**THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN THOUGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

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***"He is the One Luminous, Creator of All, Mahatma,***

***Always in the hearts of the people enshrined,***

***Revealed through Love, Institution, and Thought,***

***Whoever knows Him, Immortal becomes. . . . . "***

***-Tagore***

1. **INTRODUCTION**

A small frail man, with a thin face and rather large protruding eyes, his body clothed in a coarse khadi, barefooted, modest and unassuming ruled over the hearts of half naked million, bore the burden of a whole nation and won India’s freedom -- freedom from bondage, slavery and imperialism. He was the man “who could talk with crowds and still keep his virtue…..or walk with kings and not lose the common touch”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

According to Hoarse, he was a conglomeration of a conservative, a liberal, a socialist, a radical, a communist, and an archaist.’[[3]](#footnote-3) His uniqueness did not lie in the fact that he was extraordinary but in his being extraordinarily ordinary and this simplicity of his was reflected in his thoughts too. In his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, he was quoted as saying....

*"When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall — think of it, always."*

*“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."*

Indian people called Gandhiji ‘Mahatma’, meaning Great Soul. Car Heath describes him as “type of the civilized and humanized man.” Sir Cripps once remarked, “There has been no greater spiritual leader in the world in our times than Mahatma Gandhi.” Sardar Patel described him as a “pillar of strength and a source of inspiration to the nation.”

It was Gandhiji who taught uslocal solutions to basic livelihood issues and resolution of conflicts through consensus.

**2 EMERGENCE OF GANDHISM AS A CONCEPT**

The upbringing of a person is perhaps the most important factor in the development of his personality and his morals. A human being is like ‘***cement***’, can be easily moulded into any desired shape but once the cement dries i.e. the human gets older than the same job becomes tough. He describes his father truthful, brave, generous, incorruptible and loyal to the nation. This is probably from where Gandhi’s principles laid a foundation for themselves. He describes his mother as a religious and a meticulous lady with a good common sense and knowledge of her surroundings A lot of credit to Gandhi’s credibility goes to his parents who instilled in him certain morals like speaking the truth, non-violence, discipline. These are the principles for which he is known to us and he successfully used these principles to fight against the British.

The infamous Martizburg incident made him realised that, racial discrimination prevalent in society is actually rooting out human existence and that forced him to discover the weapon like “*satya”* and *“ahimsa” which emanate* basic human principles of love, compassion and tolerance. Fischer point out: on that bitter night at Martiburg, the germ of social protests was born in Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi himself did not like these principles to be attributed to him, as his political philosophy or thinking .In 1936, he observed, “*There is no such thing as Gandhism and I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried on my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. The opinions I have found and the conclusion i have tried at, are not final. I may change them tomorrow......I have nothing to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills. All i have done is to try experiments in both on a vast a scale as I could do.....Well all my philosophy....is contained in what I have said. You will not call it Gandhism, there is no ‘Ism’ about it.”*

Gita was the main source of inspiration for Gandhiji. He opines that Gita taught the use of violence for safeguarding truth and righteousness. Patanjali’s Yogsutra, the Ramayana, Mahabharata and some Jain and Buddhist writings also exercised great influence on his mind. Besides non-Hindu sources like ‘Sermon on the Mount’ had a deep influence on Gandhiji. He was of the view that....

*“If a man smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also,’ “Love your enemies’ ‘bless them that curse you.’ do good to them who hate you’ and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.”*

Mahatma Gandhi discovered a supreme example of non-violent resistance from the words of Christ, uttered at the time of crucification, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Gandhiji learnt from Islam the lesson of non-violence. The teachings of Lao-Tse and Confucius also affected Gandhiji’s moral and political philosophy. Lao- Tse’s philosophy of non-assertiveness and Confucius’s principle men should not do to others what they would not have done to them had an abiding effect on his mind. From Thoreau, he learnt the lessons of Civil Disobedience and non-payment of taxes. Ruskin Bond and Leo Tolstoy also influenced him greatly. All these factors are responsible for the emergence of the term ‘Gandhism’ or the more recent ‘Gandhigiri.’

1. **RELEVANCE OF GANDHISM IN TODAY’S WORLD**

3.1 **Gandhism and World Peace**

The International Day of Non-Violence is celebrated every year on 2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi developed a method of action based upon the principals of courage, non-violence and through Satyagraha. Using the principles of ‘Satyagraha’, he led the campaign for India’s independence from the British. In many ways, this is similar to the way Malaysia achieved its independence through the untiring efforts of the Late Tunku Abdul Rahman or the contribution of Nelson Mandela against ‘Apartheid’ which was a form of racial segregation, used in South Africa from 1948 to 1990, which taught white supremacy and prejudice towards non-whites. On the same note the contribution of Sheikh Mujibur Reham for Bangladeshi freedom through the weapon of non-violence and satyagraha should not be undermined. The year 2009 has been declared as 'The International Year for Reconciliation' by the United Nations. This has a great relevance in a time when we see the world divided into fragments.   The Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd gave a landmark speech in which he apologised to the aborginal natives for all the discrimination and dejection they have faced over the times. Though this cannot undo the past, it definitely united the two major communities of Australia i.e., the Anglo- Saxons and the Native aborginies much closer. This illustration proves the fact of the relevance of 'Gandhism' in the contemporary world.

