

# Relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in Contemporary World

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## Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a saint and a moral revolutionary. M.K. Gandhi has exercised the most powerful influence on modern world. Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a political philosopher; it is a message and philosophy of life. For quite some time it was considered that Gandhian philosophy and methods of struggle could not be put actual practice and with that these philosophy and methods have established their effectiveness. While M.K. Gandhi lived most of the people thought that his ideas are relevance only to win freedom for India from the British rule. So many persons were not convinced by his faith in Truth and non-violence; they agreed that this was the only strategy to turn British out of India. There is great relevancy of Gandhian political philosophy. Gandhi was a practical thinker and as such it has rightly been said about him that he was a great *karma yogi*. Gandhi was one of those philosophers who believed in self-sacrifice, *Satyagraha* or *Non-cooperation*.

## Relevancy of Gandhian Philosophy

M.K. Gandhi very exhaustively dealt not only with political or economic but also with social problems of Indian society in particular and world society in general. In the preceding paper, a *detailed study of relevance of Gandhian Thought from different angles shall be presented as follows:*

### 1. Relevance of Religion

From time immemorial, human being is practicing some religion or other in their day to day life. Everybody considers his religion as the supreme and others religion as inferior. This feeling of superiority of one's own religion has manifested into a number of wars to prove one's own superiority and thus killings of innocent persons at the altar of religion is so dangerous that even now terrorism is vividly viewed from the angle of religion. But Gandhi has a beautiful answer to such an evil. He says, "All religions adhere to the fact that "his God is the Truth." If it is so with one religion, it is true with other religions also. Thus Gandhi brings out the common point from all religions and for him "Truth is God." If

this concept is accepted by all there shall be no war/ hatred or ill-will against any religion. Why not adhere to this beautiful principle? If this is brought into practice, religions of all will be respected by all. Hence, Gandhi has to be studied in a simple way as regards religion is concerned.

Gandhi upholds different religions like different roads coming to the same point.” However it is useless to make distinction between different abodes of god-temples, mosques and churches. Though religions are many but Religion is one. He was always adhering for mutual tolerance. His religion is “Sarva Dharma Sambhava (Equal Approach to All Religions.) It is very near to Swami Vivekanand’s ‘Universal Religion’ or Tagore’s ‘Religion of Man’. His Religion unites men of different faiths and brings them on the same platform to reach the ultimate truth i.e. the spirit of humanity and thus conflict shall be resolved amicably and with temperance and not with superiority of one over other. Gandhi’s Religion makes a man spiritual and scientific. As Vinoba rightly describes that spirituality plus science means Sarvodaya (total upliftments) but spirituality minus science means Sarvanas (total destruction).

Thus, if Gandhi’s concept of religion is practiced, there shall be no scope of hatred, animosity, enmity, war and destruction. If we have to save the world of today from catastrophe, there is only way and that is the Gandhian way to practice the universal religion which shall herald an era of peace, tranquility and harmony on earth. This is how Gandhi’s concept of Religion is of eminent value for all time to come.

## 2. Relevance of Politics

Politics has regarded as a game to achieve power, to regain power and to retain power. In the western concept, politics till date has been viewed as power politics, where morality or value had no place but now this concept has almost been abandoned. Now even western thinkers have started talking about the moral values in politics, whereas from the very beginning, from Gandhi, politics was all pervading and hence, his war of Indian Independence had to be fought with the twin weapons of Truth and Non-violence, which ultimately became a movement and he called it Satyagraha. For him, politics opens the door of ‘service’ and not for using or usurping power. For Gandhi, politics is moral problem of value. This has been beautifully described by Arnold Brecht as “Scientific Value Relativism”. Need of the hour is to revolutionize politics by ethics. In Modern times, we see that politics is rooted in deceit and dishonesty and is bound to create greater deceit and greater dishonesty. Hate must generate hate and violence greater violence. Thus the need of the hour is to “moralise politics.” Gandhi’s prophetic emphasis is “there is no politics devoid of religion.” All through the Indian Freedom Movement, it was Gandhi and Gandhi alone who, in reality, practiced politics on religious foundations as he always used to put emphasis on his often repeated saying i.e. “Politics bereft of religion is a death trap.” So far, the world has seen only the use of physical force and the force of law but Gandhi had carved out the Third Force or the self-reliant moral power of the people. Gandhi stands for people’s politics and not Party Politics. Actually, power must pass into the hands of the people at all levels; initiatives must pass to the people. He pleads for party less democracy. Emergence of people’s democracy will herald a new era of democratic decentralization i.e. the Swaraj (Self Rule) is needed from below.

