today's Youth

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ABSTRACT: 2nd October is a great day for India, as the country celebrates 150th birth anniversary of the father of nation Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi. Not only that, but the world celebrates the auspicious day as international day for non-violence to pay respect and acceptance to the true spirit of non-violence promoted by Gandhiji throughout his life. Gandhianism starts with the famous line – ‘ Simple living and high thinking’. This itself is also suggestive of the fact that thoughts of an individual have a great role in shaping his/ her life. That’s why Gandhianism appears to be simple to everyone but in real sense practicing it in day to day life is difficult. For instance, remaining truthful, tolerant, non-violent and respecting others in difficult circumstances of life require a great degree commitment. Truth, the core values of Gandhian philosophy, has been given a special importance by Gandhiji as he himself has tried to remain truthful throughout his life. The autobiography of this great saint – ‘ My experiments with Truth’ testimonies the love of Gandhiji for truth. Gandhian view of truth was irreversible in different contexts irrespective of the urgency of the situation similar to the path followed by Immanuel Kant. This was why in the mid of Non-Cooperation movement Gandhiji cancelled the movement after the satyagrahis deviated from the path of truth and violent incident of Chaurichaura took place where British officers were burnt alive by the satyagrahis. Further, Gandhiji believed that truth empowers an individual whereas lies weaken a person from within. This principle of truthfulness to self and to the world is essential for students in the current context to excel in future life. Another key component of Gandhianism is non-violence of Gandhiji which was the great weapon used by him during the freedom movement of India against British Raj. Normally, people say that non-violence is the weapon of weak but in reality non-violence and tolerance require a great level of courage and patience. In world that is moving through the phases of war marred by violence and naked dance of death of common people due to the menace of terrorism there is a significant requirement of Gandhian idea of Non-violence more and more today than the past days.

KEYWORDS: Mahatma Gandhi, youth, philosophy, relevance, Gandhianism, satyagrah, non-violence

I. INTRODUCTION

Gandhiji used to respect all religions. The secular ideologies of Gandhiji are not only there in Indian constitution but also there in Indian society as a core value system. That is why so many people of diverse religions coexist in India.¹ Gandhianism was tolerant towards all religions and the world today needs more and more religiously and faith wise tolerant people in societies where violence is committed in the name of religion. Tolerance in the society will help in neutralizing the ethnocentric bias in the globe that is taking place day by day on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity and region etc. Gandhian idea of decentralization of power can be implemented in democracies through empowered local self governments at grass root level. Indian government, for instance, have implemented local self government by adopting to Panchayati Raj² and Municipality system in rural and urban areas respectively. Gandhi was against the caste system which is still a taboo in India and that was why he was in favour of Vedic system of Varna where people were assigned to certain varnas on the basis of their work not birth as followed in the rigid and oppressive caste system. The term Harijana was coined by Gandhiji³ to pay respect to the lower caste people and he did not enter the premises of the temples where lower caste people were not allowed. Thus, the Gandhian philosophy is useful create a casteless society where everyone is treated equally irrespective of their caste. Socialism is another basic philosophical entity of Gandhianism. Although Gandhian view of socialism is not radical in its approach but it aspires for a classless society with no poverty, no hunger, no unemployment and education and health for all. These Gandhian ideologies have become the lighthouse for Indian policy makers over the years. Starting from poverty alleviation to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and universal health care (Ayushman Bharat) to skill India programs everywhere the core inspiration comes from Gandhianism. National food security act of India to Obamacare policy of the United States of America Gandhian concept of socialism holds the key as a guiding principle.⁴

Gandhiji was giving great emphasis upon cleanliness or Swachhta. He used to say- ‘ Swachhta Hin Seva’ . The recent Swachhta Bharat Abhiyaan, the biggest cleanliness drive of India, is to fulfill the dream of Bapu by making India clean. This cleanliness drive is more than physical cleanliness as Gandhiji used to emphasize upon the internal cleanliness of the



individual. Thus, along with clean roads, toilets for a clean India we require a corruption free society with greater level of transparency and accountability too.⁵

