

Relevance of Gandhiji

Dr. H. Sreenivasaiah*

Mahatma Gandhi had his own way of approach to the problems of the common man and also giving solution to the problem by knowing the causes of the problems. His solution for any problem is based on truth and Non-violence.

Gandhiji was one of the rare makers of history who shaped both the world of the thought and action. No single man has effected the life of the people of our country more than him.

Truth and Non-violence are universal and eternal principles of life from the day the human race started their social life on this earth. The Upanishads gave the first message of Non-violence. Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Gita showed us the way to practice truth and Non-violence for civilized existence. Jain philosophy, Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity proclaimed the message of truth and Non-violence. These teachings unfailingly guided Gandhiji in all circumstances in his life.

Saints and great men gave the interpretations and comments of these principles of life according to the time and circumstances existed during that period to which they belonged.

Gandhiji is one who not only interpreted these principles of life but made the application of them to the problems he came across in South Africa and India. The theory of truth and Non-violence was not new. This moral was known for long. But Gandhiji became a researcher and

started experimenting them on himself first and thus made his life a laboratory.

Scientists do research work in the big laboratory on materials and publish their papers claiming as their originals and named after them.

But, Gandhiji worked on the theme of Truth and Non-violence with all the skill of a scientist in realm of social truth. It was in the process of evolution all the time in the laboratory of his life, he himself growing in the knowledge of it. There were no text books to refer in time of need. It was a science in the making. In this choice of the problems and methods of solutions in his persistence and thoroughness of research and in his knowledge of the human heart, he demonstrated his undoubted scientific knowledge. He was a real life scientist in application. Hence Gandhiji's name has been associated with all the ideas and themes, he proved. As these principles of life are eternal laws of life to be applied according to time and circumstances, which are relevant, yesterday, today, tomorrow and all the ages, Gandhiji who applied these principles and got result, is relevant, all the time.

No New Gospel

Gandhiji did not preach any new gospel but amply demonstrated in his life the feasibility of building a new society by age old path of Truth; Non-violence and love for humanity through his action.

* The author is seniormost Gandhian in Karnataka, President, Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi, Gandhi Bhavana, Kumara Park East, Bangalore-560001 (adapted from his book of the same title).

When?

Gandhiji arrived on the scene of the country, when it has fallen low culturally, socially, economically, politically and was exploited by the British administration. He helped the country by encouraging his country men, through his message of love and brotherhood.

Let us see which are the ideas of his that are not irrelevant at any time of human life?

Spiritual

Gandhiji stood for a strong spiritual base. The superstructure rested upon it. He succeeded in working in social, economic or political sphere because of his experiments in the spiritual field from the early age. At present, spirituality is neglected for which human race is suffering.

Gandhiji was a Spiritual Symbol

Gandhiji was a worshipper of the truth. This is Yagna. Yagna is not same as our rites or ceremony. Yagna is self ablution; to the eternal truth.

If the world has to be saved, if indeed the nations are to grow, in the spirit of truth and fellowship, the spiritual ideals must (by them) be adored again. West has started a number of revolution, but of a violent character. India is also trampling up on the teachings of the saints and great ones like Gandhiji. India should not slip into forgetfulness and follow the path of the west.

He is a practical man. He did not dictate any person, but he followed and showed the path to follow, to get the bliss or 'Ananda', Gandhiji's philosophy for promoting social good, has an ethical base as all his thoughts, words and deeds are born out of moral order.

The only way that may save the world is spiritual revolution on Gandhiji's principles.

The revolutionary spirit which Gandhiji showed forth in his life detachment the spirit of detachment in service, in action, not bondage to desires, not craving for office or authority, not ambition, and thus save humanity and that is *Loka Sangraha*.

Religion

Religion as emphasized by Gandhiji, believes in the order and moral Government of the universe.

While truth is God in religion, God is truth in the theory of knowledge.

Gandhiji identified God as symbol of supreme value. He called the dumb millions as "*Daridra Narayana*"

Dharma

The man could attain the ideal by treading the path of dharma. Gandhiji was convinced that the moral law was superior to the law of the State. Gandhiji believed that man as animal was violent but as spirit, non-violent.

Truth

To realize God, Gandhiji insisted, one should become votary of truth. Truth and Non-violence were not different and independent of each other. He believed non-violence as dharma in action; it was truth in action. It was creative and open morality.

