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National Conference on Rethinking Mahatma Gandhi in Present Context

Organized by: Sonopant Dandekar Arts, V. S. Apte Commerce &

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REVISITING GANDHI – FROM INNER SELF TO OUTER SELF

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Abstract

Gandhiji was a great soul who advocated peace and harmony among individuals, communities and the world at large. His philosophy is being questioned today. Some feel that it has become defunct and cannot be applied. There are many who feel that if Gandhian philosophy is applied, many of the world's current problems can be taken care of. Of course, one must be able to apply his philosophy to the self-first. The application of his 'Truth' in life brings about a transformation that will change not just the self, but society and the world too. We must revisit Gandhi in thought, word and deed. Only then will we be able to make this world a better place.

Keywords: Gandhi, Truth, Non-violence, Peace, Justice, Love

A great soul left for his heavenly abode on January 30, 1948. Many have come and gone. However, this one individual has left a mark so deep that it refuses to be wiped out either from memory or from the pages of history. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi lived an exemplary life and cared for the poor and the downtrodden. When the news of his death came in, one among the tributes was that of Sarojini Naidu. It read: "May the soul of my master, my leader, my father, rest not in peace. Not in peace - my father - do not rest (Chavan, 2001). His soul doesn't rest even today; for the principles and values that he advocated aren't being followed, leave alone in principle, but in practice too. So, should we be resting? Unfortunately, we are, perhaps because the values that he taught may not appear to make sense now. The main principles that he proclaimed are truth and non-violence. We ought to be internalizing these values if we want this to be a better world to live in.

Science and Technology has advanced so much that we have become more individualistic in our approach to life. Concern for the welfare of others has dwindled, except when it comes to commerce and trade.

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Instead of cooperation there is more of competition (Chavan, 2001). Artificial Intelligence is replacing the necessity of humans at different levels of their existence. Gone are the days when people would meet together, socialize, discuss issues, and have a communitarian life. Today, everything has been individualized, so much so, that in cities, sometimes, neighbours don't even know each other!

It is time to move back from the individual to the communitarian aspect of living. However, before one moves from this plane to the other, there needs to be a process of self-purification. Gandhiji prescribed 5 moral truths for an individual to purify himself: Satya (truth), Ahimsa (non-violence), Brahmacharya (celibacy), Asteya (non-stealing), and Aparigraha (non-possession) (Xaxa & Mahakul (2009).

Truth was the basis of his philosophy. Truth was the realization of God. The illusions of the world have made it difficult for the realization of God. One has become self-centered due to which the purity of soul has been affected. Truth leads to Ahimsa. It is the avoidance of injury in thought, word and deed. Negatively, it means not killing, avoiding becoming angry, cruel, torturing and oppressing others, etc. Positively, it means having love for all (Xaxa & Mahakul, 2009). An individual should reduce his/her wants to the minimum. It is desire that leads to having plentiful material possessions which in turn leads to violence and exploitation. One is never satisfied with what one has and starts coveting the goods of others. The grass always appears to be greener on the other side. When one starts transgressing this delicate fibre of existence it leads to damage to society, first in very subtle ways, then very vividly through crime. A delicate balance is to be maintained, if one wants to live in a peaceful society.

For Gandhiji, one is free only when one starts loving others as one's own self. When the self is sacrificed non-violence becomes a way of life. It is then that equality is the norm. There is no high and low, rich and poor. Lack of anything in society becomes everyone's concern. This in turn leads to a moral life which is lived by reason and conscience. One's capacity to reason should be fully utilized to bring about freedom in society. The British have left us and gone long ago. However, whether we are really free is a big question that remains to be answered. If an individual lives according to others dictats then he/she cannot live a moral life. Humans are free only when they reason with themselves and have their own course of action (Mathur, 1989).

Gandhiji was a strong champion of the rights of humans. His entire life was a struggle for the rights of humans. Even to attain God, an individual needs rights. For him the right to freedom was equivalent to Swaraj. Rights are necessary for the development of the personality; however, moral training was a prior condition for the enjoyment of rights. Rights are integrated with moral duties. Everyone should perform their duties, which follows from the theory of Karma. True rights do not follow from the law but from social service. If an individual performs his/her obligations, rights will automatically follow. Rights liberate an individual to do good to all. They are not for one's own self, but for the good of the society.