The world is whirling under the burden of global warming, climate change and resource crunch. The world, including the United Nation has recognized Gandhian idea of sustainable development and the recent inauguration of Gandhi Solar Park at the headquarters United Nations(UN) is a testimony to that. Behind all the climate deals, environmental conservation treaties and sustainable development goals of the UN Gandhian view self sustenance operates as driving philosophy. 'Earth has enough for Human needs, But not for Human greed's'⁶ These lines of Mahatma Gandhi reflect upon how human behaviour destroys nature and how a sustainable way of living is the need of the hour. Gandhian idea of trusteeship holds relevance in the current scenario as people live lavish lifestyle and destroy the resources recklessly indebting future generations. On ethical and behavioural part Gandhianism has much significance today because society is witnessing the degradation of values. Gandhian virtues of self control is much needed in a materialistic world driven by the desire to achieve and acquire more. Societal values have degraded to such an extent that people don't hesitate to kill someone for the gratification of their own needs. Respect for women is one of the major ideas of Gandhian philosophy and the world is witnessing the increased level of violence, subjugation women face nowadays in society. Gandhian dream of a safe country necessities safety for women and that will come from the virtue of self control. Adding more to this list of moral qualities of Gandhiji are punctuality, duty boundness and honesty etc and all these have to be the essence of administration for good governance⁸ and perfect service delivery to the last person standing in the queue as proposed by the antodaya philosophy of Gandhiji. Gandhiji and Gandhianism are always more than what we know. Gandhiji's political contributions offered us Independence but his ideologies enlighten India as well as the world even today after so many years. Perhaps this was known to Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore⁹ in those days and he had rightly called Gandhiji as Mahatma. Every individual, thus, should follow the key Gandhian ideologies in their day to day life for a happy, prosperous, healthy, harmonious and sustainable future.¹⁰

II.DISCUSSION

Today, the Indian youth is facing a hard time. After seven decades of independence the youth has become more morally, ethically, socially and spiritually adrift. The lack of sense of purpose is waning in comparison to what it was during pre-independence days. They feel alienated and frustrated. There are many reasons¹¹ (both internal and external) for frustration and purposelessness. Modernization combined with globalization has changed life in general and the lifestyle of youth in particular in the last few decades leading to change in social institutions and structures as well. Besides substantive demographic change in terms of population, political decadence, rising unemployment, and eroding value system combined with excessive market-oriented economy have made life very complicated for the new generation. The changes affect the youth the most as the young mind is like a clean slate¹². If the youth is falling prey to a rapidly changing value system on one hand, they can also be molded by inculcating good thoughts, actions, habits and values on the other. The contemporary social milieu needs to be responsive to these expectations of the young mind so as to make them partner to over-all development and nation building. In order to make the youth of modern India more actively engaged in nation-building, a force that has lot of zeal and purpose to do something, the present system needs to be all-encompassing to be able to move with the young and old with the right perspective.¹³ To achieve harmony among the young and old and seamlessly function as a vibrant society, the youth of our country need to become the engine of change. In the same context, it is all the more essential that Gandhian values are inculcated among the youth in earnest so as to make them more vivacious and active for nation-building. It will be prudent to understand the problems faced by 'gen next' before any steps can be taken to inculcate good values in youth and make them healthy partners in nation-building. To address these issues, Gandhian philosophy is best suited for the present day situation and needs to be epitomized among the youth. The Gandhian perspective of a healthy and pious lifestyle may apparently look very mundane but in reality it is very effective and lasting in the long run. The young may instinctively be repulsive to such values but elders, teachers and, above all, parents need to help the youth to imbibe these values.¹⁴ To lead a life free of addiction, Gandhi suggested means and ways to youth in a very simple but effective manner. Mostly young people depend on their peer groups and sometimes are led astray. They take to drugs, alcohol and watch adult content to spend their free time and negotiate their hurt feelings. As per WHO's latest report, per capita alcohol consumption has doubled in India from 2.4 litres in 2005 to 5.7 litres in 2016. Many of them are in a fix to distinguish between right and wrong deeds. The preoccupied adult most often cannot guide them at the right time and opportune moment, making it difficult for them to make the right choice and decision. Once the youth is in the vortex of addiction it becomes very difficult to get out of it. Young people also get affected by the values of opulence and lifestyles of splurge in modern society and they try to adopt short cuts to attain material gains; failure to achieve pushes them into the world of drugs or crime.¹⁵ Youths also get addicted to excessive digital usage. The technology provides immense help to the majority of our population but over-usage of cyber utilities has grown out of proportion and excess usage at times has proved fatal as well. Over-use of smart phones has not only physically harmed the youth to a large extent, it has also affected the mental ability and



