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Contemporary Relevance of Gandhian Values in Pursuit of Global Peace

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Abstract

In the galaxy of world leaders Mahatma Gandhi shines as Pole star depicting the symbol of non-violence, peace and truth. His stature as the most influential philosopher lies in his experimentation with truth; truth based on practicality of existing values and resources where he values human being as supreme creation of God - '*Vaishanava Jana to*' or popularly known as 'harijan'. He envisioned a society free from caste inequality, untouchability and founded on social justice. In recent years, a strong trend has become evident for conflict and war. To many of us, the world seems more war prone and violent space. The factual details can be recollected from war ravaged Afghanistan to rubrics of Iraq civilization. The wars in Ukraine (Europe); between India and Pakistan; Palestine and Israel indicates the misery of human civilization. These destructive wars and uncontrollable situation need not to be destination of human civilization. Gandhi being a philosopher of eminence had foreseen the genesis of war and conflict lies in human nature; this human nature has proliferating impact on social and political life. This paper studies how Gandhi's philosophy can be used to address today's concerns like, war and peace, terrorism, socio-political instabilities, climate change, sustainable development etc. It studies how his ideas can be thematized into many significant dimensions such as non-violence as an instrument of conflict resolution, decentralization of power, spiritualization of politics, pacifism as a viable alternative to realism, settling disputes through mediation, synthesizing local to global and espousing a doctrine of limits.

Keywords: Truth; Non-violence; conflict-resolution; spiritualization of politics; pacifism

1. Introduction

In the galaxy of world leaders Mahatma Gandhi shines as Pole star depicting the symbol of non-violence, peace and truth. His stature as the most influential philosopher lies in his experimentation with truth; truth based on practicality of existing values and resources where he values human being as supreme creation of God - '*Vaishanava Jana to*' or popularly known as 'harijan'. He envisioned a society free from caste inequality, untouchability and founded on social justice. Accordingly, his idea stands for values of moral idealism. Though he had not developed a structural theory of state and established any blueprint of it like Savarkar and Ambedkar. But his understanding of power and politics flows in four levels like- Personal level(self-rule); Level of Community (Gram Swaraj); National level (Swaraj); International Level (Comity of equal nations). His method Satyagraha supports the most practical notion of non-violent collective resistance and to establish collective tolerance and inter-faith dialogue which are the most prominent need of the hour.

2. Statement of the Problem

In recent years, a strong trend has become evident for conflict and war. To many of us, the world seems more war prone and violent space. The factual details can be recollected from war ravaged Afghanistan to rubrics of Iraq civilization. The wars in Ukraine (Europe); between India and Pakistan; Palestine and Israel indicates the misery of human civilization. These destructive wars and uncontrollable situation need not to be destination of human civilization. Gandhi being a philosopher of eminence had foreseen the genesis of war and conflict lies in human nature; this human nature has proliferating impact on social and political life. Gandhi's philosophy can be used to address today's concerns like, war and peace, terrorism, socio-political instabilities, climate change, sustainable development etc. His ideas can be thematized into many significant dimensions such as non-violence as an instrument of conflict resolution, decentralization of power, spiritualization of politics, pacifism as a viable alternative to realism, settling disputes through mediation, synthesizing local to global and espousing a doctrine of limits. These are discussed at length below in this essay.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Non-violence as an Instrument of Conflict-Resolution

Like all other political philosopher Gandhi realised power is an inescapable feature of human social life and structure. With the use of power, human being influences each other and tries to control others life or resources. Being a pacifist, he was always against any type of war and violence. According to him the supreme human endeavour should be the pursuit of

Satya. He applied many Hindu philosophical traditions to eliminate contemporary social injustice and worldwide domination of European powers like Great Britain, Portugal, France and Germany. His idea of *Satyagraha* is an approach of conflict resolution by using soul force. His *Satyagraha* is inspired by boundless love and compassion. The use of ‘*Satyagraha* lies in its self-limiting character as a form of political action that seeks to constrain the negative consequences of politics, while working towards progressive social and political reform’. So, Gandhian nonviolence points out towards using non conservative, moral or spiritual and cultural power as its instrument of conflict-resolution. However, non-violence as an instrument of negotiation, mediation or conflict resolution can be used in primary stage of conflict resolution even contemporary situation.

3.2 Decentralization of Power: Gram Swaraj

Mahatma Gandhi believed in decentralization of power as fundamental aspect of power. He has emphasized that Indian independence must have bottom-up approach and villages should be considered as republic and should be bestowed with full power. His idea of ‘gram Swaraj’ has its genesis in home-rule tradition of Anne Besant and combination of anarchism along with the faith on religion. In contrary to coercion and use of weapon Gandhi elevated negation or conflict resolution to a higher stage of morality and compassion. Empowered by soul force a *Satyagrahi* always appeals to the opponent to be kind; at the same time a *Satyagrahi* do not harm his or her opponent. A *Satyagrahi* does not passively wait for transformation of opponent; he boldly takes the course that enlightens the opponent and changes his heart. That he fights the enemy with patience and sympathy and still he pursues truth.