The unfortunate incident that happened last year in summer when Israel bombed the Gaza Strip indiscriminately and disproportionately as a result of a slight provocation by the Hamas government of Gaza. The Israeli rockets orphaned thousands of innocent Palestinian children and making many physically handicapped for no fault of theirs. It can be said that on this that the Israelis did not win the war or teach the Palestinians a lesson, but sowed seeds for a war a generation later and has just postponed the war which could be easily sorted out through reconciliation. The Palestinian conflict can only be resolved when the US government accepts that there is injustice and stop protecting Israel.

No one religion dominates the world. At global level, all religious communities are below 30 per cent. We have to co-operate and work as one human body to create world peace. Skills are taught in schools but lack values.

All religions advocate peace but human beings still are at war. Therefore, the principles of Mahatma Gandhi which comprise of non-violence and truth should be adhered to. This is utmost important for the present and future generations of today. Examples include the tension in the Middle East where people of the same ethnic race are killing each other and also can be found amongst the Christians.The world should get its act together and heal the wounds of the deprived through peace, non-violence and reconciliation. It is only then that we can make the dream of a peaceful world come true where deprivation is an extinct word and every human is treated equally. Gandhism is the way forward for the process of reconciliation to gain momentum and build sustainable peace and harmony.

**3.2 Gandhism and Religion**

The English word ‘religion’ comes from a Latin word meaning to re-join or re-unite, but sadly religion has been used as an instrument of division — even of war. Gandhi teaches that all faiths spring from the same ultimate, timeless, eternal Religion. He writes:”The root of all religions is one and it is pure and all of them have sprung from the same source, hence all are equal.“[[17](http://bahai-library.com/gandhimohan_gandhi_bahais_nonviolence#iyer160)] ”.

Gandhi specifically rejected anthropomorphic ideas about God:

*“God is not a person... God is the force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal. And yet, strangely enough, all are not able to derive either benefit from or shelter in the all-pervading living presence. Electricity is a powerful force. Not all can benefit from it. It can only be produced by following certain laws. It is a lifeless force. Man can utilize it if he labours hard enough to acquire the knowledge of its laws. The living force which we call God can similarly be found if we know and follow His law leading to the discovery of Him in us.[*[*3*](http://bahai-library.com/gandhimohan_gandhi_bahais_nonviolence#amab63)*]*

Gandhiji uphold the Oneness of God and the essential oneness of religion. Specifically, he accepts the divine origin and purpose of all of the major world religions, including the Hindu, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim.

*“I believe in [the] absolute oneness of God and, therefore, also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul (nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous). Whether, therefore, I will or not, I must involve in my experiment the whole of my kind. Nor can I do without experiment. Life is but an endless series of experiments.”*

**3.2.1** *Jainism Ahimsa*

Jivadaya, respect for all living forms and non-violence are the fundamental principles of Jainism. The Jain strives to be non-violent in thought, action, and deed, taking care not to directly or indirectly harm any living beings.

In Shree Chitrabhanu's words,

"*the universe is not for man alone. It is a field of evolution for all of life's forms. Jainism teaches that life is life, not only in people of all lands, colours, and beliefs, but is of the same sacred quality in all creatures, right down to the tiny ant and humble worm. Consciousness exists in everything which grows, regardless of the size of its form. Though different forms are not the same in mental capacity and sensory apparatus, the life force is equally worthy in all."*

Mahatma Gandhi was himself of the same views, he was quoted as saying

*The basic principle on which the practice of non-violence rests is that what holds good in respect of oneself, equally applies to the whole universe. All mankind in essence are alike, what is therefore possible for one is possible for everybody”.7*

Vegetarianism, compassion and respect for all living creatures are at the heart of the Jain way of life. Gandhiji says,” Ahimsa means non violence. But to me it has much higher, infinitely higher meaning. It means that you may not offend anybody; you may not harbour uncharitable thought, even in connection with those who consider your enemies. To one who follows this doctrine, there are no enemies. A man who believes in the efficacy of this doctrine finds in the ultimate stage, when he is about to reach the goal, the whole world at his feet. If you express your love- Ahimsa-in such a manner that it impresses itself indelibly upon your so called enemy, he must return that love.”