psychological status of youth. Some of them are indulging in cyber crimes. As cyber utilities are very handy and able to give desired outcomes without much effort, the young use it more frequently than it should be.¹⁶

III.RESULTS

It has been 72 years since India gained her freedom. However, our nation still remembers and cherishes the man who was, among others, responsible for attaining this freedom. Frequently quoted, Mahatma Gandhi is remembered for his teachings. The ideals that he preached still echo in people's minds today. But how far are these ideas of nonviolence and truth that won us our liberty, relevant in today's day and age? Mahatma Gandhi's principle of Ahimsa was based on the idea of non-violence and compassion.¹⁷ In the face of colonial violence, he proposed responding with non-violence. To his mind, a calm, nonviolent response lowers the anger and frustration of the aggressor. Today, there is a noticeable rise in people's frustration. They are quick to get angry, especially the hot-blooded youth. The validity of the anger is debatable – a lot of the times, people are angry about injustice, but even so, anger that leads to non-violence is most often harmful. Non-violence, as a principle, remains relevant especially today with so much going on around us. Learning to deal with issues calmly, rationally without resorting to violent means is something every young person must learn. When Mahatma Gandhi first spoke of 'swaraj,' he meant it in the sense of self-rule.¹⁸ Swaraj meant to be free from foreign influence and external control. In today's age, India has a self-ruling government. However, how many of us can truly say that we are free from all external influences? In , what swaraj stands for is one's control over his own self. Freedom from outside control is important for today's generation. It is imperative to exercise self-control and self-discipline while being free from the temptations of the outside world. In today's fast-paced and competitive world, it is essential that one has control over himself. Self-empowerment is the call of the times.¹⁹ Every young person in India has the responsibility of searching for their own identity, without being forced to fit into moulds created for them. Mahatma Gandhi always advocated for honesty. He not only believed in the power of truth but also condemned the act of lying. Gandhi preached three tenants of truth – truth in thought, truth in speech and truth in action. As a general principle, honesty is a valuable asset. However, according to many millennials, it's not all that black and white. Prachi Singh, a 20-year-old college student based in Kolkata said, "Things like Satyagraha and truth are relative concepts, and don't stand as Gandhi understood them. Gandhian ideologies as such are out-dated and unnecessary."²⁰

Another important tenant of Gandhian ideology was to boycott foreign goods, and buy from Indians. While this emerged purely from the need of the hour to overthrow British rule, it still rings true. According to Ayushi Sarkar, a 22-year-old postgraduate student, "In today's age of sustainability and eco-consciousness, there is once again a revival of buying local." More and more people are boycotting larger, mostly foreign brands that promote capitalism and consumerism. Instead, they are buying from local service providers, helping them earn a living. Several young people feel that the principles that took the world by storm in the mid-1990s are redundant today. Amidst controversies surrounding the life of Mahatma Gandhi, the average millennial's trust and faith in his figure is not so constant anymore. "Gandhi is no longer, to us, the revered figure he was all these years," his teachings are still important.²¹

It would be wrong to say that all aspects of Gandhian ideologies have been rendered worthless in today's world. Ushashi Sarkar, an undergraduate student of Political Science, believes that while "Gandhi is no longer, to us, the revered figure he was all these years," his teachings are still important. "Some tenets of Gandhian ideologies remain essential."²²

