

## Relevance of Gandhi for the Twenty first Century

*This article is made of the thoughts and ideas passed through the mind of the writer on reading "The Spirit of India" by Ramin Jahanbegioo, particularly the chapter titled "The Relevance of Gandhi for the twenty-first Century." The reviewer's thoughts are intermingled with quote and unquote ideas and statements of the author of The Spirit of India". - Editor*

It is an irony. Travel through the length and breadth of India, you will find visible presence of the humane values that were close to Mahatma Gandhi. The people at large are friendly and compassionate even with those who do not speak their language or belong to their religion. The 'dharma' aspect of religion that was more important to Gandhiji than rituals, 'mantras' and worship, can be seen still alive in active minds. The spirit of ahimsa and Satyagraha could very much be observed even in the midst of emotional encounters. Still the Mahatma's ideals of religion, politics, *Satyagraha* and *ahimsa* are missing at every level of governance.

Now the thoughts that churn out as we go through the article "The Relevance of Gandhi for the twenty-first Century" are:

"In Gandhian thought, religion and politics are bound inextricably, their separation meant the separation of body and soul. This is why Gandhi called politics without religion, a dirty game. In his words: 'Most religious men I've met are politicians in disguise, I however wear the guise of a politician but am at heart a religious man'. All

his life he strived to find a balance between religion and politics. Religion was the realization of truth before anything else and politics was a way to live in this truth and for it too."

He identified religion with ethics rather than theology and therefore, his main concept of 'God' is not an absolutist concept. 'True religion is not narrow dogma,' it is morality; and hence according to Gandhi, 'Morality is the basis of things and truth is the substance of all morality. His mission of politics was not only to humanize religion, but also to moralize it. Thus Gandhi rejected any religious doctrine that was in conflict with morality. In other words, when Gandhi says, "There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness,' he means that morality is prized by almost all great religions of the world."

And what is morality? "Morality is the basis of things, and truth is the substance of all morality." That must be the reason he kept on saying that he was experimenting with Truth. He called it '*satyagraha*' and the technique that he chose to achieve it was '*ahimsa*' or non-violence.

“Gandhi had the courage to stand and talk back to the authority of tradition by being consistent with his beliefs, at the same time, he remained free enough to change his mind, discover new things and rediscover what he had once put aside. In fact, one of the tasks of Gandhian non-violence is the effort to breakdown the stereo types and reductive categories that limit human communication.”

Gandhiji believed that ‘the highest Truth needs no communicating for it is by its nature self-propelling. It radiates its influence silently as the rose its fragrance without intervention of a medium.’ To him religion, spirituality, ethics, truth and non-violence all were sources of energy to realize his mission, which was emancipating the conditions of the multitude of voiceless, powerless mass. To achieve his goal he took the medium of politics armed with hitherto untested but most powerful weapons of ‘*satyagraha*’ and ‘*ahimsa*.’

“Gandhi’s contribution to the creation and cultivation of a public culture of citizenship that guarantees to everyone the right to opinion and action, and is an alternative to the system of representation based on bureaucratic parties and state structures, is one of the most relevant issues discussed in western political philosophy today. Gandhi was very conscious about the fact that the cultivation of an ‘enlarged pluralism’ required the creation of institutions and practices, where the voices and perspective of everyone can be articulated, tested and transformed.”

Why Politics? Gandhiji envisioned an ideal society where justice is done unto the last and where institutions aim to get the best out of man. The entire Gandhian thought in the realm of religion and politics also resolves round the

establishment of a just society. He said “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man’s activities today constitutes an indivisible whole.” For this reason he brought the core value of religion that is *dharma*, to politics. Gandhi’s emphasis on living in accordance with *dharma* means that anyone who is striving for spiritual knowledge and seeking the right course of political and ethical action is, in the broadest sense, a follower of *sanatana dharma*, that pervades the whole universe, mankind, animal and all creatures in the nature including the earth. writes Ramin.

