



EXPERIENCING THE EXPERIENCE(S): PROJECTING MAHATMA GANDHI AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

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ABSTRACT



This study explores the leadership qualities of Mahatma Gandhi in relation to the characteristic dimensions of the transformational leadership. The paper begins with a brief overview of the literature on transformational leadership. This is followed by an examination of the identified four characteristics of transformational leadership and the extent to which Gandhiji exemplified these qualities. The excerpts are drawn primarily from historical references and personal opinions which reveal the transformational leadership skills of Gandhiji.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Transformational Leadership, Satyagraha, Non-violence*



INTRODUCTION

In introducing Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one can come across many accolades like Gandhiji as the Father of the Nation, the messiah of the harijan, the political saint and many facets like Gandhiji as a frail man, striding across the globe like a colossus or as the indomitable champion of social justice and human rights or as a 'half-naked' saint seeking complete identification with the poor and the deprived, silently meditating at the spinning wheel, striving to find the path of salvation for the suffering humanity. While Winston Churchill contemptuously described him as a "half-naked fakir" and an "old humbug," adding that it was "alarming and nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, striding half-naked up the steps to the Vice-Regal Palace, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor," Will Durant projected Gandhiji as "one of the strangest figures in history and gave to the world the unprecedented phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint, and waged without a gun...He did not mouth the name of Christ, but acted as if he accepted every word of the Sermon on the Mount. Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity and forgiveness of enemies (cited Sahu 2017, 1). Of all the luminous stalwarts of the 20th century, Gandhiji has perhaps best stood the test of time.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The dynamics of transformational leadership has received tremendous alteration since its traditional framework of leader's characteristics, traits and behaviours (Keegan and Den Hartog 2004), responsibility accountability and problem-solving abilities (Heifetz 2004), the investigation of leader's behavior and performance based on the concepts of neurosciences (Lee 2012). Commenting on the very characteristics of transformational leadership, Bass (1990) presents four basic aspects: *Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration, and Idealised Influence*. A transformational leader brings about change through a three-stage process: recognising the need for change; creating a new vision and institutionalising change (Tichy and Devanna 1990); and requires to

perform tasks like: (1) correctly intuit the direction and pace of events (2) devise appropriate and feasible strategies (3) win the support of diverse audiences at home and abroad (4) find the right mix of hard and soft power to implement the policies (Nye 2006). Through employing developmental processes, transformational leaders empower followers helping them become more autonomous and competent individuals who reach self-actualisation and higher levels of morality in the pursuit of valued outcomes (Popper and Mayseless 2002; Burns 1978). Likewise, Schriesheim et al. (2006) argue that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of subordinate motivation, effort, satisfaction and performance. The literature also shows that the transformational leadership is very close to charismatic leadership and authentic leadership (Banks et al., 2016; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Transformational leadership is based on the personality of the leader that transforms norms and values of the followers, and it provides a long-term vision to change or transform the system (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Burns (1978) sees the transformation of a system as the goal of transformational leadership, whereas Bass (1985) believes that the task of transformational leadership is raising the awareness about the issues of consequences and work harder to achieve the desired goals. To transform the system, not only the leaders must negotiate, directly or indirectly, with devotees (Howell and Shamir, 2005), but also negotiate with the opponents (Read and Shapiro, 2014), which means they must have qualities of a strategic hopeful leader. It is through these yardsticks Gandhiji's estimation as a transformational leader is proposed to be studied.

METHODOLOGY

The technique of historical analysis, social happenings and opinion citing will be used. Historical analysis provides considerable useful information to understand who initiated the change, under what circumstances, and who gained the benefits of the change (Kieser, 1994). A critical socio-historical analysis provides rich information about the repercussions of the actions (Yousaf, 2016). Opinion



citing can bolster the understanding of events, behaviors, and actions.

ASSESSING M.K.GANDHI THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATION

The transformational leader requires more than a vision in order to enact change; they must have the skills to translate abstract and intangible concepts of a broad vision and ideas into understandable and concrete goals for action with which followers can associate and identify (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Javidan and Waldman (2003) argue that a transformational leader's vision needs to project a set of values and beliefs that resonate with followers. Owen (1999) also emphasises the importance of what he describes as the "visioning process", regarding it as one of the most important functions of leadership. Moreover, he views leadership as the evocation and alignment of spirit and suggests that the purpose of vision is to pose the question that creates the space into which spirit flows and becomes powerful. Sosik (2000) argues that effective leadership requires making goals and objectives meaningful for followers, leading to the overall formulation and articulation of the vision, which must relate to the socio-cultural environment and the experiences of both leader and followers. He identifies self-concept, social and political activism, altruism, individual values, and religion and spirituality as sources of personal meaning and providing the building blocks in allowing leaders construct the vision.