Love

Gandhiji was convinced that where love is, there is God also.

Gandhiji said Love never claims, it ever gives; love never suffers, never resents, never revenges itself.

Love is limitless, it binds us together with God, the universal force.

Gandhiji believed that if God exists, truth exists and if truth exists, love exists. Love is the cementing force in the universe. He believed

that the love in society was a scientific certainty. It is, however, clouded by passion and jealousy. It should be rescued from them.

Scientists tell us that without the presence of cohesive forces amongst the atoms that comprises this globe, it could crumble to pieces and we cease to exist. If there is cohesive force in blind matter, there is all the more present in animates. The name for the cohesive force among animates is love. This is noticed in between father and son; brother and sister and friend and friend.

There is enough repulsion in nature but she lives and exists by attraction. Man does not live by destruction. Self love comprehends regard for others. Nations cohere because there is mutual regard among individuals, composing of them.

Non-violence

Gandhiji urged us to conquer violence by non-violence. He firmly believed that the weapon of truth if firmly grasped and purposefully used, could lead to peaceful change without resort to violence.

As said earlier, the Upanishads proclaimed the glory of non-violence and Gita echoed it. All great religions ex-pounded its scope. But Gandhiji propagated and practiced this message of non-violence in South Africa and India.

The technique of non-violence is yet imperfect. It is in the process of evolution all the time in the Laboratory of his life. He himself declared that non-violence in politics was a new weapon in the process of evolution, himself grooming in the knowledge of it.

Non-violence is not to be a cover for cowardice. He preferred violence to cowardice. He made a distinction between defensive and offensive violence.

Satyagraha

Gandhiji was convinced that moral law was superior to the law of the state. Satyagraha is love for truth and non-violence indirect in action. Nothing on this earth has been done without direct action. Gandhiji made satyagraha the moral equivalent of war and an instrument of social change as well as a way of life. For him it was an eternal principle. It is essentially inward and purifying movement based on self suffering.

As a moral, not a physical weapon, it raised political warfare to a high plane.

As love is the foundation of satyagraha, the practitioners of it can have no enemies.

“It is easy for you to love your friends. But I ask you to love your enemies” Gandhiji said.

Fight his evil doing, not the does.

Non-violence and truth have been used all over the world to get freedom from slavery, the Black leader Martin Lutherking of USA and Nelson Mandela of South Africa are the best examples.

Penance

To become a Satygrahi, Gandhiji demanded that one has to undergo rigorous moral discipline, he has to take and practice in his life, the five vows (*Yamas*); i.e

1) Sathya (Truth) 2) Ahimsa (Non-violence), 3) Astheya (Non-stealing), 4) Aparigraha (Non-possession) and 5) Brahmacharya (Celibacy) without which no one should embark on the experiment at all.

Vow aim to attain self control. Truth and non-violence enabled him to become fearless. Non-stealing and non-possession enabled him to lead a life or renunciation. Sex control enables one to apprehend the Brahman, all are equal.

Human

Gandhiji had profound faith in the goodness of human nature and consequently believed that goodness should ultimately overcome the bad element.

Practical Scientist

Gandhiji was aware that modern science was complete with illustrations of the seemingly impossible, have become possible within living memory but the victories of the physical sciences appeared him to be nothing against the victory of science of life which summed up in terms of love, whichever the law of our being.

Gandhiji was asked whether his ideal was feasible in as much as what he practiced could not be practiced by everybody. He replied. "I claim that which I practice, is capable of being practiced by all, because I am a very ordinary mortal open to the same temptations and liable to the same weaknesses of the least amongst us."

Fearlessness

Fearlessness closely associated with spiritually, is a qualification for the attainment of the human goal of God realization. According to Gandhiji it is an essential prerequisite also for the solution of many problems of life including those which are social, economical and political.

Fearlessness is born out of adherence to truth, he who fears God never fears man. It is a divine attribute. It is a first weapon of the brave.

Freedom and Equality

The concepts of freedom and equality are interwoven in Gandhian thoughts.

Gandhiji's idea of freedom of the individual does not at all countenance the authority of the state.