**3.2.2** *Gandhian Non-Violence and Buddhist Philosophy*

Buddhism is commonly associated with non-violence and peace. Principles of nonviolence advocated by Gandhiji were a contemporary application of the Buddha’s teachings. Buddhism teaches us that no civilisation can remain indifferent if the forces of good are defeated and the forces of evil thrive elsewhere. If evil is left unchallenged, it will engulf and undermine all civilisations. The forces of good are the forces of peace and nonviolence. The

forces of evil are those of violence and war.

It may be said that according to Buddhist position the ideal is to “let the law of impermanence, not lawlessness of violence, determine the life-span of all that lives: individuals, species, cultures, the earth as a whole.”

Gandhi draws a distinction between the positive and negative meanings of ahimsa. For Gandhiji:

*“In its negative form, it means not injuring any living being whether by body or mind. I may not, therefore, hurt the person or any wrongdoer or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering.. This statement does not cover suffering caused to the wrongdoer by natural acts of mine which do not proceed from ill will.... In its positive form, Ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I must love my enemy or a stranger to me as I would to my wrong doing father or son. The active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.6*

In ancient India, the example of Ashoka the Great shines as an outstanding ruler who embodied and applied the spirit of nonviolence to the world of politics, contributing to the flourishing of the civilisation of his times through his enlightened policies.

**3.2.3** *Gandhism and Other Religion*

Gandhiji was born as a Hindu but his upbringing and his quest for knowledge converted him as a secular man .He says "I prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else".

In *Young India*he had already declared, "Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies".

He was also of the view that, “"If we are to respect other's religion as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. My respectful study of other's religion has not abated my reverence for, or my faith in, the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life".

Talking of Jesus he said, "Jesus expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God ... I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world'.

Gandhiji had a very high opinion of Islam. He wrote, "I believe Islam to be as true a religion as my own."Gandhiji learnt from Islam also the lesson of non-violence. The very word Islam means peace, safety and salvation. He had a deep regard for Prophet Mohammad. **Mahatma Gandhi says,**

“I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind… I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. When I closed the second volume (of the Prophet’s biography), I was sorry there was not more for me to read of that great life.”

He was against religious conversion. While attending the Wellington Convention of devout Christians who prayed for him and wanted him to change his religion, he said, "I was delighted at their faith. I saw that they were praying for me ... I could understand and appreciate the devoutness of those who attended it. But I saw no reason for changing my belief - my religion ... It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions". (18)

**3.3 Gandhism and Terrorism**

The phenomenon of terrorism primarily occurs due to a feeling of insecurity, deprivation and discrimination. Terror is an antithesis of all moral values and as such it has been universally condemned in every civil society. The United Nations has identified terrorism as a threat to good governance, the international order and the stability of nations. Under the aegis of the UN a number of treaties have entered into force, resolutions adopted and conferences organised and specialized offices established to counter terrorism in all its manifestations.

Globalisation has gripped today’s world. One of its side effects has been terrorism. People desperate to maintain the old order of life on the basis of religion and culture sometimes end up becoming social degenerates.

In the quest of achieving world peace, especially in the present world which is confronted with so much violence and terrorism the principles of non-violence practiced by Gandhiji should be seriously looked into. To achieve a peaceful world through a strategy of non-violence requires a massive effort by the world leaders of today. Lives should be preserved, not destroyed!

All the nations of this world should focus more on balanced development of their area so that no particular area or class in their country feel deprived or discriminated against. Similarly, the various international developmental institutions should focus more on developing under-developed areas rather than taking up projects in already developed areas.

**4. CONCLUSION**

Gandhiji is dead but Gandhism will live till the stars shine and oceans roll on. He amply demonstrated to the world that through non violence and truth, an unarmed subject nation can be freed from the clutches of the imperialist. In the age of materialism and cross egoism, Gandhism seems to be the only gleam of the hope for the dark and disordered world. It alone can safeguard possible extinction of the human civilization which stands on the edge of a volcano.

Gandhian wisdom can guide us in our quest for more effective ways of addressing the social, political, economic, educational and environmental challenges of our times. We will also see how Gandhian wisdom can help us better cope with the personal, interpersonal and spiritual predicaments in our lives. Gandhism will be vital for fostering a culture of non-violence and for promoting social and political change.

Dr. Radhakrishnan said, “Gandhiji is the immortal symbol of love and understanding in a world wild with hatred and torn by a misunderstanding. He belongs to the ages, to history.”

His philosophy of *“satyagraha*” which according to him meant *“the force which is born of truth or violence”* is required more in the contemporary world scenario where accumulation of nuclear weapon has become the means to attain supremacy. It’s here when Gandhi’s Weapon of “*satya”, “ahimsa”* and *“compassion*” come into play and helps in restoring the light to the darkening world.

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