The values of love, truth, justice and equality leads to the individual being a participant in national life. In our national life we are a very emotional people, influenced by cross-sectional factors like caste, class, creed, sex, religion, etc. We have been more divided and fragmented due to these factors which has led to a compromise on the Indian values that we are famous for, the world over. The riots that have taken place



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have tainted our image of being a tolerant people. We were known to be a nation that absorbs and assimilates different cultures, bringing about a new society. This has happened a few centuries ago. Now we have become very egoistic, self-centered, selfish, and aggressively possessive of ourselves.

One of the reasons for this selfish and self-centered attitude of us individuals is consumerism and modernity. He wasn't against modernity, but the immense materialism that it brought along with it. This resulted in exploitation, domination and conquest. As all know, modernization brings with it rapid and overall changes, wherein societies are transformed through industrialization and urbanization (Mishra, A. D., 2012).


There is no antagonism between tradition and modernity. Rather there is a continuum. Today khadi and other crafts have been introduced, though not in the same sense as in the past. Science has come to the aid of old methods being used in our daily living. It is not a physical necessity, but a social, economic and political one. He was ready to reward the scientist or the technologist who would invent the charkha, with a prize of Rs. one lakh. Hence, it is clear that he was not against modernity. What he objected to was the mad rush of industrialization that would gradually replace human beings. He foresaw what the 21st Century would bring! He justified modernity from 3 perspectives:

- a. India lagged behind due to colonization. Hence, the gap had to be bridged.
- b. The idea of nationalism was new and modern. It needed modernism as a pre-condition. Before demanding for freedom, India needed to be mobilized into a modern society.
- c. A modernized society could stand the stress and strain of independent nationhood (Mishra, A. D., 2012).

The good old laissez-faire principles of political and economic organization looked very respectable and logical because they promised that only the fittest would survive and manage society. However, because it was always a contest between the unequals, and, the privileged and the deprived, it was unjust and exploitative. He wanted the welfare of all through cooperation, not competition. The modern-day industrialists use the State for their purposes and make political parties their pawns. The owner class works and lives as trustees of the poor and the underprivileged, which looks quite unreal. However, these days Corporate Social Responsibility has proved that the business class is working for the concerns of the poor. CSR has become a reality due to compulsions of the law. However, some industries were already involved in some initiatives towards the poor. Now many more are involved in such work (Mathur, 1989).

Gandhiji had concern for the 'means'. It was the centre of his political and social philosophy. Many believed in the past and many still believe in the present that any means can be employed to attain the 'ends'. This is a dangerous trend. Democracy is different from the other forms of governments because of this means – ends dichotomy. There is widespread opportunism and indifference (Mathur, 1989). Political parties are engaged in a game of power. Muscle power and money power are employed to gain

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just one aim, and that is to win an election by hook or by crook. Democracy has been tarnished by such persons who do not care about welfare, rather they are more concerned about the chair. The one who occupies the chair of politics becomes the king. With this comes power and corruption. 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Gandhiji would beg to differ with these people who are always wanting to be at the helm of affairs in politics. He believed in the ethic of work. A political representative should be one who is ready to work for the people at all levels. There is no gain. It only entails sacrifice.

Gandhiji emphasized on Satya and Ahimsa which comes with Dharma. It is the dharma of a citizen to practice active resistance to authority. A citizen should do so when he/she is convinced that the authority is not morally connected to his/her work. Adherence to Satya and Ahimsa made him connect between the State and the citizen. A citizen is obliged to accept the authority of the State and is dependent on it upto the extent when the laws of the State are just and its acts are not repressive. He believed that the State was a soulless machine. It represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. He wanted minimum state intervention in the life of the individual. In order for the resistance of the citizens to be effective they need to practice Satyagraha, which is larger in nature and form. Non-cooperation is a branch of Satyagraha. It can be safely practiced by the masses. Civil Disobedience can be practiced as the last resort, but by a few select people. It is more difficult than non-cooperation. For Civil Disobedience, one must have the courage and spirit of suffering (Mishra, P. A., 2017). The State is just and effective in its functioning if it provides the citizen with the empowerment that he/she needs. A citizen will feel absolutely safe and protected in a State that enshrines certain rights on him/her.