Russels declared 'Man is born free, yet he is everywhere in chains'

To Gandhiji, freedom of India was not a narrow ideology. Freedom of India he believed, could pave the way for the freedom of the exploited races of the world over.

Man has to think himself for his independence. He can be independent as soon as he is with it.

Gandhiji's supreme consideration was thus the freedom of the individual.

Although, Gandhiji waged non-violent wars for India's freedom, his aim was to free people from all traces of exploitation.

What shall it avail a man, if he gained the whole world and lost his soul?

He wanted every individual to become a full-fledged and fully developed member of the society. Gandhiji as a confirmed monist, would not but assess the absolute equality of all living beings.

Equality is promoted by love. Gandhiji believed that social and political equality could not last long unless there was coexistent economic equality. This alone ensured a non-violent social order.

He advocated hard labour to keep one's mind and body healthy. Manual labour as experience, as demonstrated, keeps the body and mind in fine fiddle and also serves to improve even the equality of intellectual output.

The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society.

Socialism

Socialism is a beautiful word and all the members of the individual body are equal so are the members of the society. This is real socialism of Gandhiji.

Mass Appeal

Gandhiji did not acquire his ideas and knowledge by merely reading books and did not pass his time in library and museums poring over volumes.

Most of his knowledge was the result of direct contact with life and the practical experience it offered.

He was a man of the masses and spoke to them in their own simple language which they understood. Not what he read from the books, but had seen sensed, experienced and thought about and described in his observation and his reaction. This is the method that has characterized great religious reformers and prophets.

His method is more suited to the intellectual capacity of the common man than that of learned.

It readily appeals to the former and carried conviction. Often, however, it leaves the intellectual and academic mind unconvinced and cold.

Gandhiji was no great student of history. But he created history. His practical schemes of work and his explanation became his philosophy.

Gandhiji's style of speaking and writing does not seem to appeal to the majority of the educated people of today. But, yet it is those formed the public opinion.

Gandhiji did not talk of socialism but social justice and not of capitalistic exploitation but of grinding poverty of the masses.

The political structure - Non-violent society

Gandhiji believed that application of truth and non-violence for the solution of the social, economic and political problems could prove the welfare of all.

Gandhiji sought ultimate establishment of a stateless society. He opposed total centralization of authority. People should govern themselves, that is true democracy.

The unit of self-government being a village; all inhabitants in it should work for self-sufficiency.

Illiterate people are often wiser than literates, even educated class.

All jails should be turned into hand spinning centres and have weaving institutes.

Gandhiji insisted that the administration of justice should be very cheap, efficient and speedy.

While propagating a spirit of nationalism among his countrymen, Gandhiji was truly internationalist. He marched India through its freedom to serve the whole world. Gandhiji believed that nationalism promotes internationalism.

Gandhian Economics

The Gandhian economic order has been founded on the ancient Indian dictums of simple living and high thinking.

Gandhiji insisted on decentralization of products and encourage village industries.

Gandhiji gave his unified support to the use of machine for the production. Gandhiji believed that machine made men their slaves. But labour for him was wealth. Machine led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of few. Mass production leads to over production. Instead, it should be production by masses. Employ every one by any machine or not. Gandhiji conceded that mechanization was good, when hands were too few for the work in-hand to be accomplished. Owing to automation in developed countries the problems of unemployment is assuming alarming proportions. This is not only annoying but a disgrace.

The goal of his economics approach was relieving of poverty and maximization of welfare to the society. Gandhiji was never against use of machinery, but was opposed to mechanization of man. He desired that any able

bodied citizen of India should be provided with gainful employment. Machinery could be used without ousting human labour and creating unemployment.

He was opposed to concentration of power and wealth. He wanted the rich to act as Trustees of the wealth which belonged to the people. Wealth was to be used for a better life in society.

Gandhiji said freedom has no meaning for me if a section of our people live in fear. He meant that political freedom without economic freedom was no use.

What Gandhian economy aims is to furnish all people with their full requirement of food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, sanitation, hygiene, etc. These are our primary needs and it is not beyond our capacity to achieve this if we concentrate our efforts in that direction.

The wealth of the country cannot be measured by the number of millions it possesses. The well being of a country depends on the happiness of the largest number of people which means the capacity to satisfy the primary needs of the largest number.