Gandhiji has a mesmerizing hold on his followers – a north star for them. The conceptualization of leader-follower dynamics rhetoricizes "dialectizing" the master-signifier" (Bailly (2009) 64) where Gandhi was treated a living incarnate, the vox populi of the Worldvians. The intuitive response and whole-hearted acceptance affirmed all that he had achieved as a World leader. The continuances of Gandhi legacy is a clear signal that the society is fortifying a mode of belief, concretizing a cherished set of ideals and subjective/societal investments.

Bose's (1970) point is that the role which a man plays in history is partly determined by the needs of the times in which man is born. It is a

function of a man and the environment (Vroom and Maier, 1961). Individuals emerge on the horizon because they are present at the right moment and advocate the agenda for which the ground has already been prepared. Gandhiji envisioned Satyagraha as not only a tactic to be used in acute political thrash about, but as a universal solvent for injustice and harm. In his Sabarmati Ashram he taught the satyagrahis the fundamental rules of satyagraha: (a) Self-reliance at all times: Outside aid may be accepted, but should never be counted upon; (b) Initiative in the hands of the satyagrahis: Through the tactics of positive resistance, persuasion, and adjustment accelerate the rhythm of the movement; (c) Propagation of the objectives, strategy and tactics of the campaign: Propaganda must be made an integral part of the movement; (d) Reduction of demands to a minimum consistent with truth: Continuing reassessment of the situation and the objectives with a view to possible adjustment of demands is essential; (e) Progressive advancement of the movement: Direct action is to be launched only after all other efforts to achieve an honourable settlement have been exhausted;(f)Examination of weakness within the satyagraha group: The morale and discipline of the satyagrahis must be maintained through active awareness of any development of impatience, discouragement, or breakdown of non-violent attitude; (g)Persistent search for avenues of cooperation with the adversary on honourable terms: Every effort should be made to win over the opponent by helping him thereby demonstrating sincerity to achieve an agreement with, rather than a triumph over, the adversary; (h)Refusal to surrender essentials in negotiation: satyagraha excludes all compromise which affects basic principles of valid objectives; (i) Insistence upon full agreement on fundamentals before accepting a settlement (52).

Gandhi recommends several techniques of Satyagraha. Satyagraha can be practised by several methods such as fasts, cessation of work, protests, and public demonstrations and can be used by people, either singularly or jointly, to resist unjust laws. The techniques of Satyagraha may take the form of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, Hijrat, fasting and strike. Gandhiji believes that oppression and exploitation were possible only on account of the



cooperation of the people. If the people refused to cooperate with the government, the latter could not function properly. Emphasizing on the inseparableness of truth and non-violence in satyagraha, Gandhiji describes satyagraha as "It is a movement intended to replace methods of violence and it is a movement based entirely upon truth.... In his satyagraha movement, Gandhiji considers truth and ahimsa as the two sides of the same coin.... Without ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find truth. ...Nevertheless ahimsa is the means; truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later" (49). So in satyagraha movement truth is the ultimate goal and non-violence is the means to it. Gandhi in his pursuit of truth sets ahimsa as the supreme value, "the one cognizable standard by which true action can be determined" (68). The very mantras of Gandhiji had a profound impact on the psych-socio-physic livings of the Gandhians. As a leader he guided his followers and a visionary envisioned a paradise in the dreary desert of difficulties.

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

The transformational leadership, characteristic of intellectual stimulation, provides depth and solidity to change efforts within organisations and society. Bass and Avolio (1994) argue that intellectual stimulation encourages within followers greater searching for new approaches to old problems, a questioning taken for granted assumptions and the development of problem-solving skills. Research indicates that intellectual stimulation leads to increased independence and autonomy amongst followers, encouraging them to come up with their own approaches to solutions and problems (Graham 1987). Intellectual stimulation also involves transformational leaders forming a connection between the overall vision and their follower's own personal challenges (Javidan and Waldman 2003). By doing this, leaders create a substantial pool of intellectual and emotional energy and a high level of intrinsic motivation.

Gandhiji attempted to stimulate his followers not only to the overall vision, but also to educate them regarding the risks and challenges

ahead. His conscious experimentation with swadeshi - "the buy Indian movement" - in independence struggle was a calculative act of resistance and an effort to generate production, employment and income to economically challenged Indians of the then-time. He defined "swadeshi" as "the spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote" (37). The swadeshi movement achieved its most explicit manifestation in the *Khadi* (home spun cloth) struggle, where *Khadi* at once became a propaganda weapon in the liberation movement with a strong moral appeal to Indian intellectuals and hearty responses from the rustic masses.

