
Relevancy of Gandhian Principles & Ideology

Ritu Sharma

*Research Scholar, Department of Political Science,
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi*

ABSTRACT :

Gandhism is a body of ideas and principles that describes the inspiration, vision and the life work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is particularly associated with his contributions to the idea of nonviolent resistance, sometimes also called civil resistance.

The term "Gandhism" also encompasses what Gandhi's ideas, words and actions mean to people around the world, and how they used them for guidance in building their own future. Gandhism also permeates into the realm of the individual human being, non-political and non-social. A Gandhian can mean either an individual who follows, or a specific philosophy which is attributed to, Gandhism. Eminent scholar, Professor Rarrjee Singh has called Gandhi the Bodhisattva of the twentieth century.

However Gandhi did not approve of 'Gandhism', as Gandhi explained:

There is no such thing as "Gandhism," and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems...The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.

This paper is an attempt to review the Gandhian ideologies and to analyze that is Gandhism or Gandhi's principles are powerful ideology to the current scenario.

INTRODUCTION :-

Mahatma Gandhi was an intensely active personality. He was interested in everything that concerns the individual or society. He is best known as the matchless political leader who evolved the new technique of "satyagraha". His fight against untouchability and the notions of superiority and inferiority by birth are also fairly well known. For India, his greatest service was, perhaps, the emancipation of Indian women.

It is generally known that he lived an austere life, practised strict vegetarianism and abstained from alcoholic drinks, tobacco and even the milder stimulants like coffee and tea. His

attachment to simple natural remedies against illness and disease and his radical ideas on education are not so well known to the outside world and, even in India, they have not made much impact. Gandhi deliberately refrained from making these public issues and thereby confusing the people. The only exception was prohibition of intoxicating drinks which became a tool in the armoury of satyagraha. Therefore it became a plank in the Congress program but it was well known that many an important supporter of Gandhi was privately addicted to drink and the great leader did not take undue notice of it. Even though it got into 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; and in the program of Khadi and Village Industries included in the Five Year Plans and in the Panchayat Raj which has recently been established, they have been accepted and implemented to some extent.

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. It is only when it is realised that Gandhi was fundamentally a moral and social philosopher and that, through these items, he sought to experiment with certain far-reaching fundamental principles, of whose absolute truth he was convinced beyond all doubt, that their true significance becomes clear.

The first principle which guided all his thoughts and activities is the complete unity and integrity of body, mind and soul in the individual human being. He was never tired of saying that the body should be controlled by the mind and the mind by the soul. But this control is not to be achieved by despising or neglecting either the body or the mind or in the mystic exaltation of the soul by itself. He attached to physical health and well-being as much importance as to plain and logical thinking or moral responsibility. He was one of the most logical and powerful writers; yet, he was never tired of decrying all idle and purposeless playing with words and ideas or deification of thought as such. He was convinced that real thought must be organically connected to moral purposes on the one side and useful and right action on the other.

IDEOLOGIES ENVISAGED IN GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY :-

Khadi

Gandhi adopted the clothing style of most Indians in the early 20th century. His adoption of khadi, or homespun cloth, was intended to help eradicate the evils of poverty, social and economic discrimination. It was also aimed as a challenge to the contrast that he saw between most Indians, who were poor and traditional, and the richer classes of educated, liberal-minded Indians who had adopted Western mannerisms, clothing and practices.

The clothing policy was designed to protest against the violence of British economic policies in India. Millions of poor Indian workers had been left unemployed and entrenched in poverty. Owing to the industrialization of cotton processing in Britain, Gandhi promoted khadi as a direct boycott of the Lancashire cotton industry, linking British imperialism to Indian poverty. He focused on persuading all members of the Indian National Congress to spend some time each day hand-spinning on the charkha (spinning wheel). In addition to its point as an economic campaign, the drive for hand-spinning was an attempt to connect the privileged Indian brahmins and lawyers of Congress to connect with the mass of Indian peasantry.

Many prominent figures of the Indian independence movement, including Motilal Nehru, were persuaded by Gandhi to renounce their smart London-made clothes in favour of khadi.