IV.CONCLUSIONS

Gandhi was a thinker, writer, public intellectual, political activist, political theorist and, above all, a philosopher who invented a new philosophical way of life. As a philosopher, he undoubtedly deserves to be ranked alongside the Buddha and Socrates. The freedom which we enjoy today is the result of the toil and countless sacrifices made by thousands of sons and daughters of this great nation. In committing themselves to this mission with spirit and grit, they rose above all other social divisions and barriers. This fact serves as a reminder to us that for centuries, India has been a repository of wisdom, anchored in the conviction of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (The whole world is one family). With resilience and resolve, Gandhian philosophy carried forward the torch of our great nation's guiding philosophy, which has been the underlying message of the Rig Vedic verse,²³ "Ekam sat, vipraah bahudhaa vadanti (Truth is one, but the sages call it by many names)". Gandhian Ideology: Gandhi has become an iconic figure, a symbol of many things for many people. His techniques have universal appeal which are not only relevant today but relevant for all times and ages. The 21st Century has evolved more as a materialistic and pompous world filled with greed, malice and hatred where spiritual and moral values are losing steam. The four basic principles of ahimsa or nonviolence i.e. respect, understanding, acceptance and



appreciation have lost their identity, depth and value in the 21st century. The Golden Rule given by Gandhiji:²⁴ Simplesness springs Peace: The most important ethical rule Gandhi abstracted from his reading of the Gita, and what he labelled as the Golden Rule, is the following: All acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace. If we read "attachment" in the above quote as meaning selfishness/self-centeredness then the golden rule is that, since actions like murder and lying can be performed only when one is selfish, these are to be treated as tabooed. Intolerance & Violence are two sides of the same coin. Mahatma Gandhi successfully weaponized truth, satyagraha,²⁵ and peace during India's struggle for independence. These ideals inspired great men across the world, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Their lives stand as a testament to their indomitable will and the courage to practice the ideals. Therefore, the youth of India must draw inspiration and learn how to tackle intolerance & violence peacefully. That is why Gandhi claimed: "Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow Truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or himsa." Gandhian Ideology even valid during Pandemic times: Gandhiji's emphasis on khadi and village industries during the freedom struggle has special relevance today a Bharat that is atmanirbhar or self-reliant is the Bharat of Bapu's dreams²⁶. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a number of valuable lessons, foremost among them being atmanirbharta, which became synonymous with self-esteem. We saw for ourselves, how industrialists, technologists, innovators, scientists and researchers rose to the occasion with missionary zeal during the lockdown, manufacturing thousands of products from ventilators to PPE kits, from medicines to vaccines to finished products in a variety of areas. It is clear that marked by a transformed mindset, the Atmanirbhar campaign has set India firmly on the path of development and national pride. As Mahatma Gandhi aptly remarked: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." With ingenuity and innovation, the nation's youth should chart the course of India's development, lending impetus to the concept of vocal for local. Gandhi's thinking is much more relevant today than it was during his lifetime:²⁷

The ideals of truth and nonviolence, which underpin the whole philosophy, are relevant to all humankind, and are considered as universal by the Gandhians. More than ever before, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings are valid today, when people are trying to find solutions to the rampant greed, widespread violence, and runaway consumptive style of living. The Gandhian technique of mobilising people has been successfully employed by many oppressed societies around the world under the leadership of people like Martin Luther King in the United States, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, which is an eloquent testimony to the continuing relevance of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's concept of basic education includes holding of creative activities like cleaning surroundings, spreading communal unity, health education programme, addiction relief programme etc. which can instil national, social, spiritual and cultural values among children. Planning should be made at the grass root level in which villages, individuals, and families would play a dominant role. In the decentralized planning the subject matter of economic planning would be man and his development. Resources would be conserved by avoiding wastage. Martyrs' Day²⁸ is an occasion to remind us of the fact that thousands of brave soldiers, some prominent, many obscure, had walked on the thorny path of resistance fighting for India's freedom in the epic struggle spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. While recollecting their immeasurable contribution, and paying homage to their memory, it is our duty to ensure that their sacrifices have not been in vain.²⁹ Their austerity, forbearance, asceticism, spirituality and self-effacing spirit of sacrifice should serve as a fountainhead of inspiration to all of us. We have a big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism. Today throughout the world people are shifting to nonviolent resistance in order to fight against any kind of evil, be it corruption, social, economic and political injustice etc.³⁰ It is precisely to fight these big wars that the Gandhian philosophy needed in contemporary times.³¹

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