

Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Concept of Non-Violence in the Present Context

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi is timeless and ageless. His life is an example which has universal validity. His concepts of truth, non-violence and peace have brought about a great change not only in India but also in the whole world. Seven decades have gone by since we lost Mahatma, but still there are lot of discussions either in society, cinema or literature as to what he has left for the world and how his philosophy can be useful in dealing with the recent global challenges. Often his philosophy is talked about, but in reality it is very difficult to follow it as it requires great patience, hope, sense of struggle and approach to non-violence. There is so much chaos caused due to various selfish ends of humans in this world. The present paper is an attempt to discuss if the philosophy of Mahatma is put in the midst of this chaos, will it be helpful to resolve the contemporary 'Glocal' problems. For this the researcher has tried to dive deep into the literature as well as life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Non-violence, Truth, Hope, Contemporary World

1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is timeless and ageless. His life is an example which has universal validity. His concepts of truth, non-violence and peace have brought about a great change not only in India but also in the whole world. Seven decades have gone by since we lost Mahatma, but still there are lot of discussions either in society, cinema or literature as to what he has left for the world and how his philosophy can be useful in dealing with the recent global challenges. Often his philosophy is talked about, but in reality it is very difficult to follow it as it requires great patience, hope, sense of struggle and approach to non-violence. Throughout his life, Mahatma has been struggling with peaceful means against injustice. His journey against injustice started in South Africa and physically ended in India. But he is still alive in the hearts of all people who realize his importance in the post-modern world.

His life-long search was directed for the real meaning of truth and during this he found the concept of Non-violence. According to him both nonviolence and truth were the two sides of the same coin and compliments and completes each other. Mahatma emphasized that there may be various interpretations of the same thing and likewise truth can be interpreted accordingly. So it is necessary not to postulate that what we know is the only truth. Rather we should respect the other person's version of truth. And then in the churning process for knowing the truth, something new and better version of the truth may emerge out. And what is essential in this journey towards truth is suggested by Mahatma himself when he says that nonviolence is the only justifiable way to reach and vindicate truth. It was for this reason he gave the dictum in his *YervedaMandir* (1932), that, "Truth is the end and ahimsa the means thereto" (Qtd. in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 87).

This concept of Non-violence is unique in itself because it is full of positive attitude and compassion for everyone even for the evil-doer. It was his philosophy to the hate the hatred not the hater, so it goes in the same way for this concept also where he believed in opposing the wrong not the wrong

doer. It is necessary for giving him a chance to behave like a human in the true sense of the term. This is uplifting and positive step necessary for a healthy humanistic society. In order to explain the aspect of love in ahimsa and reason for using negative word 'nonviolence', Mahatma Gandhi said in his *Harijan* (1936), that : "Ahimsa means 'love' in the Paulin sense, and yet something more than the 'love' defined by Paul...Ahimsa includes the whole creation and not only humans. Besides 'love' in the English language has other connotations too and so I was compelled to use the negative word. But it doesnot, as I told you, express a negative force, but a force superior to all the forces put together"(Qtd. in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 123).

According to him love and non-violence can win anything in the world. It seems difficult, but not impossible. It is this bond of love and non-violence which can create wonders. It can unite the whole of humanity. According to him non-violence is mightier than any other destructive weapons made by man. Amid the death and destruction caused by destructive weapons, there is a possibility that one can resort to anger and violent ways. But his strength lies in the fact to go against this probable option and follow non-violent ways in the hope of a better future. War and violence can never bring peace, only love and non-violence can. In this context he wrote in *Young India* (1931) that,

Consciously or unconsciously, we are acting non-violently towards one another in our daily life. All well-constructed societies are based on the law of nonviolence. I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and therefore there must be higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would well-ordered society be intelligible and lifeworthy living. And if that is the law of life we have to work it out in daily life (Qtd. in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 36).

He dreamt a world where there is peace, love, trust, hope and non-violence. It is beyond religion, race, gender and any other barrier erected by man in the path of humanity. And for this utopian world to be a reality, every human being has

to accept non-violence by heart. One should practice non-violence in one's life and set example for the others. In ancient times, this concept of non-violence was deemed fit only for the sages, but Mahatma Gandhi broadened its dimensions to be followed and accepted by common people also. He thought it to be a universal medium for resolving conflicts. First he experimented with this concept and then preached people to follow with right intact. He himself used it for the first time in South Africa, to fight injustice and racism and later to bring independence in India and other social evils prevailing in India like untouchability, female feticide, alcoholism, discrimination against women etc.

The present scenario of the globe is larded with the thoughts of materialism and distrust where the world resorts to greed, malice and hatred. Simplicity, truth, conscience and moral values are crumbling down. At such a juncture, the humanity in is need of some trustworthy anchor to hold, and that anchor revolve round non-violence and truth. If we follow these two, automatically most of the conflicting claims will be resolved. The post-modern man has become blind with all his eccentricity, greed, lust, immorality, power and pomp. After the death of mahatma and India gaining freedom from the British rule, there was a sharp deviation from Gandhian principles of Non-violence and peace. When the first atom bomb was exploded on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Mahatma Gandhi's reaction was, "I did not move a muscle. On the contrary I said to myself that unless now they adopt nonviolence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind." The irony of the very perfection of the weapons of war rendering them useless as arbiters between nations has become increasingly clear during the recent years.