Thus Gandhian Politics has a dominant and constructive role to play. He was against narrow nationalism. His concept of politics was for higher values. “Through deliverance of India”, he said, “I seek to deliver the so called weaker races of the earth from the crushing wheels of western exploitation.” And it happened so and in due course most of the weaker nations emerged as free nations after India achieved Independence. We fought for others Independence also and the latest in the series is the war of

Bangladesh's freedom in 1971. Now, the politics of exploitation has been uprooted and the politics of service is visualized through democratic ideals. Party Politics is being replaced by people's power. Service to the people and their amelioration is gradually becoming the sum mumbonus of the states all over the world and hence relevance of Gandhian Politics cannot be minimized.

### 3. Relevance of Democracy

Gandhian concept of Self Rule (Swaraj) is real democracy, where people's power rests in the individuals and each one realizes that he or she is the real master of one's self. Thus people are sovereign in a democracy but in a parliamentary democracy, party system has a vital role to play. However, Gandhi was highly critical of the parliamentary democracy and in his monumental book "Hind Swaraj" (Self Rule or Home Rule, he has called the British Parliament as a "sterile women and a prostitute", though for him "good government is no substitute for self-government." There is contradiction in the statement of Gandhi about parliamentary democracy but while diving deep into the democratic ideals, he has said, "Democracy, disciplined and enlightened is the finest things in the world." At the same time, he also cautions people against a whole-sale copying of the Western Model of democracy, where there are only nominal democracies. However, he has highest regards for Democracy and he calls it as "a great institution" and again conscious people and says, "It is liable to be greatly abused." Even today, all over the world, democracy is widely accepted principle of the system of governance and there is no alternative to democracy. Thus it is abundantly clear that for future, Gandhian concept of democracy is the only hope, where it must be practiced at the grass-root level, party system to be built up on accepted principles and not on partisan line, defection should be done away with and recall of recalcitrant representatives must be adhered to.

### 4. Social Philosophy

Dr. V.P. Verma discusses thoroughly about the social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and he says, "Gandhi never sanctioned the doctrine of caste war, class struggle and fight between races. Now, it is an accepted fact that, Sarvodaya concept of social change is multidimensional and a safety valve against abuses of State Power. Intellectually, it is a better guarantee of democracy than anything else. However, this is still not mature enough to bring about social changes as per expectations of Gandhian Thought. Hence, the information of a World Peace Force (Vishwa Shanti Seva) has been conceived to bring about desired social change on Gandhian Principles at the World level. Cautious efforts in due course will bring expected results when peaceful and non-violent social order could be visualized. The road is difficult but aim is laudable and we have no alternative also as we have either to live together or perish together.

### 5. Economic Relevance

The German economist Ernst Schumacher described Gandhi as a "People's Economist... who refused to treat economics as if people did not matter" and argued "The technology of mass production is inherently violent, ecologically damaging, self-defeating in terms of non-renewable resources and stultifying for the human person. Gandhi urged that technology should design to serve the human person instead of making him the servant of machines".

