

Gandhi: His Relevance in Present Times

Dr. R P Saini
Associate Professor
Dept. of Political Science,
SD (PG) College Panipat

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi, a powerful and charismatic personality, was concerned about everything that involved either the individual or the society. The new technique of *satyagraha*, fight against untouchability, apartheid, the notions of superiority and inferiority by birth and the upliftment of women are some of his contributions. His program of *khadi* and village industries have been included in the five year plans. The Panchayat Raj is also the contribution of Gandhi himself. In fact, Gandhi was fundamentally a moral and social philosopher who always believed in the complete unity and integrity of body, mind and soul in the individual human being. His greatest achievement was that he spiritualized the Indian politics and believed that all our social actions must be governed by simple set of moral values and selflessness, non-attachment, nonviolence and active service are some among them. He held that no society, state, institution or government has any value if it is not concerned and contributing to the growth of the individuals. The relevance of Gandhi in the present times and for the future generations will depend more on the realization that how his fundamental principles are included in the core of our teachings and how aptly we are able to apply his illustrations in our day-to-day life and policies. This is what the present paper tries to unfold.

Keywords: Relevance, Value, Integrity

Mahatma Gandhi was a powerful and magnetic personality and was concerned about everything that involved either the individual or the society. The new technique of *satyagraha* was evolved by him and it made him a matchless political leader ever born in this country. His fight against untouchability, apartheid, the notions of superiority and inferiority by birth are well known to the whole world. As far as India is concerned his greatest service was the emancipation and upliftment of the Indian women.

It is now a well known fact that Gandhi lived an austere life, practiced strict vegetarianism and abstained from alcoholic drinks, tobacco and even the milder stimulants like coffee and tea. But his taking recourse to simple natural remedies at the time of illness and disease and his radical ideas on education are not so well known to the outside world and, even we Indians hardly know or notice these very facts. Gandhi himself refrained from making these public issues and thereby even the people of India have remained ignorant about these. People know his prohibition of intoxicating drinks because it later became a weapon in the armoury of *satyagraha*. It is also for this very reason that it became a base in the Congress program although many important supporters of Gandhi were privately addicted to drink but this great leader did not take undue notice of it. Later it entered in the Constitution in the form of a directive principle there has been no honesty about prohibition among the Congress governments and Congressmen in general. Gandhi's views on language, government and economics played

a considerable part in his political movements. His program of *khadi* and village industries have been included in the five year plans and even the Panchayat Raj is the contribution of Gandhi himself. Many of his programmes have been accepted and implemented to some extent by all the governments.

If all these ideas and activities are viewed in isolation, they constitute a miscellaneous and rather archaic collection, the importance of which will dwindle and fade away with time. But when it is realized that Gandhi was fundamentally a moral and social philosopher and that, through these, he sought to experiment with certain far-reaching fundamental principles, of whose absolute truth he was convinced beyond all doubt, their true significance will become obvious too us.

Gandhi always believed in the complete unity and integrity of body, mind and soul in the individual human being. He always asserted that the human body should be controlled by the mind and the mind in its turn by the soul although this control should never be achieved by neglecting either the body or the mind or in the mystic exaltation of the soul by itself. For him physical health and well-being were as important as the logical thinking or moral responsibility. He was one of the most rational and potent writers; yet, he never tired to decry all idle and purposeless playing with words and ideas. He was fully assured that real thought must be organically connected to moral purposes and useful and right actions.

The greatest achievement of Gandhi was that he spiritualized the Indian politics although he never believed in spirituality as an abstract virtue. He conceived it as a kind of enlightenment that could guide all our thoughts and actions. For Gandhi it was difficult to define it although the verses of *Bhagavad-Gita* were a part of his daily prayer.

Gandhi also believed that all our social actions must be governed by simple set of moral values and selflessness, non-attachment, nonviolence and active service are some among them. It is difficult to define all these key concepts in mere words but the key remains that he believed in the growth of an individual's personality through his faith in and practice of all such virtues. This is possible only when one identifies himself more and more with other people until it embraces all humanity and all living beings. Gandhi judged the values and vitality of social institutions by their power to harbinger growth, prosperity and development.

Mahatma Gandhi also believed that no society, state, institution or government has any value if it is not concerned and contributing to the growth of the individuals. The state, the nation, the community and other social institutions have no intrinsic value if they are idle and indifferent. At the beginning Gandhi defended the caste system as a great scheme but as he plunged into society and had real experiences he abandoned it as an impractical system and even wanted its removal from the nation.

For Gandhi 'means' were as important as and their 'ends'. He believed that 'ends' must also be defined at the very onset and of course, they must be good and reasonable. 'Ends' (goals) give a direction to life whereas 'means' constitute 'life' itself. He believed that if our means are correct and based on the principles of truth and nonviolence, then even mistakes, errors and failures will make us strong and foster our growth. Wrong means corrupt the soul and ultimately our personality get crumbled. Gandhi repudiated categorically those ideas that simply justify the 'goals' forgetting the means.

For Gandhi faith in God was the basis of all moral values although he never defined God and also encouraged every person to have his own idea of God and how to

worship Him. Gandhi asserted that so long as a person believes in some source of spiritual life and holds it superior to the material universe, he is a believer in God. Gandhi had no objection even to a formal profession of agnosticism, so long as a person is able to demonstrate his attachment to moral values and establish that his outlook is essentially spiritual to the core.

The relevance of Gandhi in the present times and for the future generations will depend more on the realization that how his fundamental principles are included in the core of our teachings and how aptly we are able to apply his illustrations in our day-to-day life and policies. He considered his life as a series of experiments with truth and thus it is his conception of truth that we have to explore, analyze and implement. His principles are not exhaustive but they are the basics and basis to all development and progress be it individual or collective or holistic.

References

- Basham, A.L. *Outline of History*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921. Print.
Hay, Bary. "Jainism and Buddhism". *Sources of Indian Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. Print.
Autobiography. Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948. Print.