

Gandhiji and Ethics

Prof. N.S. Ramaswamy*

Gandhiji is a unique phenomenon, on whom volumes have been written by Indian and foreign scholars, analyzing and appraising his life and teachings from several angles. Recently, an American has written an interesting book, titled "Gandhiji as a CEO". Gandhiji combined several ideas and ideals in his thought and actions. These were drawn from Politics and economics, religiosity and spirituality, ethics and morals, Ahimsa and non-cooperation, fasting and silence. Without a formal position in the Congress, he was literally a dictator, whose decisions were accepted without questioning. Though a majority of Provincial Congress Committees preferred Sardar Patel to be the PM, he chose Nehru as his successor, who was in many ways unlike Gandhiji in ideas and ideology.

Gandhiji had the courage to start his meetings with a Hindu prayer, which no follower of his dare to do. Though he admitted that he looked unto the Bhagavad-Gita for guidance in deciding on crucial issues, he was literally following Christian and Jain ideals and supported the cause of Muslims. He lived a Spartan life, and the rich and mightily came to him. He forced his opposition to accept his views by resorting to fasting. At a time when there was no TV, but only inefficient radios and telephone systems, his voice reached the masses. He had the courage to go to His Majesty, the King of Britain, bare chest with a loin cloth only. When His Majesty commented on the scantiness of his dress, he retorted "Your Majesty has enough for both of us together".

But Gandhiji could do all this because the British were gentlemen, who observed the rule of Law. If Germans or French were our colonial masters, they would have shot him dead. They recognized his nobility and treated him with respect. The Viceroy replied to his letters on the same day by special messenger, while his followers do not reply to people's letters at all. Though his followers have named the main road in every city after him and put up statues, and further praise him every day, not one of his ideas has been followed by his successors. In fact, instead of taking his advice to disband the Congress soon after independence, they rushed to grab power and started policies exactly opposite to his views. India's 6 lakh villagers were the concern of Gandhiji, his followers have left them in poverty. Their attitude has been "Gandhiji's ideas are worth praising but not for adoption."

We blame the British for all our ills. But we have not been able to come forward with alternate models or methods. Further, we lavishly imitate the bad parts of the west without imitating the good. Gandhiji used non-cooperation for the goal of independence, which we now use for selfish gains. His followers obstruct trains, inconveniencing millions. Gandhiji was warned by the British not to break the Law, saying that the same method would be used against you in Independent India. Lawlessness prevails in many parts of the

* Padma Bhushan & National Research Professor in Management, Director CARTMAN-IHA, 870, 17E Main, Koramangala 6th Block, Bangalore -560 095. Ph: 2553 0121/2553 0304, Mobile: 93412 59392, 94480 47014, Email: nsramaswamy@hotmail.com, cartmanblr@hotmail.com, indheritage@hotmail.com, Web:

country, created mostly by political leaders and hooligans. British caned “Quit India” agitators in 1942 in the Gowalia tank Maidan, which we screen every day to prove how cruel the British were. But our police are caning people every day.

Truth and Ahimsa were dear to Gandhiji. But both have disappeared completely, except in preaching of Swamijis in religious discourses. Gandhiji wanted leaders to live an austere life. Instead, most of our leaders are living in vulgar luxury. Gandhiji wanted leaders to think “Will my policy or decision help the largest number of people needing it”. This has never been the criterion in most decisions by our leaders. Gandhiji united us; but our leaders are dividing us. Gandhiji wanted the curse of caste to go; but our leaders have perpetuated it. Gandhiji derived power as a leader by his noble life. But our leaders grab formal power by using money and muscle power. The list of our betrayal of Gandhiji will be endless. But most of our leaders are not ashamed. Pursuit of power is the main occupation of our leaders. Conflicts and clashes are common even within the Parties, whether it be Congress, BJP or others who are part of the political scene. May be they are right in adopting the present practices. But then they should not do the same in the name of Gandhiji. Garibi hatao, Aam Aadmi etc. are empty slogans, which are demoralizing the people. Gandhi cap was once the symbol of service and sacrifice. But now it has become the symbol of power and hypocrisy. It is good that Mahathma Gandhi Roads are referred to as MG Road. We examine below the relevance and feasibility of Gandhiji's ideas to present day situation. Further, we have referred to Mao Tse Tung, who was able to achieve what Gandhiji wished.