INDIVIDUALISED CONSIDERATION

The development of close relationships between transformational leaders and followers is critical to bringing about successful change. By demonstrating trust through understanding the struggles, needs and capabilities of followers, transformational leaders show that they care and value their followers (Gillespie and Mann 2004). Zucker (1986) maintains that social similarity between leader and follower can form the basis for a relationship based upon trust, while Shamir et al. (1993) maintains that transformational leaders often point to similarities in background and experience in order to demonstrate belonging to the same collective and to portray themselves as a representative character or role model to that community. For their part, Howell and Avolio (1995) maintain that many transformational and charismatic leaders have a value system that distains the material trappings of success in favour of a higher moral plain that prevents them from straying down the wrong path.

Gandhiji made it clear early in 1933 that untouchables' access to temples was the key for untouchability in India: if untouchability became obsolete, Gandhi was convinced that other problems within the Indian society, including economical, political and social problems, would solve themselves. The Sanatanists (orthodox Hindus) charged Gandhiji of a renegade, a defiling agent of Hindu purity, as he endeavoured to give the untouchables the right of temple-entry. Gandhiji craftily handled the situation by declaring a



purification ceremony in 1933-34. He believed that untouchability is not birth-based rather work-based. Purity could be achieved by not consuming beef or carrion, to take daily absolutions and to wear clean clothes. He tries to convince the Sanatanists about untouchables' right to temple-entry through conformity and adaptation to Hindu traditions: "If you are polluted by my presence or by my touch, I am quite prepared to consent to a separate period being reserved for you to offer worship by yourselves and give you the same credit for sincerity that I claim for myself. You are as much entitled to worship in the temple as I think I am. Therefore you offer worship in your time, and I shall offer worship, along with reformers, during the period reserved for us, and since by tradition you have been taught to think that the efficacy of the idol is diminished by my entering the portals of the temple gate, though I do not believe in it myself, let the priest perform the purification ceremony" (66). Gandhiji compromising attitudes and situational analysis with the characteristic win-the-heart mannerism brought out a change in the superstitious-ridden Indian society.

Gandhiji's easy accessibility and intimate attachment with the masses made him a crowd puller. Understanding people and generating trust have become critical factors to achieving successful change. Bartlett and Groshal (1995) argue that trust is essential for change as change itself necessitates risk-taking and will not be successful without risk-taking by individuals. Essentially, the basis of trust lies in consistency between a person's words and actions. Kouzes and Posner (1992: 483) argue that individuals are willing to take huge risks for their leaders if the individual practices what he or she preaches.

IDEALISED INFLUENCE

The identification by followers is the pivot characteristic of the transformational leader. The leader that serves as a role model to his followers generally imbues the followers with higher abilities to achieve the leader's vision than leaders who do not provide modelling behaviour for their people (Bass 1985). They are concerned with being respected, trusted and admired as well as showing their persistence and determination to their target audience (Bass 1997). Transformational leaders

uphold the highest moral and ethical values and bring about change in follower's values through the merit and relevance of their ideas and commitment (Howell and Avolio 1993). Indeed, House (cited in Bass 1985) maintains that leaders engage in impression management to bolster their image of competence, thereby increasing subordinate compliance of their group to strongly held values, ideals and aspirations. In support, Willner (1984: 9) maintains that it is not what the leader is, but what people see the leader as, that counts in generating the leader-follower relationship. As role models, transformational leaders show superior levels of commitment and dedication towards bringing about change. By displaying personal commitment and encouraging follower commitment, transformational leaders encourage a greater sense of ownership, empowerment and engagement by followers (Van Eron 1995).

Gandhiji's experimentation of "touch the hearts" therapy has a Kantian moral stance on the followers (Arifon 3). His "interactionism" management (Watzalwick 2006) and strong stance of Emotional Intelligence (EI) with its characteristic features: self-awareness, social awareness, self management and relation management (Goleman 1995) drew the attention of the mass. His mastery over oratory and the art of persuasion mobilized thousands of common rustics in the course of his mass collective actions – during Dandi March, Quit India movement and the like. Gandhiji had a strong stance of impression management. For instance, during the time of the protest against the Salt Act (1882) in Dandi, he knelt down and symbolically picked up a piece of natural, unprocessed salt from the shore and thereby violating the British law. His march received widespread support across India, inspiring the mass to follow his example of non-violent civil disobedience. Thousands of protesters got arrested including Gandhiji, but later Gandhiji was released to negotiate an end to the protests.