#### A. Employment

India's rural industries located predominantly in rural areas are providing employment to over 30 million families of spinners, weavers, embroiderers, leather, marble and metal workers, wood, bone and

stone carvers, carpet and rug makers etc. India's annual exports of these items earn it over US\$ 1 billion. Gandhi's maxims "production by the masses, not mass production" and "The cure for unemployment is provision of employment and not a dole" have been vindicated. Gandhi's economic philosophy is inspired by John Ruskin (1819-1900) book "Unto this Last" "Gandhi Condemned the nineteenth century doctrine of laissez-faire which is the political basis of capitalism and he said that labour was superior to capital. As we all know by now that Gandhi was against industrialism and Big Machines and not against machines as such.

### **B. Concept of Trusteeship**

Gandhi paraphrased John Ruskin's book 'Unto This Last' into Gujarati with the title 'Sarvodaya'. Literally, Sarvodaya means the rise of all human beings. The society should function as an organic whole rather than being disjointed into economic classes or social castes. Gandhi's concept Trusteeship was that "those who own money now are asked to behave like Trustees, holding their riches on behalf of the poor" sought to establish a link between ethics and economics. During Gandhi's lifetime this concept evoked poor response. However, now Indian capitalists, Jammalal Bajaj, J.R.D Tata, Narayan Murthy of Infosys and Azim Premji of Wipro adopted it. Their surplus wealth is spent in providing education and toilet facilities for the masses. A Sarvodaya State shall be a secular State. The Sarvodaya program as charted out by Gandhi and supplemented by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of independent India has the following features:

1. Farmers and workers will be at the center of a Sarvodaya State. There will be no exploitation of the farmers and the workers. To this end, the farmers and the workers should organize themselves.
2. Children will be given basic education and adults will be given basic as well as technical education.
3. Village industries, health and hygiene will be emphasized.
4. The villages to become self-sufficient republics.
5. Every household will spin yarn in the village.
6. There shall be social justice and communal harmony.

### **6. Relevance of Education**

True education is that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties. According to Gandhi, the aim of education should be build the whole man and develop his integral personality. "Literacy in itself is no education. It is not the end of education or even the beginning." Gandhi wanted to build up a new society but he was apprehensive that it cannot be build up with old educational system. Education is worthless, if it fails to inculcate the spirit of service and sacrifice. A school should not be attached to workshop. The workshop itself is the school. We should learn while we earn and vice-versa. The whole of general education should come through crafts and simultaneously with their progress. This is the only method of producing fully developed human beings. Except for the scholastics all others agree that work should find a place in the educational curriculum. Some regard work merely as an appendage without accepting its needs. However, the real technique of education should be the technique of correlation. Activity draws out the latent capacities of the child which is the aim of education. Hence, it is the best technique of education judged even from the purely educational and psychological viewpoints. So, on the one hand, there is the explosion of knowledge, on the other, there is the explosion of man himself. Gandhi's concept of Basic Education has got the maximum attention. It aims at all round development of human personality. His primary emphasis is on the 3'H's i.e. – Head, Heart and Hand, rather than on 3 R's i.e. – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. For

Gandhi, The true development of head, heart and soul are necessary for a satisfactory system of education.” The Basic Education envisaged by Gandhi aimed at producing self-reliant and good citizens. In order to regain India’s lost glory and prestige, Gandhi’s educational ideas based on value-orientation have to be reemphasized. The education curricula should be value laden as well as information oriented. Eradication of illiteracy and spread of education is the prime need of the hour so that the citizens of Twenty First Century can be alert and enlightened.” Before, Gandhi’s concept of education through “Basic Education” could take off and materialized, it could not be implemented with true spirit and hence, there is apprehension in the mind of the educationists about its efficacy, usefulness and relevance for modern time. However, men of higher thinking always ponder over the failure of the present educational system, which has simply multiplied the number of so called educated unemployed and this huge army of educated unemployed is becoming a menace for the polity and society both. Still there is a ray of hope to get the Gandhian concepts of value education implemented to save the society from peril and total destruction.

