

CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Dr. Sheo Harsh Singh

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

ISDC (A.U.), Prayagraj

It is over 75 years since M.K. Gandhi left our midst leaving behind a prolific mass of literature on every aspect of life Political, Social, Economic & Ethical. Now when the world is well into 21st century and celebrating Gandhi's sesame centennial, it is worthwhile to examine the relevance of important Gandhian ideas for the contemporary world. Some of the Gandhian ideas like sarvodaya, Satyagraha & especially non-violence are apparently and obviously relevant even prima facie, but relevance of his socio-economic, Political and ethical ideas to the contemporary world is worth to be explored and analysed.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S POLITICAL IDEAS

Gandhi's ideal state was "the anarchist state in which men are naturally good and hence need no external government - they govern themselves without any governmental agency"¹. In such a state man rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state therefore, there is no political power for there is no state. Thus, in Gandhi's ideal state people would be so good and pure that there would be no need for a state to maintain peace and order. In other words, Gandhi's main concern was the moral and spiritual upliftment of man himself and such an ideal is of universal validity and has as much relevance today as it had in Gandhi's days. Such an ideal will remain relevant for all the times to come.

Gandhi pre-supposes that there is a definite, continuous and gradual evolution of man towards good and hence a day will come when all evil in man will be eliminated and obviously when that day will come, no government will be required. Once we admit that man for a very long foreseeable time will continue to be an admixture of good and bad impulses, we have to admit of the need for restraints and that means the need for the state or government. Gandhi was aware of this. He later admitted that the anarchist ideal was not practicable. Hence he modified his stand by asserting that while the totally non-violent or stateless society was the ultimate ideal, the realisable or immediate ideal was the "predominantly non-violent state,"² the state that governed least. This is of course the laissez faire ideal which is very much relevant today.

But why was Gandhi against the state and against the extension of its functions? He cites many reasons, he realized that undue state action kills initiative and leads to Jobbery and nepotism. This is very true of the modern states. M. Gandhi believed that compulsive nature of the state robbed individual actions of its morality. When men act like machines or automatons there can be no question of morality. Both M. Gandhi and Thoreau looked upon the state as a soulless machine. Because it gives no place to conscience. The government is based on the majority rule but, says Gandhi, "In matters of conscience, The law of majority has no place" conscience to Gandhi was a higher court than the highest court in the land and "hence obedience to it was law of our being." In the place of state's forcible restraints. Gandhi believed in the enlightened and willing submission to social restraint. Gandhi quarrelled with democratic principle of majority rule on the ground that wisdom is not born of mere numbers. He once wrote, "Swaraj will be an absurdity if individual have to surrender their Judgement to a majority."³ This statement of Gandhi is a befitting comment on the present state of Indian democracy. Where corruption and manipulation are supreme manipulation of a requisite number for the survival of the government has reduced the Indian democracy to a force. Criminalisation of politics and politicisation of Crimes has actually reduced our Swaraj to an absurdity.

In Hind Swaraj Gandhi condemned the parliament as a sterile women and a prostitute. 'sterile women' since parliament could conceive of no good policy on its own accord, and a 'prostitute' since it had no real master. And in keeping with this condemnation Gandhi also attacked political parties, election and Legislation passed by parliaments. To Gandhi, parties divided people & bred natural distrust; election merely deceived people & were availed of by self seekers to capture power. As to legislation by parliament, it was not worth the paper, it was printed on since no law could be really effective without a prior conversion of hearts. But if hearts were converted then where was the need for legislation? It was similar logic that made. Gandhi see not much value in a Declaration of human rights. He said, "unless we become manly and fearless, no number of rights showered upon us can secure or liberties."⁴

Whatever Gandhi said we are eyewitness to all that, political parties are showing dissensions in society are making people to hate each other in the name of caste, creed and religion. The growing communalism and casteism as well as regionalism in contemporary Indian politics of are largely the result of the dirty politics of

various political parties. The political, representatives that we send to state and union parliaments seldom return to their constituencies to listen to our complaints and to fulfill their election time promises. Hence Gandhi's criticism of democracy is totally relevant to the contemporary Indian politics.

RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IDEAS

The Gandhian economy is built on the principle of simple living and high thinking. The Gandhian theory of both production and distribution are derived from this principle. Gandhi believed fully in the value of practical economics. Since his goal was not to establish the superiority of any theory or principle but to find practical solutions to the problems faced by the poor who were suffering the ill effects of dominant economic theories. Many people, have question Mahatma's wisdom of treating. The spinning wheel was a remedy for the problem of poverty suffered by the millions. But Gandhiji has never profounded a principle, without trying it out himself and becoming convinced of its practicability and efficacy. Production by masses and not mass production was his recipe for employment. This is a timeless recipe and is very much relevant for present century. Which is witnessing mass production as well as mass employment side by side.

Gandhi, Although is never treated as an economist by conventional economist, but his ideas were echoed by Theodore Rosejack and E.F. Schumacher in the late 60's and by AmartyaSen very recently. In his writings which centered on the principle that economics should begin with people who produce those goods. The production of goods by millions will keep the millions happy and healthy both physically and spiritually.

