

Relevance of Gandhian thoughts in modern scenario

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Relevance of Gandhian thoughts to the modern world comes from Gandhiji's deep rooted faith in spirituality and ethics in working and achieving results. No doubt he was deeply spiritual as much as his thoughts and actions were politically vibrant. Spirituality and politics went hand-in-hand with him – the former to manage the mind and the latter to manage community or social life ensuring justice to one and all. His vision of modernity provides us with a number of fruitful insights that may help us to confront the dilemmas of the modern world.

Gandhiji's vision can be traced from the time he got actively involved in community welfare activities during his stay in South Africa. He went there in 1893. He organized the Indian community there and inspired them to fight with a new style of agitation or struggle, which he called Satyagraha. The most essential tool of Satyagraha was non-violence. Between 1893 and 1914, he sharpened his vision of achieving positive results through positive thoughts based on the welfare of the community at large, by sacrificing one's personal comforts and challenging tyranny with passive resistance.

Gandhiji returned to India in 1914 and got himself totally involved in the ongoing

political struggle against the colonial rule of the British in India. He laid great stress on 'Satyagraha'. To him Satyagraha encompassed truth, non-violence, morality, ethics, universal brotherhood, self-confidence and courage.

One area of Gandhiji's vision and thoughts very much relevant to the fast developing economic scenario is his concept of Trusteeship. Gandhiji believed that if the Trusteeship concept is accepted in every area involving public interest, it will lead to overall peace, security and prosperity of the people and the country as a whole. He once said "I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have found it worth the effort."

Gandhiji's principle of Trusteeship evolved around one main point:

Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives the present owning class a chance of reforming

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itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

Trusteeship means enjoying the wealth by sharing it. If magnified it means “Earn your crore by all means, but understand that your wealth is not yours, it belongs to the entire society. Take what you require for your legitimate needs and use the remainder for the benefit of the society.”

Wealthy people, and in modern sense Corporates, are asked to act as Trustees holding their riches on behalf of the society. In this context honesty on the part of trustee is implicit.

In addition to honesty, another prerequisite to Trusteeship is the reformation of individuals or inner reform. Wealthy individuals must spiritually reform and be conscious of the conditions of the society in which they live. They must realize that they can use their talent not only for themselves but also for the social structure as a whole. After all they are a part and parcel of the society.

For Gandhiji the concept of values and principles were not just theoretical. They were a method of struggle to bring the best out of human resource. Gandhiji was never against the liberative contribution of modernity. His efforts were to integrate the positive elements with a liberating reinterpretation of tradition.

Time and again he used to say that independence was not an end in itself. For him independence or Swaraj was all about individual autonomy involving self-respect, self-restraint and maturity. He asked Indians to free themselves mentally from internal and

external colonization through character development

Elaborating the strength of Trusteeship, Gandhij once said “My theory of 'trusteeship' is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage. I am confident that it will survive all other theories. It has the sanction of philosophy and religion behind it. That possessors of wealth have not acted up to the theory does not prove its falsity; it proves the weakness of the wealthy. No other theory is compatible with non-violence. In the non-violent method wrong-doer compasses his own end, if he does not undo the wrong. For, either through non-violent non-co-operation he is made to see the error, or he finds himself completely isolated.”

Trusteeship and Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility links Corporate Sector to Social Sector. It is becoming more relevant in our society plagued by increasing inequalities between haves and havenots. Corporate Social Responsibility means that the corporate sector, which earns profit through the sale of its goods and services in the society, also has some responsibility towards it. This is essential to promote growth with equity and to achieve an inclusive society. Increasing number of industrial houses are taking active interest in the welfare of the employees, their families and society at large. Starting from the provision of basic necessities like drinking water, primary education, health facilities to the development of environment friendly technologies on regional/national or even international scale, they are working in various spheres. In taking up few initiatives,

some of them also have enlightened self-interest in mind. They are not only able to advertise their products but are also selling them to the beneficiaries of their activities. Some of them are involved in the charity work like provision of mid day meals to school children. Many of them have their own NGOs operating at ground level, and in other cases they are involving the civil society in their activities.

The concept of modern Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is akin to Gandhiji's concept of Sarvodaya or welfare of all. He wanted the rich to part share of their wealth for the welfare of the hapless and helpless. He desired a civilization that provided a humane environment for the whole of humanity, not for the wealthy and the powerful.

To know Gandhiji's relevance for the modern world, it is necessary to be aware of

the fact that he is neither a speculative philosopher nor a neutral observer. He is essentially a pathfinder who seeks to define truth and apply it to different aspects of life. Another important and relevant factor of Gandhiji's ideals to the modern world is that he is explicit in his belief in the essential unity of mankind. From his point of view when one civilization gains spiritually, the whole human civilization gains with it, and when one civilization declines morally, the whole world falls with it. His acceptance of the concept of oneness of humanity is linked to his belief in the oneness of "satya" and "sat." Truth for him is Being, Consciousness and Bliss.

This can be achieved through the establishment of universal values that place human dignity above political power and economic growth.

I asked my friend's little daughter what she wanted to be when she grows up.

She said she wanted to be Prime Minister some day.

Both her parents, Labour supporters, were standing there, so I asked her, "If you were Prime Minister what would be the first thing you would do?"

She replied, "I'd give food and houses to all those poor people on benefits." Her parents beamed, and said, "Welcome to the Labour Party!"

"That's a worthy goal!" I told her, and continued, "But you don't have to wait until you're Prime Minister to do that. You can come over to my house, mow the lawn, pull weeds, sweep my drive and I'll pay you £ 25. Then I'll take you over to that homeless chap who hangs out in front of the store. You can give him the ?25 to use toward food."

She thought that over for a few seconds, then she looked me straight in the eye and asked, "Why doesn't the homeless man come over and do the work himself and you can just pay him the £ 25?"

I smiled and said, "Welcome to the Conservative Party."

Her parents still aren't speaking to me.

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