3.3. Spiritualization of Politics

Gandhi was essentially a pacifist. He emphasised the purity of means would lead to noble ends. He considered that long lasting peace in the world can be attainable through non-violence and mediation and abstaining from any type of war and hatred. According to him, violence produces counter violence and leads to instability. So, he never justified any type of war including the World War I and World War II. Peace through violence at best may be truce, but it cannot be a lasting peace. Violence and war end in colossal destruction of human life and property. As Gandhi asserted that, an eye for eye only ends of making the whole world blind. In the age of nuclear age either we follow non-violence and mutual respect, or we will nonexistence as nations.

Being a true champion of truth and nonviolence Gandhi strongly stood for peace and non-violence. His conception of Swaraj goes hand in hand with his idea of humanism and universal brotherhood. Amid scientific discoveries, establishment of modern civilization he suggested of courage to strengthen the ‘soul force’- the *Aatmic Shakti*, to enhance peace and stability

in the world. His idea of peace is not of related to any kind of competitive or antagonistic in nature. His idea of peace is an integrated human being in social, political and spiritual level. He mainly 'spiritualized politics to create ethical and fearless human being who will contribute to the nation in all form. His idea of Purna Swaraj is not isolated independence of India from British colonialism but, he aspired for a healthy and dignified interdependence of other nations. He had envisioned synthetic nationalism like his predecessor Sri Aurobindo and Shri Ravindra Nath Tagore. He envisaged an international league, only when all nations, big and small, composing it was fully independent. Amid his fight for independent nationhood of India he visioned a world order base on truth and nonviolence and pure pacifism.

3.4 Pacifism as a Viable Alternative to Realism

Gandhian model of global peace is one of the viable alternatives to realistic model based on war and conflict. He prescribed moral and ethical means to settle national and international disputes. His ideas are being experimented throughout the world. He himself made his experiment in South Africa during 1915 which had proliferating impact in Ghana in the leadership by Nkrumah; President Keeneth Kaunda in Zambia; Nyerere in Tanzania; in America during Martin Luther King Jr; later in South Africa in the leadership of Nelson Mandela. For example, President Kenneth Kaunda who had led Zambia to freedom through campaign of non-violence and had hither to have been a leading advocate of Gandhian politics dedicated a moral rather than physical force. Likewise, Nyerere in Tanzania has given one model of decentralized governance which named as *Ujama*. The idea of *Ujama* was implemented in Tanzania after independence from colonialism during the presidency of Nyerere. The idea was based on fraternity and local people cooperating with each other to provide for the essentials of living, or to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together to establish 'cooperative economics'. The idea was influenced by Gandhi idea of Gram Swaraj and self-sufficiency.

Gandhi along with all these leaders espoused a peaceful and non-violent change, to establish social equality with self-sufficiency, and harmony against all forms of racial and ethical discrimination or racial subjugation prevalent during that time. He stood for non-violent society; the smallest nation to him should have its own self-respect and should stand as tall as the tallest. The idea of superior nation and the inferior one was to be completely obliterated. However, in certain ways, the situation in South Africa was comparable to that of India, where the combination of different groups committed to violence and non-violence produced an effective dialectical instrument of counter hegemony. Mandela also succeeded because he refused to adopt violence. He was completely committed to non-violence as fundamental principle to achieve independence. In Gandhi's theory of peace, human values take a great prominence. Nonviolence

(ahimsa) is a way of life rather than a strategy; is a means to reach the truth. It inculcates strength to bear the truth 'satya' ki 'agraha' (holding on to the truth with moral strength or spiritual courage).

Gandhi laid down the principles for ideal international organisations which can be attainable through non-violence, freedom from colonialism, equal representation of all nations, complete disarmament and a small international police force to maintain order if violence occurs. Gandhiji explains his concept of nationalism along with internationalism beautifully in the words, "just as the cult of patriotism teaches us today that the individual has to die for the family, the family for the village and the village for district, the district for the province and the province for the country, even so a country has to be free in order that it may die if necessary for the benefit of the world. My idea therefore of nationalism is that our country may become free from that, if need be, the whole country may die so that humanity may live'. Thus, it can be calculated that Gandhi's nationalism is not opposed to internationalism. Rather, it is the foundation of the latter. The very concept of the Swaraj meant healthy and dignified interdependence, a federation of friendly interdependent states and brotherhood. Though his ideas are idealist but kept a perennial significance to establish world peace and comity.

3.5 Settling disputes through Mediation

According to his scheme, his ideal nations should absent from use of brute force for settling disputes among themselves. They should adopt methods like negotiation, mediation and arbitration for resolving their disputes. The world federation may maintain an international non-violent policy of the non-violent state for the purpose to resolve conflict between the states, but soldiers of this force will bear no arms. Gandhi wanted to train these soldiers with nonviolence and moral courage to resolve the dispute between the states. Though he conceived that such a new world order will take time to evolve, yet he has faith in the inherent goodness of man. Even if in the age of nuclear weapons and scientific inventions we still aspire to live with harmony with other nations. Policy makers all over the world prefer to use mediation and arbitration in the place of war. However, nonviolence technique seems to be the only solution to the world armed with nuclear weapons. Let us take the example of American intervention in Afghanistan and very recently the Russian war over Ukraine. If we analyse these to situations, we can find that the outcome of Wars is devastating and anti-humanistic in nature. The deaths, displacements; ruins of cities and devastation of infrastructures can't be rebuilt in days to come. Along with that the memories of fear, distrustfulness and hatred will always remain in the memories of people. This will certainly lead to future distress. Thus, Gandhi prescribed for *Nai Talim*; his idea of basic education which not only trains the human being to self-sufficient but cooperative and pacifist living.