Mega mechanisation and globalisation originated not recently but at least 150 years ago when many large scale industries were established in various parts of the world. Gandhi in General was opposed to large scale production and mechanization for in his opinion this leads to exploitation of man by man. According to Gandhi industrialization is the outcome of man's greed for more and more profits. The machine by rendering men unemployed, deprives them of livelihood; by reducing work to a mechanical performance. It drives out our all creative instincts and destroys man's initiative. In one the Harijan issues of 1940 Gandhi wrote "Pandit Nehru wants industrialisation because he thinks that if it is socialist, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialization and no amount of socialisation can eradicate them?"⁵

A recent U.N. Human development Report has indicated that despite the remarkable and unprecedented progress in nuclear, space, telecommunication & information technologies and also in reducing poverty & raising comforts of substantial number of people, poverty and quality of life remain big problems. Infact poverty remains the biggest problem before the world and it will be the biggest global problem in the initial decades of 21st century. The new global pressures of automation will narrow down the avenues of employment for computer illiterate and conventionally illiterate people. All over the world but more so in the poorer countries Euphemistically called developing countries. Chances are that inspite of computeirsation and digitalised telecommunication (Not entirely because of them), poverty will continue to pester the poor countries. The only way out of this mess seems to be the Gandhianreceptie of production by masses.

GANDHIAN VIEWS AGAINST MISERY AND EXPLOITATION AND THEIR RELEVANCE

Gandhi broke the back of the caste system by such means as temple entry and continuous propaganda against untouchability. He adopted an untouchable girl as his own daughter, called the word Harijan (Children of God) to replace the ugly word untouchables (Achoot) and gave them an honoured place in hindu society. He fasted against separate electorate for these people and gave them more than their share of seats in the legislature through the system of reservation of seeds in joint electorate. He had a special concern for women and children and discovered the moral strength of women in his early non violent campaign in South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi's new system of education known as "NaiTaleem" had at its bottom two principles of truth and human dignity. While thinkers before him spoke and wrote eloquently on human dignity, Equality & brotherhood, M. Gandhi practiced them. Thus we can see that Gandhi's view regarding the respect for Harijan's women & children & his practice of human dignity, equality & brotherhood are more relevant today than ever before as the present society is torn with castism, exploitation of women and children. Had Gandhi been living today he would have certainly started a big and powerful movement against the eradication of child labour as well as for the Rights of women.

HIS PHILOSOPHY OF NON VIOLENCE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO MODERN WORLD

Perhaps the Gandhian philosophy of non violence and its political aspects of satyagraha has the maximum relevance for today's world in this age of overkill & most violent crimes.

Non violence, the cardinal principle of Gandhian thought has many Facts; it is an end as well as a means. As an end he visualizes a non violent individual who constitutes a non violent society, a non violent state, a non violent world order. He called this non violence as truth or God. In young India of August 14, 1920, he wrote "Non violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute."⁶ As another place he wrote that "Non violence is the First article of my faith. It is also last article of my creed."⁷ He maintained that "The highest violence can be met by the highest non-violence."⁸

Satyagraha was the political aspect of his philosophy of non-violence. Gandhi's Satyagraha is a non-violent way to non-cooperate with evil. In short Satyagraha means resistance to evil with all the moral and spiritual force that a person can command in the modern world. There is an urgent need of a world wide Satyagraha to resist the wisdom of aim to fight the evil of producing and maintaining nuclear weapons. In other words nukes are epitome of violence and hence there is a need for a global Satyagraha for total nuclear disarmament.

Towards the close of his life, Gandhi had been convinced of the need for total and universal disarmament, in 1921 he said, "Under Swaraj of my dreams, there is no necessity of arms at all."⁹ Again in 1942, he said that if he survived the attainment of freedom by India, he would "advise the adoption of non-violence to the utmost extent possible, and that would be India's greatest contribution to the peace of the new world and the establishment of the new world order." In 1947, he said that he was convinced that unless India developed her non-violent strength, she had gained nothing either for herself or for the world. "Militarisation of India would mean her own destruction as well as the whole world. This would equally to the other nations of the world. Hence there was need to evolve an international order based on general or total disarmament, but before such an international order based on general or total disarmament, but before such an international order, based on general disarmament emerges, as (Gandhi believed) it must some day, Some nation will have to dare to disarm herself and take large risk"¹⁰ such views of M. Gandhi are very contemporary in this age of nuclear mania, when every nation of the world is desperate to acquire some nuclear weapons by hook or by crook.

On the whole, most of the political and social ideas of M. Gandhi are as refreshingly relevant today as they were in his life time. In modern India, where all the crimes are politicised and all the parties is criminalised, his views regarding the relationship between politics and morality are remembered with nostalgia. He used to say that "The politics devoid of morality is a thing to be avoided." India will be benefited immensely if the compatriots of Gandhi especially those in the thick of politics follow the above Gandhian precept. Though Gandhi was not an economist but his principle of trusteeship that is the obligation of the rich and prosperous towards the less advantaged has a lot of value for modern India Today. Even as large parts of the world undergo economic reform and as we enter into a cybernetic age, we risk leaving behind millions of people. Gandhi's insurances that those who possessed most of societies resources must remember that they held them in trust for the vast numbers who were not so fortunate is relevant today.

Gandhi was a precursor of ecological activism; as mentioned above, he was passionate critic of industrialism an uncritical and exaggerated belief in the need for the virtues of industrial organization. Gandhi was of view that industrialism is violence not only of man on man but of man on other species. Thus Gandhi was not unaware of the treat posed by industrialization to the ecosystem of the world.

The forgoing analysis convinces us that Gandhi has Been rightly adjudged as the man of the millennium because with his views he is a man for the millennium.

References :

1. Asirvatham, Eddy, Political Theory, S. Chand & Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1936, p. 750.
2. Ibid.
3. See Asirvatham, Eddy., op.cit., pp. 749-751
4. See, Gauba, O.P., An introduction to Political Theory, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi, 2003, p. 267.
5. Asirvatham, Eddy., op. cit., pp. 759-760.
6. Ibid., pp. 756-758.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Mathur, J.S., Peace Non-Violence and world order (Gandian Perspective), Vohra Publishers distributors, Allahabad, 1990, pp. 29-62.
10. Ibid.