“On the social side, Gandhi envisioned an ideal society where justice is done ‘unto the last’ and where institutions aim to get the best out of man. The entire Gandhian thought in the realm of religion and politics also revolves around the establishment of a just society. Gandhi’s *Sarvodaya* hinges on moral growth in the man; here an unrestricted individualism gives its place to a civic humanism. Similarly, while speaking on religion, Gandhi wanted man to develop certain qualities like fearlessness, non-possessiveness and humility. The main aim was to restructure man to suit a non-violent society. His repeated emphasis on service to human beings as the essence of religion is intertwined with his pluralistic understanding of humanity. In this pluralistic approach to the dialogue of cultures and faiths, Gandhi was far ahead of his time.”

For Gandhiji *dharma* starts from the individual but in final application it passes through ‘institutions and practices, where the voice and perspective of everyone can be articulated, tested and transformed.’

Politics then takes to citizenship. Involvement of citizen or active citizenship is important to make the institutions function properly. Citizenship brings along with it duty and responsibility. Institutional *dharma* brings justice to one and all.

The author explains Gandhiji's concept of politics in this way. The top has to be energized from the bottom, which means from the citizens. To keep the citizen's mind blossom with *dharma* and to lead all his actions in the positive directions Gandhiji has cautioned of eight sins. They are "wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, commerce without morality, worship without sacrifice, politics without principle, rights without responsibility, knowledge without character and science without humanity."

In modern India we find all these eight sins flowing in full swing. This has resulted in a section of the citizenry inflicting injuries to body politics of the 'just society' that Gandhiji envisioned in independent India. This section that gains power and influence, derails all constitutional proprieties to amaze wealth and power on the one hand and deprive the vast majority of the innocent citizens their legitimate rights ignoring the "spirit" behind the "letters" of rules, regulations and laws.

As Ramin Jahanbegloo rightly writes "Struggles for peace and equality have proved once more that non-violence has a moral power that exacts our respect and reverence in a way that violence never can." This respect and regard for *ahimsa* or non-violence along with *sathyagraha* once spread will force the exploiters, the looters, the fraudulent to change their mind set.

"The problem arises in the belief that one possesses the whole truth; Gandhi believed

correctly that the scriptures of all religions reveal some of the truth of this world.

"Struggles' for peace and equality have proved once more that non-violence has a moral power that exacts our respect and reverence in a way that violence never can. Gandhi has been a shining example for many people, in particular for those who have been determined to do something about resisting injustice. ... As Martin Luther King once observed: 'If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable.' It is time for us to look into our souls and ask ourselves why Gandhi is more relevant today."

"Mahatma Gandhi represents a unique figure of integrity, consistency and humanity. The point of departure of his life philosophy and the basis of his theory and practice are freedom and welfare of any human being and prosperity of all peoples and nations. Non-violence is the elementary and indispensable condition for the materialization of these noble goals. These principles and values represent a permanent source of inspiration in Gandhi's struggle for India's freedom and the promotion of her role in the international community."

As the proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" says, the present exposition of cancer at every level of governance and the non-violent form of struggle adopted to drive away the cancer viruses has the potential of spreading throughout the length and breadth of the country and rediscovering the mind of Mahatma in our country again.

Let us conclude this short saga with the following words of Gandhiji "My business... is not to kill the man or men who obstruct me, but to discover the cause that compels them to obstruct me, and deal with it."

- A.V.

**A list of books written by Mahatma Gandhi and others on Gandhiji, is given below. It is not a comprehensive list. The books may be available at major book shops and any book sale outlets of Navajivan Publishing House, Gandhi Peace Foundation and Gandhi Smarak Nidhi/Gandhi Bhavan in different States of India. Readers may also look for more details on the following websites: [www.navajivantrust.org](http://www.navajivantrust.org), [www.sarvodaya.org](http://www.sarvodaya.org).**

### **Books written by Mahatma Gandhi :**

- An Autobiography – The Story Of My Experiments With Truth
- Hind Swaraj Or Indian Home Rule
- Key To Health

