

Revisiting the Virtues of Gandhian Philosophy: Relevance and Applicability Towards Inclusive Growth

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Abstract

“What I have done will endure, not what I have said or written.”

“I want the culture of other countries to blow through the windows of my house, but I do not want to be swept off my feet by any of them.”

So wrote Gandhi ji, and, indeed, there is no single repository of his thoughts and ideas, no radical or systematic philosophy as such that he offered. We have to glean his ideas and thoughts from his letters, articles and random writings, and above all, from the way he lived his life and motivated people in the national struggle for freedom. *Indian opinion*, a South African weekly, *Young India* and *Harijan* were major media through which Gandhi Ji expressed his views. His books, *My Experiments with Truth*, *The Voice of Truth*, *Path to God*, *Hind Swaraj* are the sources in which we may seek and get the ideas that shaped Gandhi's life and activities. He was much influenced by religious ideas pertaining to all major religions of the world. He was equally conversant with Indian traditions and western intellectual principles such as liberalism and rationality. There are some concepts basic to Gandhian thought. All his actions are to be seen as applications of these concepts to real life. “As the microcosm, so the macrocosm”- is an idea that informs all his thought and action. Principles have to be practised by oneself before getting others to follow them. The principles to be followed are truth, ahimsa, non-possession, non-stealing and Brahmacharaya. Truth is God to Gandhi ji and the way to that God is through ahimsa or non-violence, for God is also love and ahimsa is the manifestation of the love for all. Gandhi Ji views the ultimate object of man's life as self-realisation which implies the greatest good for all. Believing in the principle of spiritual unity, he advocates that the only way to find God is to see Him through His creation and to be one with it. Undoubtedly, non-violence as an ethical norm is generally considered basic to Gandhi's philosophy, a kind of ‘foundation stone’. For Gandhi Ji Truth is the highest value, the only intrinsic value, the only thing good in itself, the endeavour for truth is also at the same time the highest of virtues. Morality is a means or a method of realising this goal. Morality, to Gandhi ji is the fundamental presupposition for the knowledge of truth and for self-realisation. **“I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills.”**

Keywords: Truth, Non-violence, Self-realisation, Education

Introduction

Gandhi ji was a determinant, towering and unmatched personality. He was extremely simple and hard working. He said, “Be the change you want to see in the world”. During his early years, Gandhi ji was also a bit of a casual person. He was sporting fancy clothes and tried his best to play the role of an elite colonial lawyer. He could realize it soon that if he wanted to change the world around him and achieve his goals, he must surrender his personal desires to those of his cause. He abstained from fancy dressing, observed fasts and took a vow of celibacy.

Some theorists give a different explanation of the word “educate”. They say “e” means “out of” and “duco” means “to lead” i.e. to extract out the best in individuals. This explanation presumes that all knowledge is inherent in children. Only methods are to be found out to tap their brains and the knowledge will automatically flow.

Mahatma Gandhi ji also supports this theory when he says, “By education I mean all round drawing out of the best in the child and man- body, mind and spirit”.

Gandhi ji was a man of action and through the adventure of living, his experiments with truth, that he came to formulate ideas that are in over thousands of pages of writings, speeches and correspondence. Some of his prominent, philosophical doctrines are his concept of God, truth, morality, non-violence (Ahimsa), Satyagraha, labour, economic, equality, citizenship, brotherhood of man etc.

Concept of Society:

Gandhiji's philosophy relating to society centred around his concept of human happiness and development, the place of man in the society and the relationship between the two.

Concept of Truth:

Gandhi ji believed truth to be the ultimate reality and God can be realised only through truth. He said, "I have no God to serve but Truth". Truth is manifested both externally and internally and it is expressed through the inner voice, which is the "Voice of God" In the words of Gandhi ji, "Everyone who wills can hear the voice. It is within everyone."

Concept of Non-Violence:

Gandhiji's concept of non-violence or ahimsa was in self-sacrifice, self-suffering and love. According to him Non-violence was equivalent to love.

Concept of Satyagraha:

Gandhiji's concept of Satyagraha was a dynamic aspect of non-violence and a tool which created a human context for social conflict. Truth is the end and non-violence is the means to human activities. For Gandhiji Satyagraha is a dynamic quality of non-violence

Views on Morality:

The end of all knowledge for Gandhi was the development of morality. The society and individual can progress only through morality i.e. purity in thought, speech and deed. Therefore, a solid foundation of truth and purity should be established through education.

Concept of Education:

Gandhiji has given the concept of education with the synthesis of three main philosophies, idealism, naturalism and pragmatism. Literacy according to him is neither the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is not education. Right education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of the children. The purpose of Gandhi ji's education was to raise man to a higher order through full development of the individual and the evolution of a new man. He has two fold aims of education- ultimate and immediate. Self realization is the ultimate aim of life as well as education. It is spiritual education which provides knowledge of God and Self-realization. Faith in God is an indispensable condition for achieving this aim. Immediate aim of education of Gandhi ji are many as they are related to different aspects of life. They are education for character building, education for community, cultural aim of education social and individual aim of education etc.

Gandhi ji's Concept on Correlation:

Like John Dewey, who correlated all useful knowledge with project method, Gandhi ji made an original contribution to pedagogy by introducing craft as the Centre of Correlation. The whole range of desirable subjects are

integrated round the productive activities on the physical and social environment. All these provide an opportunity to the child to be engaged in productive activities. Gandhiji desires that correlation should be natural and not forced.