Mahatma Gandhi suggested for basic parts of non-violence, they are: respect, understanding, acceptance and appreciation. Unfortunately these four have lost their validity in the whirlwind of hatred and distrust among human beings. The first part respect does not bind itself for oneself but also one's relation with the others. It is a broad concept in itself which incorporate respect for other cultures, beliefs, religion, language, race, gender, region and species along with nature. If one has respect for these above mentioned one can create an atmosphere of love and humanity.

The second part is 'understanding' which is of equal importance. If there is no understanding confusion and distrust prevail. Lack of coherence certainly widens the gap between truth and lie. Understanding each other and the conditions may change our point of view and we begin to put ourselves into the situation of person in front of us. For this we have to rise above our personal self and start thinking in terms of 'vasudhevkutumbkam.' We human beings have to create an atmosphere of understanding where the relation between human beings and Mother Nature remains in balance. The remaining two are aptly described by Arun Gandhi in his "Nonviolence in the 21st Century: Challenges and Choices" (2004) as:

Acceptance is reached when we accept the differences, physical and philosophical between human beings. And lastly when the differences melt away the appreciation among people is achieved. But in the present scenario

these two principles are also seen to be shadowed by the feeling of hatred, disrespect, misunderstandings and ignorance. A peaceful society needs all these in order to run smoothly. Man has to understand that they are inter-dependent and inter-related to one another" (4).

Mahatma Gandhi was aware of manmade troubles and their viable solutions. In his celebrated book 'Hind Swaraj,' he suggested practical solutions of modern day world challenges. His was to make a balance between tradition and modernity. The former was being challenged at every stage by the latter in every aspect of human life. But we need to avoid extremes and work out a middle way where the interests of both approaches can be entertained and preserved. Everywhere he advocated equality and justice, which may create the necessary understanding and respect. All these traits are interrelated with truth. If truth prevails, the Earth will turn into a Heaven. The words of N. Ramakrishnan are noteworthy in this respect when he says in his "Toward Building Societies in the Nonviolent and Peaceful Tradition" (2013) that: "Mahatma Gandhi was a person who tried to establish truth above everything. According to him if science is truth seeking, then by making his life 'Experiments with Truth,' he went far beyond the traditional parameters of classifications. He considers truth to be supreme power (14). Because of this he was called by many historians as social scientist. He thought of almost all aspects and was a whole system in himself. He always tried to provide permanent and systematic solutions to the problems rather than temporary solutions which do not last long. If we look into the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi we will find out that he has provided several great and sufficient tools for sustainable development. He talked about many nonviolent methods which could lead to a peaceful and prosperous life and create a nonviolent society.

Everywhere he takes about positive attitudes, so that they may create positive and acceptable solutions. In describing his principle of trusteeship he makes a difference between pity and compassion. He favours compassion in place of pity. Because pity involves a sense of degradation on the part of person in need. He further tries to explain that there is a very thin line between pity and compassion. Many people believe that if they are doing something for someone then it's their greatness. But it is not so. According to Arun Gandhi: "Pity is degrading and oppressive, while compassion is uplifting for giver and receiver. Pity is when we give hungry person to buy food or when we feed the hungry through soup kitchens . . . On the other hand compassion requires that we get involved in finding ways in which unfortunate can be helped to become self-sufficient citizens. The help they receive should be such as to help rebuild their self-confidence and self-respect which are crushed by poverty and operation. ("Nonviolence in the 21st Century" 12).

2. Conclusion

People follow violent ways since it seems easy and effective method to them in order to get something they want. But this is not true victory. There is a black truth hidden behind this victory which is bloodstained. It is evident through human history that violence can never create an atmosphere of love

and hope. It creates an atmosphere of hatred and fear. And amid fear and hatred, no one can live peacefully. Two World Wars and many more battles have left a bleak legacy for the future generations. If want our children to live in peace and harmony, non-violence and truth are imperative. In the wake of 21st century his teachings and preaching are very useful and need to be followed. We have the cast away our prejudice regarding his philosophy as mush talked about and now useless. We have several examples wherein we can see the magic of his stance. "LageRahoMuunaBhai," a Bollywood movie recently released shows how his teaching can solve everyday challenges of common people. And they can be equally influential in global terms because after all each problem is man made these days. Martin Luther King Jr. won Civil Rights Movement through following Gandhi's path of justice through non-violence. And the whole world witnessed that even a black person can become the president of the USA breaking the chains race and color. His 'Dream' won, America Won and above all humanity won. How Mahatma is still relevant today is evident from the following words of Matt Doedon, when he says in his book "*Darkness Everywhere: The Assassination of Mohandas Gandhi*" (2013) that:

Throughout my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things. That is why his portrait hangs in my Senate office: to remind me that real result will come not just from Washington 'they will come from the people' this statement made by US President Barack Obama in 2004 is evident enough to his relevance worldwide (76).

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