## 7. A Gandhian Idea of World Government and World Peace

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: “Nationalism is not the highest concept; the highest concept is world community. I would not like to live in this world, if it is not to be one.” The quintessence of divine wisdom, “Vasudhaiv Kutumbkum” or (“Mankind is one family”), proclaimed by India millennium ago, was the ultimate aim of Mahatma and his thought. Hence, his greatest follower, adviser and interpreter, Acharya Vinoba Bhave has a great slogan ‘Jai jagat ‘or ‘Hail one World.” Nation States have seen a plethora of wars and devastations on large scale and hence idea of world government, if materialized will end the disparity a real cause of disharmony among the people of the different nations. This is why supra-national institutions like the E-E.C. are becoming more necessary today than before. The institutions like the IMF, G.A.T.T., IBRD, FAO, WHO, ILO etc. are charged with the solution of humanity pressing problems of hunger, disease and illiteracy. At the same time compulsion of war expenditure is another constant reminder for us, to consider seriously the question of bringing the whole world under one government. So Prof. Arnold Toynbee also said, “If we do not abolish war, war is going to abolish us.” Peace can be ensured in the world if a single government wields control over the armaments. In fact, no sacrifice would be too big to achieve world peace – be its surrender of a part of the national sovereignty or renunciation of the use of force in settling, international disputes. Gandhi’s nationalism, fierce though it is, is not exclusive, not designed to harm any nation or individual. His nationalism was the essential precondition of sound internationalism. “Through Swaraj (Home Rule), we would serve the whole world.” Indian nationalism is not exclusive, or aggressive nor destructive. He went further..... “My idea of nationalism is that my country may die so that the human race may live. Gandhi frankly hints at some sort of world federation, when he says: “The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states warning one against another but a federation of friendly interdependent states.” Further he said, “The only condition on which the world can live is being united under one central governing body composed of representatives of the component parts.” In 1931, while speaking about the League of Nations at Geneva, he said, “It is expected to replace war, and by its own power to arbitrate between nations.” But the same time, he candidly said, “That League lacks the necessary sanction.” As the arch patriot of his own ideology of non-violence, Gandhi was against any sanction of brute physical force. At the same time of San Francisco Conference for the formation of the UNO, Gandhi had said, “The retention of an International Police Force is by no means an emblem of peace. Shedding of belief in war and violence is essential to the establishment of real peace based on freedom and equality of all races and

nations” (17.04.1945). However, peace keeping force is not supported by him; Vishwa Shanti Sena (International Peace Force) is the only solution. In the present Unit polar world, its importance has further increased and Gandhi is becoming relevant day in and day out.

## 8. National defense and international security strategists

Gandhi’s approach to national defense and international security was based on the maxim that for achieving security and peace it was the path of Truth, Justice, non-violence training and mutually acceptable agreements that needed to be adopted and not that of amassing arms, invading and occupying countries and waging war. This approach is embodied in UNESCO’s motto “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”. Now it was right rather might, courage rather than fear, and indomitable will rather than superior arms that triumphed.

## Conclusion

After many years of martyrdom, Gandhi is now more relevant on global level than before. In contemporary period Gandhi is remembered more with reverence than merely casually. He is being recognized as a great leader of action, a Liberator and a Prophet Martyr all over the universe. What is needed at the hour is to implement his deeds, actions and thoughts into practice and thus, his relevance in different fields is unquestionable and unchallengeable. For the very survival of human being, it is imperative on our part to act upon his advice because only on his relevance, we shall survive together or if we fail in our venture, we are bound to perish together.

Now we have to try and see what we can do with our limitations to overcome what Gandhiji described as the seven social sins:

1. Politics without Principles.
2. Wealth without Work.
3. Commerce without Morality
4. Education without Character
5. Pleasure without Conscience.
6. Science without Humanity.
7. Worship without Sacrifice.

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