Fasting :-

To Gandhi, fasting was an important method of exerting mental control over base desires. In his autobiography, Gandhi analyses the need to fast to eradicate his desire for delicious, spicy food. He believed that abstention would diminish his sensual faculties, bringing the body increasingly under the mind's absolute control. Gandhi was opposed to the partaking of meat, alcohol, stimulants, salt and most spices, and also eliminated different types of cooking from the food he ate.

Fasting would also put the body through unusual hardship, which Gandhi believed would cleanse the spirit by stimulating the courage to withstand all impulses and pain. Gandhi undertook a "Fast Unto Death" on three notable occasions:

- when he wanted to stop all revolutionary activities after the Chauri Chaura incident of 1922;

- when he feared that the 1934 Communal Award giving separate electorates to Untouchable Hindus would politically divide the Hindu people;
- and in 1947, when he wanted to stop the bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal and Delhi.

In all three cases, Gandhi was able to abandon his fast before death. There was some controversy over the 1934 fast, which brought him into conflict with the Untouchable leader B.R. Ambedkar. In the end, Gandhi and Ambedkar both made some concessions to negotiate the Poona Pact, which abandoned the call for separate electorates in turn for voluntary representation and a commitment to abolish untouchability.

Truth:-

Gandhi was to describe himself pre-eminently as a votary or seeker of Satya (Truth), which could not be attained other than through ahimsa (non-violence, love) and brahmacharya (celibacy, strictly towards God.) Gandhiji conceived of his own life as, a series of experiments to forge the use of satyagraha in such a manner as to make the oppressor and the oppressed alike recognize their common bonding and humanity: as he recognized, freedom is only freedom when it is indivisible. Gandhi dedicated his life to the wider purpose of discovering truth, or Satya. He tried to achieve this by learning from his own mistakes and conducting experiments on himself. He called his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with **Truth**.

Gandhi stated that the most important battle to fight was overcoming his own demons, fears, and insecurities. Gandhi summarized his beliefs first when he said "God is Truth". He would later change this statement to "Truth is God". Thus, Satya (Truth) in Gandhi's philosophy is "God".

Nonviolence

Mahatma Gandhi was in no way the originator of the principle of non-violence. But he was the first to apply it in political field on a huge scale. The concept of nonviolence (ahimsa) and nonresistance has a long history in Indian religious thought and has had many revivals in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish and Christian contexts. Gandhi explains his philosophy and way of life in his autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth. He was quoted as saying:

"When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall - think of it, always."

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?"

"There are many causes that I am prepared to die for but no causes that I am prepared to kill for."

In applying these principles, Gandhi did not balk from taking them to their most logical extremes in envisioning a world where even government, police and armies were nonviolent. In accordance with his views, in 1940, when invasion of the British Isles by Nazi Germany looked imminent, Gandhi offered the following advice to the British people (Non-Violence in Peace and War):

"I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves, man, woman, and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.

However, Gandhi was aware that this level of nonviolence required incredible faith and courage, which he realized not everyone possessed. He therefore advised that everyone need not keep to nonviolence, especially if it were used as a cover for cowardice.

Vegetarianism

As a young child, Gandhi experimented with meat-eating. This was due partially to his inherent curiosity as well as his rather persuasive peer and friend Sheikh Mehtab. The idea of vegetarianism is deeply ingrained in Hindu and Jain traditions in India, and, in his native land of Gujarat, most Hindus were vegetarian and so are all Jains. The Gandhi family was no exception. Before leaving for his studies in London, Gandhi made a promise to his mother, Putlibai and his uncle, Becharji Swami that he would abstain from eating meat, taking alcohol, and engaging in promiscuity. He held fast to his promise and gained more than a diet: he gained a basis for his life-long philosophies. As Gandhi grew into adulthood, he became a strict vegetarian. He wrote the book *The Mora/ Basis of Vegetarianism* and several articles on the subject, some of which were published in the London Vegetarian Society's

publication, The Vegetarian. Gandhi, himself, became inspired by many great minds during this period and befriended the chairman of the London Vegetarian Society, Dr. Josiah Oldfield.