From primitive existence some 10 thousand years ago, man certainly progressed in the materialist world. Spectacular developments in

Science and Technology have enabled mankind to abolish poverty and deadly diseases and also live with comfort. Instant communication, rapid transport, a variety of gadgets, reduced drudgery, scintillating entertainment in the TV screen, good food, comfortable housing and hundreds of other facilities and amenities are being enjoyed by the upper one-third of mankind. The middle one third are above want and lower one third are suffering in poverty and privation. Technology has not helped to bring about equity. In fact, modern social organizations – right from the political system at the top and other sectoral organizations - have not found a way to give our mankind a reasonable level of living and happiness. Gandhiji wanted Government to take care of Daridra Narayana. Our system is producing millions of affluent middle classes.

It is the ideology of political system that determines the fate of mankind, animals and nature. Most parts of the world are now governed by the ideology of capitalism or market economy, where everybody is expected to work in self interest, with the assumption that overall human welfare would come as a byproduct. Recognizing that market economy is exploitative and increased inequality, the concept of Communist and Socialist ideology was tried out in Soviet Union and a few East European countries, Cuba as well as in China in the East. Other countries adopted a mid-way ideology with a mixed economy, where Government participated in developmental activities as owner and manager. A large number of countries in Africa and Middle East have dictatorship. Though there was some progress in certain countries, there is revolt against that system, as has happened in Libia, Yemen and other Middle-Eastern countries. Cuba and North Korea are sticking to Communism, while China changed after the death of Mao Tse Tung. They have a

combination of Communism as a controlling mechanism in the State apparatus and market economy and partial market economy in economic and social development.

As far as India is concerned, soon after independence, Nehruvian concept of socialistic pattern of society was tried out for the first forty years. When it failed, economic liberalization was introduced. India is doing well now in terms of growth rate of 9%. Also, as per the world pattern, we have upper one third consisting of middle class who are enjoying, while the lower one third is in misery. Concurrently, values are deteriorating all over the world. Crime, violence, corruption, exploitation etc have increased manifold. Families are breaking down. There is a sense of alienation and purposelessness in life. It is equally true of India. Though 80 m go to temples and there is massive teaching on ethics, India is rated as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The democratic system has certainly failed in bringing about relief to the lower one third. Cultural values have declined in all segments of society. The media is enjoying wide popularity by dishing out crime, violence, fantasies, cricket, sexuality etc, as entertainment. Nowhere, they have a place for ethics and morals. Selfishness predominates among all decision makers, the limit being safety and survival. Gandhiji's "Truth and Non-violence" has no place.

Political scientists, economists and sociologists have not yet come out with solutions, which can bring growth without exploitation, equitable distribution of wealth created, elimination of poverty and illiteracy, etc. Concurrently, it should also remove forces which are causing deterioration of values.

It is against this context that we have to compare Gandhiji and Mao Tse Tung, the two great leaders in the two large countries, forming one-third population of the world. Though

Gandhiji was highly respected during his time, he is given only lip service now. Not even one or two of his ideals have been implemented. Gandhiji was a leader, but he did not build an organisation based on his ideas and ideals. In the case of Mao, he built an organizational, managerial and administrative system, which would implement his ideas and ideals. In that sense, Gandhiji was a leader only, while Mao was a leader cum manager. In other words, management component is as important as leadership quality. Both of them derived authority from mass following, without organisation. A leader is one who is respected by people, though he does not have an organisational base. Managers and administrators are those who derive their authority and power from formal organizations. A combination of leadership and management attributes can only bring about good results. Though Gandhiji managed to mobilise the people to get us freedom, he was frank enough to suggest that the Congress Party should be disbanded soon after independence, since it was not built to administer the country. Our political economy system is so inappropriate that it can never produce a national leader of the caliber of Gandhiji or even a fraction of the respect that he commanded. Our system can never produce national leaders. In the case of Mao, his Communist Party was a formal organization, which implemented his ideas using the governmental machinery.