Basic Education:

In the year 1937 Gandhiji finalised a scheme of education out of his experiments and tried for its adaptation throughout the country. He also placed the salient features of his scheme of education in the All India National Education Conference convened at Wardha on the 22nd and 23rd of October, 1937. This is Basic because it is based on ancient Indian culture. It is Basic because it lays down the minimum educational standards which every Indian child is entitled to receive without any distinction of caste or creed.

Features of Basic Education:

Gandhiji advocated that within the age group 7 to 14 years, there should be free, compulsory and universal education. The Gandhian curriculum consisted of "the craft", the mother tongue of the students, mathematics, social- studies natural science and music.

Gandhiji stressed that proper education can only be imparted through the mother tongue. Foreign language as the medium of instruction makes us unfit for original work. It makes us crammers and imitators. The proper teaching of mother-tongue is the foundation of all education. Without the capacity to speak effectively, no one can develop precision of thought or clarity of ideas. Moreover, it is a means of introducing the child to the rich heritage of his people's ideas, emotions and aspirations and can, therefore, be made a valuable means of social education and right ethical and moral values. Also, it is a natural outlet for the expression of child's aesthetic sense and application with joy and appreciation.

Basic education is a plan of national education for the whole country including both the rural as well as in urban area. Keeping in view the educative possibilities of a craft in relation to local needs, curriculum may differ from region to region. There is no rigidity in the curriculum of basic education. Difference will be of a degree and not of kind. Basic principles of life are the same everywhere.

It is not quite fair to limit Gandhiji's philosophy and principles of education to basic system of education. Basic education is just one of his contributions to education. There is no dimension of life and education on which Gandhiji has not expressed his views. His views on the importance of mother tongue as medium of instruction, his emphasis on manual labour, learning by earning, his views

on significance of women education, role of teachers etc. are quite relevant today.

To Gandhiji, education was an integral part of a comprehensive programme of socio-economic reconstruction of Indian society. As a political and spiritual leader and an economic and social reformer, Gandhiji was naturally concerned with education. All his constructive programme, economic, educational, ethical, political, social and spiritual were interconnected.

Relevance and Applicability of Gandhian Philosophy Today

The thoughts and ideas of Mahatma Gandhi have spread throughout the world since they were first evolved by the Mahatma. Based on the noble and sustainable ideas of love, brotherhood, truth, non-violence and welfare of all, his thoughts along with the path devised by him for realising them have gained admiration and popularity in many parts of the world. They have been recognised as the views and ways of a great man, which carry the mark of greatness in them. Gandhi's ideas were crucial in boosting the morale of the masses and awakening them and making them fight for independence from British rule. They played no mean part in forcing the British to leave the country. But are they significant in the India and the world of today ?

There is no dearth of people who doubt the continuing relevance of his thoughts. From their point of view, the foremost reason for this is the utopian nature of his ideas. On the face of it, they seem impractical musings that cannot be of much relevance in a world that has lost its moral and ethical values and has set itself on the track of materialism and intellectualism; in a society that shows marks of continuing on the road to selfishness, exploitation and degeneration. Actually , Gandhi and his ways have been considered irrelevant from time to time since the early twentieth century. Such doubts have been largely inspired in independent India by the fact that India since independence has never really adopted any of his thoughts and practised Gandhism even in a limited sense. It is only lip service that has been offered to Gandhi and Gandhism. It is as if Gandhi died in 1948, and was easily forgotten by the very India which he helped to liberate with his views and which, he was eager, should become a leading light of the world by adopting the spiritual and noble ideals he preached.

An understanding of the depth and intrinsic value of his message, its eternal and universal significance, and that it operates at various levels through a myriad techniques show us the relevance of Gandhism. His thoughts operate at various levels- the individual, society, state and the

global level- and they concern themselves with various fields. It is true that they often appear intractable , too perfect for use in real-life situations. And, in many cases, his ideas may not provide a direct answer to our present day problems. But they definitely indicate a direction. That they can do much more than that is attested to by the fact that Gandhi lived by what he preached, and successfully too! And once Gandhi himself stated that he was an "ordinary" mortal preaching and living by views that were most noble and good for mankind. Today, people from world over agree and admire many facets of his thoughts such as non-violence, the non-exploitative growth of economy and environment, etc. for their message and relevance, which only makes us wonder whether there is not anything in them.

However , there is need to mention one thing. Gandhi propagated his ideas at least 50 years back. Since then, the world has undergone a lot of change especially in the political and economic sense, and so has India. Many of his views may thus need to be modified in order that they may be applied to present conditions while their essence is kept intact. There is no reason to doubt whether such a step would have been approved by the Mahatma were he alive to this day. It would also not be wrong to study his ideas in combination with others from varied sources and produce an amalgamation of thoughts that would serve as a relevant framework for addressing present-day problems and concerns. The great relevance of Gandhian thoughts and ideas especially to modern man lies in their essence All his concepts and techniques for moral and spiritual regeneration are aimed at Man's realisation of self- which was for him the attainment of God- so that man could become Parmatama. Gandhi's vision opens the way to a better and superior life, a 'higher' man devoted to love, justice and truth. But such glory could be achieved only by serving mankind for the welfare of the common people especially the downtrodden, as only in the service of people can the soul's qualities of truth and justice be demonstrated. What can be of greater relevance to us than understanding how such self-realisation may be possible, how man can achieve a higher state of being! All the operational techniques preached and followed by Gandhi ultimately aim at the attainment of this goal. Once man's inner transformation takes place, all other changes would automatically occur. The need for this is all the more urgent today as spiritual and moral values are only on the decline and progress is largely gauged on material terms. What follows is a discussion of the significance and feasibility of some major facets of Gandhian thought and practice in the present time.

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