Having also read and admired the work of Henry Stephens Salt, the young Mohandas met and often corresponded with the vegetarian campaigner. Gandhi spent much time advocating vegetarianism during and after his time in London. To Gandhi, a vegetarian diet would not only satisfy the requirements of the body, it would also serve an economic purpose as meat was, and still is, generally more expensive than grains, vegetables, and fruits. Also, many Indians of the time struggled with low income, thus vegetarianism was seen not only as a spiritual practice but also a practical one. He abstained 'from eating for long periods, using fasting as a form of political protest. He refused to eat until his death or his demands were met. It was noted in his autobiography that vegetarianism was the beginning of his deep commitment to Brahmacharya; without total control of the palate, his success in Brahmacharya would likely falter.

Bapu had been a fruitarian, but started taking goat's milk on the advice of his doctor. He never took the dairy products (of cow) largely because of his philosophical views, partially because of disgust for phooka, and, specifically, because of a vow to his late mother.

Brahmacharya

Gandhi saw brahmacharya as a means of becoming close with God and as a primary foundation for self realization. He followed brahmacharya, so that he could learn to love, rather than lust. For Gandhi, brahmacharya meant "control of the senses in thought, word and deed."

Simplicity

Gandhi earnestly believed that a person involved in social service should lead a simple life which he thought could lead to Brahmacharya. His simplicity began by renouncing the western lifestyle he was leading in South Africa. He called it "reducing himself to zero," which entailed giving up unnecessary expenditure, embracing a simple lifestyle and washing his own clothes. On one occasion he returned the gifts bestowed to him from the nats for his diligent service to the community.

Gandhi spent one day of each week in silence. He believed that abstaining from speaking brought him inner peace. This influence was drawn from the Hindu principles of mauna (Sanskrit: - silence) and shanti (Sanskrit: - peace). 'On such days he communicated with

others by writing on paper. For three and a half years, from the age of 37, Gandhi refused to read newspapers, claiming that the tumultuous state of world affairs caused him more confusion than his own inner unrest.

After reading John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, he decided to change his lifestyle and create a commune called Phoenix Settlement.

Upon returning to India from South Africa, where he had enjoyed a successful legal practice, he gave up wearing Western-style clothing, which he associated with wealth and success. He dressed to be accepted by the poorest person in India, advocating the use of homespun cloth (khadi). Gandhi and his followers adopted the practice of weaving their own clothes from thread they themselves spun, and encouraged others to do so. While Indian workers were often idle due to unemployment, they had often bought their clothing from industrial manufacturers owned by British interests. It was Gandhi's view that if Indians made their own clothes, it would deal an economic blow to the British establishment in India. Consequently, the spinning wheel was later incorporated into the flag of the Indian National Congress. He subsequently wore a dhoti for the rest of his life to express the simplicity of his life.

Faith

Gandhi was born a Hindu and practised Hinduism all his life, deriving most of his principles from Hinduism. As a common Hindu, he believed all religions to be equal, and rejected all efforts to convert him to a different faith. He was an avid theologian and read extensively about all major religions. He had the following to say about Hinduism:

As I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being ... When doubts haunt me, when disappointment stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad Gita, and find a verse to comfort me and immediately began to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible on me, I owe it to the teachings of Bhagavada Gita Gandhi believed that the core of every religion was lone and truth.

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THE GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES

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- The second principle of Gandhian philosophy may be stated as follows: All social action should be governed by the same simple set of moral values, of which the main elements are selflessness, non-attachment, non-violence and active service. It will take me too long to define and elaborate his ideas in respect of each of these; but he believed that the growth of a mans personality is proportionate to his faith in and practice of these virtues. This is possible only when he identifies himself more and more with an ever-increasing circle till it embraces all humanity and even all living beings. He judged the value and vitality of social institutions by their capacity to foster such growth.
- His third conviction was that no society, state or any other any worth or importance apart from its part in contributing to the growth of the individuals of which it is composed. The State, the Nation, the community and other traditional groupings had no intrinsic value for him. In the pages of Young India in the earlier years, he defended the caste system as a great scheme of social and sexual discipline; but in the light of actual experience he abandoned it as an impractical system, though to the end he believed in some kind of voluntary and ideal social groups based on qualifications and capacity for service.

