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Philosophical Thoughts of Gandhi: Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract

According to Gandhiji there is nothing such “Gandhism”. And it is in fact, that he was neither a systematic philosopher nor a system builder. But it is to be admitted as he was freedom fighter, social reformer and practical man. Not like a social scientist but as a scientist he was an empirical oriented. So his aim was to bring problem like social, political, economic and cultural face to face with the truth.

Key Words: Satyagraha, Swadeshi, Hinduism, Swaraj, Sarba dharma sambhaba.

Introduction

Was Gandhi borned to be a leader or the then Indian chaotic circumstance urged him to be a leader? Was Gandhi an average man who rose to an extraordinary height or an extraordinary man? These sorts of queries invoked many debates and discussions. It can be vociferously argued that the British colonialism in all over the world, the two world wars, of racism, of apartheid has produced many great man but before the personalities and principles of Gandhi all of them become obscure (Mukharji: 2008). It is only Gandhi the world has recognized him as a unique personality. His all principles resonates in the mind and springs of the lips when people struggles for freedom and a better way of life. However, despite of it the relevance of Gandhi in the present context has created a big question.

In this paper I would like to draw light on the relevance of Gandhian principles like nonviolence, non-cooperation (satyagraha), fast unto death, self-reliance (swadeshi), panchayat raj institution, trusteeship not of his period to transform the society rather to fit it in the present condition (Mukharji: 2008). If I were to single out some of the most imperative abstractions which many of the world have recognized then it would be:

- The transformatory power of truth and non-violence in thought and deed (the non-violent revolt by Buddhist monks for restoration of democracy in Myanmar; the non-violent ouster of authoritarian regimes as in Iran and the Philippines; and other examples).
- Establishment of village panchayat in theory and practice and this is an alternative idea of the elitist representative form of democracy.
- Emancipation of women and eradication of inequalities in the society.
- Human being is an integral part of society and not alienated from it which is widely accepted by the present ecologists and environmentalists in world over.
- Emphasis over rights which is the prime obligation of the liberalized state.

Hence the relevance of Gandhi is unquestionable and beyond debatable issue. In spite of it Gandhi is so humble and benevolent that he abstain the posterity to follow his ideas, thoughts and views (Johnson: 2006). There are many areas to make a comparison of Gandhian ideas and thoughts with the current situation but I would like to confine myself only in the religion, politics, economics and social dynamics segments.

Religious relevance

Since time immemorial human being is practicing some religion and other in their day to day life. Some believes superior to their religion and inferior to the other. And ultimately this is the sole reason for all clash and conflict in the social scenario on the context of religion. This superiority feelings of one's own religion has proved many war and the killing of innocent life on the price of religion. Even now the terrorist groups has been formed on the basis of religion. Most recently the dreaded terrorist Osama Bin Laden and his al-quiada warned the president of U.S to accept Islam or face the strenuous consequence (Narayan: 1978). So this jeopardized approach has formed man savage and cruel. But Gandhiji had a very beautiful solution to save everyone's religion from a catastrophe. He explains, "All religion believes the fact that his god is truth"⁴ if it is so to one religion than that is also equal to other. Thus Gandhi brings the gist of all religion and concluded that "truth is God (Gandhi: 1947). If everyone is embedded on this thought then there would no more be hatredness, animosity and no ill-will against any religion. If this is brought into practice then all will start to respect to all religion.

However by the passage of time Gandhi after vast reading and experiment vehemently said that every religions are good, all religions have some error and all are as dear to me as my own Hinduism. Gandhi upholds that though "there are many religions but religion is one (Gandhi: 1947). As a tree has a trunk but many more branches and leafs. He was always adheres to mutual tolerance. His religion is "Sarba Dharma Sambhaba (equal approach to all religion)" (Tendulkar: 1951-54).

Thus if Gandhian concept of religion is practiced then there would be no scope for any hate, enmity, war etc. So to save the world from the disastrous end, Gandhian way to practice the universal religion which shall concede an era of peace, tranquility and harmony on the earth.