During Mao's time, he brought about revolutionary changes in society. Character became as important as competence for promotions and recognition. Everybody had the same dress, ladies having of a lighter colour and texture. Everybody had to work in order to earn a livelihood. Those who were lazy were denied jobs. Those who worked harder were given incentive. Those who sacrificed and were cooperative in common endeavours and

community service were given special privilege. Those who misbehaved with women were ridiculed in public. The general and senior official had four-pockets shirts, while others had only two pockets. Only 20 people could be called for a marriage function. Every village had a common kitchen, where rice and curry was made, which enabled women from the drudgery of cooking at home. Those who wanted special dishes were permitted to cook at home.

In most of the major projects, food, shelter, clothing and basic requirements were met by the authority. They were given pocket money. In that way, they constructed a Yangtze dam in 11 months, while India took 12 years to construct the Ramapada dam. His leadership commanded over the people can be illustrated by one incident. Mr. Nixon, former President of United States, was scheduled to arrive on a particular date to meet Mao. But there was heavy snow, and therefore the American authority proposed to postpone the meeting by 10 days in order to enable the American machines could clear the snow. When Mao heard about this, he told his staff to arrange a Radio broadcast next morning. Mao exhorted his people saying that it would be a shame, if the meeting had to be postponed. He wanted them to clear the snow within three days. Millions came from all neighbouring parts of Peking and cleared the snow. Such was the pride of the nation. Gandhiji also had at one time appealed to the people to join the Non-cooperation Movement, the Quit India Movement etc. People followed him, since there was patriotism and inspiration to get freedom. At present, most of the politicians are only there to make money for themselves. Idealism has gone away not only in India but also in China too under Deng. But in China, because of the state control, they are able to make people work for 300 days per year and that too 8-10 hrs a day. So much so, China is 40 years ahead of India. China

has become a manufacturing hub for all over the world. India is nowhere near China. We are still in the screw driver technology stage. During Mao's time, most Chinese movies showed stories eulogizing sacrifice, service, selflessness, cooperation, ethics, morals, values, etc. The print media will not report about crime and murder. Newspapers and radio as well as books were all full of positive thinking and ethics. In India, exact opposite is happening. Barring a few books coming out of Ashrams, most of the reading materials like newspapers and journals as well as electronic and celluloid media are full of violence, sex, perversion, revenge, cruelty and vulgar stuff. People's mind are polluted and perverted. It is equally true of US and some countries in Europe. So much so, many dacoities and murders, taking place in New York and Chicago, are more often a copy of what were seen in the previous day in movies.

Gandhiji preached ethics, morals and values. But not a single instrument of the Government is teaching or practicing his ideals. In fact, the whole ambience is negative and the leaders are the first to behave like hooligans, breaking law and order, triggering and leading bundh, obstructing traffic, etc. All these are anti-national.

Thus it should be noted that the Ethical, Administrative and Management is the key for prosperity and peace. Both Gandhi and Mao had the same ideals, with the difference that Gandhiji was a religious and spiritual person, who started meetings with a prayer, invoking God to bless him and the people. He had the courage to start meetings with bhajan. In that sense, he was the only political leader in India, who brought in religiosity and philosophy, spirituality and ethics into the political scene. Starting with our constitution, we discarded that idea on the ground that India was a plural society and hence religion should be separated from the state, education and public affairs. —————●