Real rights are a result of the performance of duty. Gandhi was very pointed with reference to the British government. He told them "You can govern us only so long as we remain the governed". He questioned the structure of power! Did the ruler obtain power because of their military might? or, because of his/her recognition in the world? He was very clear that it is not military might or recognition, but the governed who gave the ruler his/her power. Hence, the ruled have to be cooperative. Gandhiji used non-violent cooperation as a very strong means of negating the power structure adopted by the British. In fact, by Satyagraha, he withdrew the consent of the ruled given to the ruler (Mishra, P. A., 2017).

Gandhiji advocated a just socio-political order. For him, justice is a synthesis of non-violence, freedom and equality. It is a Ram Rajya, wherein Divine Rule prevails. It is a stateless Republic that represents the values of justice, non-violence, freedom and equality. Given the distrust that he had on the State, he substitutes it with a non-violent society. This society is a group of villages where there is voluntary cooperation. Every village is a republic or a panchayat having full powers. Every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs to the extent that it can defend itself against the world. Here every village is a 'Republic within a Republic' (Xaxa & Mahakul, 2009).

When it comes to international matters Gandhi is even more relevant today. Were he alive today, he would make nuclear disarmament his first priority. Nuclear weapons and human rights are incompatible (Welukar, 2019). Back then when he concentrated on India's struggle for independence, he was very much in touch with international developments. He was anti-colonial and anti-imperialist in his approach.

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Hence, the struggle for India's freedom was part of the larger picture of the world. Peace can be obtained through negotiations, dialogue, trust and good will. Unfortunately, the sorry state of affairs for the world today is to seek peace through violence. It is not weaponry but communication systems that can bring peace and harmony. His concept of non-violence is not just a philosophy, but a proper plan of action (Vijayam, 2004).

The global community is divided into developed, developing and underdeveloped communities, the last two being clubbed together. For survival, there has to be interdependence and co-existence. Most underdeveloped countries are in no position to develop themselves independently. They are not equipped to do so. They have to follow the beaten path that others have trod – the debt trap. A number of countries have already been affected due to civil wars which have impoverished them. Hence, the hope of catching up is very bleak. There is also a lag in technological development that puts them behind time. Such countries have to also provide sites for polluting industries and markets for surplus goods and arms. This is nothing short of arm-twisting techniques being employed by the developed countries to beat the poor ones into submission, because the latter are overly dependent on the former (Chavan, 2001).

What is true of society, is also true of the global society and international relations. When there is internal peace it extends to international peace. The outcome of wars is exploitation, injustice, false pride, etc. The world is undergoing strife because of the race for power, wealth, arms and the desire to dominate. Gandhiji did not believe in the racial superiority of nations. The entire world is on the brink of war because moral values have been disregarded. More money is being spent on weapons and defense systems, rather than on development and abolishment of poverty (Mathur, 1989). He was very much concerned with any such individual who had no one to defend himself/herself. The way of being today is such that masses are sacrificed for the classes, in various areas of life. This is very much against the philosophy advocated by Gandhiji.

Development is the need of the hour. However, it doesn't mean that development should be at the cost of existing resources, such that they become deplete and there remains nothing for the coming generations. Many Conferences, Seminars, World Summits, etc. take place, but it is just an eyewash. Countries are still doing the same harm that they were doing earlier. Lip service is more recognized than real work being done. A concerted effort needs to be made to make this world a better place to live in. Beginnings should be made from the self, spreading to the community, nation and the world.

Times have changed and Gandhiji needs to be recalled in the form of a re-birth to proclaim his ideals to the masses. He was the salt of India. We have become bland and tasteless. We need to add Gandhi into our lives. His ideals of Truth, Ahimsa, Tolerance, Peace and Love are all lost ideals, that have become extinct. One can imagine the kind of India that one would have with a little of Gandhi in everyone! The lost ideals would all come to life bringing in a freshness of humanity and a new world that all are longing for.

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