His thoughts are relevant as it influenced decision making of many world leaders. According to Gandhian principle, a leader in contemporary scenario must be honest, inspiring and competent to hold the path of peace. A leader must be truthful and honest to be followed by his people. He should have moral strength in his character to uphold truth in any form. Gandhi assumed, “politics without ethics is a death trap”. For Gandhi politics and political power is dangerous without moral understanding and ethical values. His idea of clubbing of ethics and politics not only shows light in the darkest hours of our time. It works as the guiding principle for many statesmen and politician to devote and dedicate their life to the cause of humanity, peace and integrity.

In contemporary times also Gandhi’s theory of peace, human values take great prominence. Nobel peace prize winners in the current decades like Mr. Martti Ahtisaari (2008), Mr. Muhammed Yunus (2006), Ms. Wangari Maathai (2004) and Ms. Shirin Ebadi (2003) have effectively changed their parts of world to maintain amity and bring peace amid trouble. On the other hand, it must also be viewed how political leaders like Mr. Jimmy Carter (2002), Mr. Al Gore (2007), Mr. Barack Obama (2009) and very recently Mr. Abiy Ahmed (2019) had played a crucial role for understanding the global conflict through the perspective of peace. Very recently the intervention of US president to end Russia and Ukrainian war can be considered as milestone to the idea of pacifism and cooperation amongst both the nations. Though this may not be seen from the lens of Gandhian principle but stopping of war and adopting of mediation and negotiations are the mechanism of Gandhi which has been time tested during Indian freedom struggle. Thus, Gandhian advocacy of peace and cooperation has long lasting impact on policy makers foreign policy experts.

3.6 Gandhi on Synthesizing Local to Global

Gandhi unlike any other philosopher was more humanist and pacifist. He had seen human nature as more truthful and peace-seeking. In a French paper, he said, “My nationalism is intense internationalism”. His strong propagation of the idea of Gram Swaraj, do not stand in isolation, He tried to balance independence with dignified inter-dependence. His idea of Atma Nirbhar Bharat should be seen in sync to his idea of humanism, universal brotherhood and complete submission to the pacifism. So, to bring Gandhian idea of ‘self-reliant’ India in today’s context we need to set a balance between the globalized world order and self-proclaimed ‘self-reliance’. India, in today’s time requires carefully calculated strategies to overcome the economic sluggishness. Undue rhetoric would take India towards an unhealthy relationship with neighbours and ultimately lead to internal security issues. The failure to establish cooperation, in term of diplomacy also weakens the economy. We need to rethink Gandhi on Atma Nirbhar Bharat in the context of intense global cooperation.

3.7 The Doctrine of Limits

In his idea of political economy Gandhi was mesmerized by Ruskin's idea of "Unto this Last". However, he translated it to 'Sarvodaya' or welfare of all. According to Gandhi, greed is the primary cause of the trouble. To control greed, he propounded the idea of Talisman and tried to impound the idea of limiting one's needs and help the poor. Gandhi said, "whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much, recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man/woman whom you may have seen and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him/her. Will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then your self will melt away".

He was a very staunch critic of present-day 'consumerism' proposed by heavy industry poise the danger to propagate the idea of materialism and monster-God. The dependence on western civilization's value of consumerism would increase the societal inequality, poverty, unemployment, disease, war, and sufferings. However, Gandhi's view on limiting wants and detesting material and consumerism attempts to 'spiritualize' economic activities. He held that "increase of material comforts, does not in any way whatsoever, conduce to moral growth". He prescribed to limit the desires to necessities. In fact, many of the food and community development programmes of the post-independent era were being influenced by the Gandhian Talisman model to eradicate poverty and hunger. His ideas are being realized through, Antodaya Yojana, mid-day meal schemes etc. As we can see, his philosophy has had a significant effect on everything from poverty alleviation to 'Sarva, Shikha Abhiyan' to 'Anshuman Bharat' to 'Skill India' to 'Swaachatta Mission'. His vision of clean India has been realized by launching 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan'.

4. Conclusion

Gandhi's ideas are still relevant and will enlighten generations to come. The need of the hour is to strategize his prescriptions on the contemporary situation of global interdependence. To conclude, it's important to bring ethics and morality to the forefront of globalization. Let the globalization have a human face, technology be human friendly, let equality and happiness be the strength of every man and women to create a sustainable economy with Gandhian ethos. Gandhian perspective on peace has given way out to many international, national conflicts. It has inspired thousands of political leaderships who used truth and nonviolence as biggest attribute. His method Satyagraha is being used nationally and internationally for resolution of conflict. Gandhian philosophy of truth and nonviolence will remain relevant to generation to come.

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