- It was Gandhi's firm conviction that means are at least as important as, and often even more important than, ends. It is, of course, desirable that ends should be good and reasonable. But they merely give a direction to life while the means adopted constitute life itself. Therefore, if the means are right, that is, if they conform to the tests of truth and non-violence, even mistakes, errors and failures aid the growth of the individual. On the other hand, wrong means corrupt the soul and no good can ever come out of them. Gandhi repudiated categorically the idea that ends justify the means, This implies the rejection of war, espionage and crooked diplomacy, even when they are adopted for the so-called noble ends of defending the country, religion or humanity.
- Faith in God is, according to Gandhi, the foundation of all moral values. He never defined God and was prepared to allow every person to have his own idea of God. For himself, he was inclined to think of Him as the Upanishadic Brahman. But, 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 demonstrated by his attachment to moral values that this outlook was essentially spiritual in essence. I believe that the influence of Gandhi in the future will depend more and more on the realization that these fundamental principles constitute the core of his teachings and that all his actions were merely illustrations of their application. He considered his life as a series of experiments with truth. Therefore, it is his conception of truth that is central to his life and work. I do not claim that the principles I have indicated exhaust his conception; but I believe that they constitute its basic elements

CONCLUSION :-

Live as if you were to die tomorrow, learn if you were to live forever, “said the Mahatma; but after so many years of independence truth, love, non violence and transparency is now lost in the realms of Materialistic pursuits, and a new debate has arisen in modern day – whether in this nuclear-powered world, Gandhism is still relevant? Can anyone still attain/his/her objectives through Gandhis’ principles or not?

The answer of the question is that Gandhiji talked about peace, and as we all know that peace is the basic element of state. In a state of peace man accepting the reality of Vasudhaiv Katumbakam and freeing himself from the state of confusion, fear, tension, struggle, conflict

or war through harmony and co-operation of other in society continuously work to ensure welfare of humanity peace is also the best mean to progress.

As we know the Gandhian view in general pertain to the welfare of the human world. Therefore, it is necessary to take his ideas and practices together while discussing or analyzing he's views. His ideas like Ahimsa (non-violence), is the mean of development and achieving the goal of life, and the other ideas also helped human to improve their means of life.

In current perspective, there are numerous examples across the world which speak all aloud of how violence never bring peace, but only creates future conflict and hatred. Indo-Pak conflict, Lebanon-Israel crisis, Iraq war, and America's war on terrorism are few examples which prove Gandhi's saying – "An eye for an eye makes the world go blind".

For those who believes that Gandhism is dead, can take a look on it, that a number of universities and colleges in many countries including the US, started courses on 'Gandhian Thought'.

This shows that the countries which are very well developed as well as militarily most powerful are trying to get back to simplicity and purity of thought and action.

Mahatma Gandhi's ideology about patience, persuasion and perseverance being the three crucial element for peace and harmony. Truth and violence can fight the existing global intolerance and hated.

Gandhian faith in religious pluralism and non-violence holds much significance in the present scenario and if this was remembered by the people of his own motherland, the nation wouldn't have witnessed the 1984 riots or the Babri demolition or even the 2002 Gujarat riots.

If his words were still followed, problems pertaining to terrorism, communalism, regionalism and problems relating to languages and castes wouldn't have weakened the nation.

Corruption has seeped deep into every working system of India. In the British era, money was being looted from this nation. A similar thing is going on now too, but the dilemma is that the country is being robbed by its own people and the gap between the rich and poor is getting bigger.

At such a time, the policy of 'non-violence' and 'satyagraha' can indeed induce a spark of life in the corrupt democracy that needs to wipe-off the cobwebs of black money and deceit.

I sum it up with Gandhiji's words, "Truth and Non-violence are two sides of the same coin. Both have same value. Difference consists in approach only. On one side there is non-violence, on other side is truth."

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