It is not accumulation of wealth in a few hands but the distribution of wealth as evenly as possible. Take an example, a ten rupee note in the hands of labour, it represents the means of satisfying his hunger and the minimum needs of his family for the whole day while the same amount in the hands of a rich man may represent tips to the taxi driver or hotel bearer in hotel. In the former instance, it represents the use of the wealth to satisfy minimum wants of life while in the latter instance it represents the ideal and wasteful use. The former is a moral use while the latter is an immoral use.

Gandhiji said there would be no objection to the villagers using the most modern machines and tools that they can afford to use

only. They should not be used as means of exploitation of others. Simple living is the foundation for economic equality. To his bread labour theory may be linked with his basic education scheme.

Gandhiji's educational scheme provided for religious instructions for a fundamental character.

Simplicity

Gandhiji's idea is creativity in simplicity, the good relationship between human being and nature, has to satisfy the need of human being and not his greed.

Gandhiji had great love for simplicity. He was so simple in dress. He was called half-naked FAKIR by the British.

The message of the simple life is the need of India today. False desires are at the root of artificial life which is thriving. We must not become the victims to desires.

Gandhiji became poor for the sake of the poor.

True function is not organizing feasts and festivals, military parades and processions. The freedom belongs to the country which has to solve the problem of poverty and that will not itself be exploited by others.

He envisaged the medium of instructions to be one's mother tongue.

The Kothari Commission on Education also recommended a 'Work experience' scheme which is not very different from Gandhiji's scheme.

Man of Action

Gandhiji believed in the unity of human life which is a synthetic whole and cannot be divided into separate water tight compartments.

Gandhiji was not intellectual in the academic sense of the terms. He was not a scholar or a philosopher or theoretician. He was

predominantly a man of action. He has written a great deal but his writings are designed as a guide to act and not for acquisition of knowledge.

Present Day

The message of his life is India's urgent need. Today the human race is facing crisis, perhaps the greatest crisis in human history.

Today there is unrest in the world, chaos spreading and the world is threatened with a moral collapse.

He has given us a *manthra* of sacrifice.

Today nothing could be accepted unless it is presented in a scientific form. All investigations must be formulated in terms of cause and effect, and effect must invariably flow from cause.

Gandhiji does not, however, follow this method while giving his proposition. He did not systematically work out in the language of the economist, all the implications of his scheme.

But, he gave simple and homely reasons and examples for his new and revolutionary ideas.

He talked powerful of the mass and their enforced idleness.

Modern understanding

Present generation prefer readymade, properly arranged and documented knowledge. But this, Gandhiji, unfortunately did not provide. His ideas need to be synthesized, coordinated and correlated. They have also to be presented in appropriate technical terms made familiar by the current social success.

If proper justice has to be done to Gandhiji's ideas and thoughts, it must be considered in its entirety as one whole unit and in its proper setting in Indian conditions of time and the problem one has to solve.

Gandhiji's reputation for originality is accepted by the learned at its face value. They

think that he tried to foist on the people some outdated and discarded thought or institutions. In the words of the so called radicals he tried to put back the hands of the clock of progress. We have not understood revolutionary aims and spirit underlining Gandhiji's thoughts.

The form is old but, in spirit, intention and applications, it is new. It is quite possible that if the charkas had been as fashionable among modern women as knitting is (however superfluous it sometimes may be), it would have stood better chance with the upper class than it does today.

In the political writing instead of "Non-violence" and "Truth" words like "disarmament" and "open diplomacy" would have better understood by the modern mind. This would have regarded as practical politics and Gandhiji would have been named as Professor of international peace. "Village and cottage industries" which the mass understand would have been turned as "decentralization". "Basic education" should have been named as "Polytechnicalisation of Education".

It is said that "Words are wiseman's counters, they are the money of the fools".

Writings

All his writings are devoted to the cause of the poor and downtrodden. He did not write stories, novels, poems, dramas or about God; rulers, kings, capitalists. He is not even mentioned at any progressive writers' conferences.

Gandhiji was a creative artist. He wrote to masses. Gandhiji's youthful freshness was also due to his keen sense of humour.

Like very great reformers, his thought is greater than his words and arguments. Hence, study should be made relying on our own intelligence, knowledge and experience for the proper understanding of Gandhiji's ideas, policies and to propagate them among masses.