SHARP TONGUE AGAINST GANDHIJ: QUESTION-MARK ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER STANCE

Some events, decisions, comments and circumstantial evidences put question mark on Gandhiji's stance as a great transformational leader.



Lord Cecil said, "Gandhi is the greatest enemy of peace the world has ever had." What would he mean, using these words of the most spectacular pacifist of modern times? He would mean that passive resistance--which is Gandhi's form of pacifism--could only lead to chaos and the eventual triumph of brute force; that to lie down and let people trample on you (which was Gandhi's recipe for dealing with the Japanese) is a temptation to the aggressor rather than an example to the aggressed; and that in order to have peace you must organize, you must be strong, and that you must be prepared to use force. Mutatis mutandis, that is precisely what Ambedkar meant about the untouchables. He wanted them to be recognized and he wanted them to be strong. He rightly considered that the best way of gaining his object was by granting them separate electorates; a solid block of 60 million would be in a position to dictate terms to its oppressors. Gandhi fiercely opposed this scheme. "Give the untouchables separate electorates," he cried, "and you only perpetuate their status for all time." It was a queer argument, and those who were not bemused by the Mahatma's charm considered it a phoney one. They suspected that Gandhi was a little afraid that 60 million untouchables might join up with the 100 million Muslims--(as they nearly did)--and challenge the dictatorship of the 180 million orthodox Hindus. With such irreverent criticisms made to him, Gandhi resorted to his usual tactics: he began to fast unto death. (As if that altered the situation by a comma or proved anything but his own obstinacy!) There was a frenzy of excitement, ending in a compromise on the seventh day of the fast. The untouchables still vote in the same constituencies as the caste Hindus, but a substantial number of seats are now reserved for them in the provincial legislatures. It is better than nothing, but it is not nearly so good as it would have been if Gandhi had not interfered. Dr. B R Ambedkar opined "Gandhi is the greatest enemy the untouchables have ever had in India." <https://www.scribd.com/doc/35853949/Dr-B-R-Ambedkar-on-Gandhi-and-Gandhism>

The distant followers (who are not in an immediate and close contact with the leader) can have inspiration for a specific idea, but they do not necessarily imitate the lifestyle or admire the

ideology, especially if it needs cognitive or/and behavioural change (see Howell and Shamir, 2005). For example, the followers of Gandhi in India neither adopted his half-naked attire, nor completely accepted his ideology, though Burns (1978) and O'Connor et al. (1996) considered him a transformational and a socialized transformational leader, respectively. In admiring Gandhi, researchers such as Godrej (2006) appreciated Gandhi's espoused theory than measuring its influence on distant and the closed followers. Even if we assume that Gandhi sincerely believed in and worked for the unity of Hindu-Muslim, he could not influence cognition, attitude, and behaviour of his acolytes to reduce the differences between the two communities. While walking half naked in the streets to stop violence between Hindus and Muslims, Gandhi's idealized influence hardly reduced the tension between the communities, except generating a temporary truce between the communities (Whitehouse, 2001). There were many, including co-workers, prominent politicians and religious groups, who voiced their scepticism when Gandhi in 1932 announced that he would forfeit a civil disobedience-campaign and concentrate on opening Guruvayur temple in Kerala to untouchables. Shifting from campaign for the Indian against the colonial power to a campaign with a religious motive focusing on the internal issues created polarisations in Indian society (65).

Jawaharlal Nehru had also a strong hold on the party even without accepting the tenets of Gandhism (Bose, 1970). Due to his strong position with the left group of the All India Congress and relationship with Mountbatten's wife, Gandhi had to support him to be the first Prime Minister of India. According to Singh (2015), Nehru gave a clear signal to Gandhi that he would not play second fiddle. Gandhi recognized that Nehru had a potential to cause problems in the way of independence by splitting the congress if he was not supported. Gandhi violated the canons of democracy, which he espoused so much, by favoring Nehru over Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who was supported by 12 out of 15 members of the All India Congress Committee and no support for Nehru (Singh, 2015).

**CONCLUSION**

Looking back from the vantage point of the first decade of the 21st century, it seems nothing short of a miracle as to how, in the first decade of the 20th century, Gandhiji launched his crusades against racialism, colonialism, runaway industrialism, religious fundamentalism and violence. His satyagraha was not only a political doctrine directed against the state; it had also socio-economic trusts relevant to and drawn on human natures. It is highly original and creative conceptualisation of social change and political action. It is beyond dispute that Satyagraha is a practising mode of demonstrating mass or individual protest in the current socio-political spheres.

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