Political relevance

This is a common perception of people about politics is, which has been penetrated in mind over the period of time, as contest for power, to regain power and to retain power. Western democratic society had accepted this self-interested view of politics where morality and value had no role. But now this concept has already been jettisoned by the western society and try to add the moral values. Interestingly this techniques of politics started from Gandhi since the struggle for independence of India. He adopted the ideas of "truth and non-violence" which consequently converted to Satyagraha. For him politics is a platform which open the path for service not to capture and usurping power. In his description on politics Gandhi some extent support to "party less democracy" (Mukharji: 1986). According to him power should not be concentrated in some hands rather circulated to all. Power should flow from everybody's hand and it is the responsibility of everyone to take initiatives for the up-liftment of society. Emergence of people's democracy will create new era of democratization i.e. Swaraj (self-rule) is needed from below. His analysis of "panchayatraj" is a cornerstone of democratic government. In Gandhian perspective of politics democracy become the rule of the people and depends more and more upon the power of the people not on the police or military. Thus Gandhi urge for the moralization of politics and voluntary action should be the basis of democratic life and culture.

Relevance of social dynamics

As like a prophet he has exhaustively studied the lacuna of social problems and prescribed its possibly solutions. According to D.P Sharma "Gandhi has never approved for caste war, class war and war among races" (Gandhi: 1942). He has never made an attempt to segregate the society irrespective of caste, class and religion. Instead he recommended these social evils can be resolved through collaboration, accommodation and genuine brotherly solidarity (Varma: 1984). For him annihilation of caste is no longer a matter of political discourses rather it was to be the transformation of heart. As a great devotee of god/Gita he always search the eternal spirit in the hearts of oppressed and sub-human creatures. Gandhi as a protagonist of common good of all inhabitants of India, because as a religious man he believed Hindu-Muslim unity on the moral ground.

One of the prominent feature of his philosophy is communal harmony which he practiced throughout his life. He has of the view that without it no nation can scale the height and it would eat away the values of society. The recent series of bomb explosions in many parts of Hyderabad and Mumbai must be eye opener for all of us that without Gandhian approach to social dynamics, India cannot progress. 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 (Pravu: 1966).

Economic relevance

Gandhi in economic sphere was a firm follower of Ruskin (1819-1900) and his masterpiece “Unto this last” (Mukharji: 2008). Since his inception he was opposed to industrialization and big machine but not to the machine. He advocated for rural economy and ownership of the land by the tillers (Mehta: 1978). His heart bled to see the misery of the rural people and thus he advised for the “Constructive programme” for thorough improvement in the life of the rural peasant (Mehta: 1978). Decentralization of economy is his breakthrough innovation for the self-reliance of the village people. His concept of trusteeship has come from *aparigraha* (non-possession) of the Gita (Gandhi: 1951). Trusteeship is an institution of the surplus wealth of the rich people for the good of the society. Hence the state has also the responsibility for the supply of goods for the underprivileged groups. So the society is an extension of a family. There is a best solution in the Gandhian economy to remove the economic inequality is equality of wages not only for labor but also for other members of the different professions. Thus Gandhi inculcated the revolutionary doctrine of “equality of wages for lawyer, the doctor, the teacher and the scavenger as the panacea for socio-economic evils” (Gandhi: 1944).

Conclusion

Gandhi was a moral rebel who called for organized movement against imperialism, virulence social exploitation, economic oppression and slavery (Shah: 1963). At a time when thinkers in the realm of philosophies and social sciences are trying to take stock of the Eastern Heritage and Western Thought, Gandhi stands as a symbol of the **conjunction**⁶ of the East and the West. The service of Gandhi in awakening the soul of Asia and Africa is of immense importance. Ho-Chi-Minh and Nelson Mandela have testified to the inspiration of the leaders and activists of the two continents Asia and Africa, received in their work from the trials, sufferings and teachings of the Mahatma. Even the Negro liberationists in North America under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King II received inspiration from him. Romain Rolland had recognized the moral significance of the work of the Mahatma. Both Einstein and Tagore testified to the spiritual eminence of Gandhi. At a time, when cultural norms are collapsing and structure of civilization is imperiled, the deathless spirit of Gandhi stands as a mighty Himalaya an immense source of strength to those devoted to the emancipation of mankind.

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