### **These are Compilations of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings**

- A Gandhi Anthology – Part I
- A Gandhi Anthology – Part II
- All Men Are Brothers
- Constructive Programme – Its Meaning And Place
- Epigrams From Gandhi
- Ethical Religion
- From Yeravda Mandir (Ashram Observances)
- Mohan Mala (A Gandhian Rosary)
- My Views on Education
- Selected Letters
- Selections From Gandhi
- The Gita According To Gandhi
- The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi
- The Moral Basis Of Vegetarianism
- The Teaching Of The Gita
- The Words Of Gandhi
- Towards New Education
- Trusteeship
- Character & Nation Building
- Discourses On Gita
- Gandhiji Expects
- India Of My Dream
- Industrial And Agrarian Life And Relations
- My God

- My Religion
- Truth is God
- Nature Cure
- Panchayat Raj
- Pathway To God
- Prayer
- Ramanama
- Satyagraha In South Africa
- Self Restraint Vs. Self Indulgence
- The Essence of Hinduism
- The Law And The Lawyers
- The Message Of Gita
- The Way To Communal Harmony
- Truth Is God
- Village Industries
- Village Swaraj

### **List Of Some Foreign & Indian Books On Gandhiji**

1. Sudarshan Kapur – Raising Up a Prophet – The African-American Encounter with Gandhi (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)
2. Thomas F. Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
3. Srimati Kamala – Mahatma Gandhi : An American Profile (Washington DC Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Foundation, 1987)
4. Martin Luther King Jr. – Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958)
5. Campbell R., Coltheart M (1984) – Gandhi : The nonviolent road to spelling reform? Cognition, 17:185-92.

6. Rawls, John (1971) : A Theory of Justice – Cambridge, Mass. The Belknap University Press
7. Prahlad C.K. and R.A.Mashelkar (July/Aug.2010) – Innovation’s Holy Grail–Harvard Business Review
8. Bourke-White, Margaret – Halfway to Freedom – New York, Simon and Schuster, 1949
9. Brown, Judith – Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope – Delhi Oxford University Press, 1990
10. Catlin, George – In the Path of Mahatma Gandhi–London–Macdonald, 1948.
11. Dtta, Dharendra M. – The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi – Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953
12. Erikson, Erik – Gandhi’s Truth – New York, Norton (1969)
13. Fischer, Louis – The Life of Mahatma Gandhi – New York – Hopper, 1950.
14. Gandhi, Rajmohan – Gandhi, The Man, His People, and the Empire. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008
15. Green Martin – Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution–New York : Continuum, 1993.
16. Huttenback, Robert A – Gandhi in South Africa, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.
17. Walker, Roy – Sword of Gold – A Life of Mahatma Gandhi, London: Indian Independence Union, 1945
18. E.S.Ready, ed. Mahatma Gandhi: Letters to Americans (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998)
19. Swami Vishwananda – A Souvenir of Dr.Martin Lutrher King's visit to India February-March 1959 (New Delhi – Gandhi National Memorial Fund, 1959)
20. Anand Y (2006) – Albert Einstein and Mahatma Gandhi, New Delhi: National Gandhi Museum.
21. Khoshoo, TN and Moolakkattu, JS (2009) – Gandhi and the Environment – Delhi: TERI Press
22. Tendulokar, Suresh D. (2010) – Inequality and Equity During Rapid Growth Process – New Delhi, Oxford University Press
23. Barr, Mary F. – Bapu: Conversations and correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi – Bombay International Book House, 1956
24. Birla G.D. – In the Shadow of the Mahatma – Bombay : Orient Longmans – 1953
25. Bose, Nirmal K. – Days with Gandhi – Calcutta : Nishana, 1953
26. Chatterjee, Margaret – Gandhi's Religious Thought – New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983.
27. Weber, Thomas – On The Salt March, New Delhi : Harper Collins, 1997 \_\_\_\_\_●

*In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.*

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*It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings.*

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*When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator.*

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*God sometimes does try to the uttermost those whom he wishes to bless.*

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