



RESEARCH PAPER



## RELEVANCE OF GANDHI IN TODAY'S SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT



The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is identified as the age of growth and development. In midst of all the developments, it is the acceptable hour to stand still and think 'Is India really developing?' and 'Is humaneness present in human life?' An inquest into these two questions, reminds a lot about our charismatic leader Mahatma Gandhi, his philosophy and his teachings. This article envisages the facts behind the relevance of Gandhiji and his philosophy in today's socio-political environment.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Growth and Development, Politics, Society, Humanity.

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The 21<sup>st</sup> Century India is earmarked for predicaments such as swift growth in population, corruption, economic inequality, unemployment, racial discrimination, social injustice, untouchability, etc. India's concentration towards development on one side and the predicaments that are prevailing in today's India are juxtaposed to identify what is lacking and what are the pre-requisites for India to become a developed and a happy nation of the people to live. The author is of the opinion that revisiting the socio-political philosophy of the great leader Gandhi and proving its relevance today will enable one to justify, whether we are travelling in the right direction towards growth and development?

Gandhi, a great Mahan is regarded to be a simple, ordinary man imbued with grand qualities

like non-violence, truth, love, tolerance, freedom and peace loving. He was a man for the people, of the people and universally supported by the people at all times. The Nature, deprived poor, trodden society, caste and colour discrimination, inequality, political and social evil and economic conditions of the people were some of his major concerns. Gandhi's weapons were his selfless willpower, confidence, non-violence, respect for the under privileged and the hard labour for the sake of humanity. He was fragile man, who stood for a great cause in a peaceful way. Gandhi's vision and mission includes renovation of India through decentralization of socio-political, economical and moral order.

In general, Gandhian philosophy is the outcome of Gandhi's own ideas, developed and



implemented by Gandhi himself in South Africa (1893 to 1914) and later in India. Gandhian philosophy is set in Indian context which is universal at all times. Gandhian philosophy is grounded on several planes such as social, political, moral, spiritual and economical aspects for both individuals and groups. The twin eyes of Gandhi's thought non-violence and truth which are translations from the Sanskrit word 'ahimsa' and 'satya' respectively.

Truth according to Gandhi can be segmentalized into two orders namely relative truth and absolute truth. Stephen Murphy writes in his brief outline of Gandhi's Philosophy that

"For Gandhi, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth - the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality - the moral laws and code - its basis."<sup>1</sup>

"I claim to be a votary of truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayerful search gave me the revealing maxim Truth is God, instead of the usual one God is Truth. That maxim enables me to see God face to face as it were. I feel Him pervade every fibre of my being."<sup>2</sup>

The above quote clearly explains Gandhi's intentions to follow as one follows God. His comparison of truth with God throws a pellucid description of his inward respect for God. He believed Truth is God more than God is Truth. The word truth is made sacred by identifying it one with the existence of God.

Ahimsa is a Sanskrit word which means non-violence in English translation. The opposite of Ahimsa is 'Himsa' meaning violence. Ahimsa is the offshoot of the basic consciousness of love. Non-violence or love is the basic element of human law and evolution of human nature. The word Ahimsa throws light on the idea that, life is divine and all the divine life gifted by the Almighty, is one. In this connection, when a man uses Himsa (i.e violence) to disturb the harmony of others, it is equal to injustice meted to his own self. Destructing others mean destructing oneself. This is a divine reality through

which Mahatma Gandhi wanted to uplift the human consciousness into, so as to establish a hatred-free or violence-free India and thereby hassle-free, love filled life may be led by humanity. Ahimsa was a means through which humanity was given ultimate honour in the law of nature.

Today's scenario if life in India is totally different and opposite to the philosophies of Gandhi, Both truth and non-violence which were considered by Gandhi to be the major factor that could save humanity from destruction, is at stake. Violence, death, rape, murder, assassinations, deception, cheat etc., have become all pervasive. Truth and non-violence have taken the last seats in the stage of human life. The daily reporter reveals the chaos and catastrophes that every sacred life undergoes or experiences due to unbounded or uncontrolled boom in untruth and violence. It seems like violence and untruth are daily bread of life. The violence is executed by one man to the other. This is because of the lack of awareness that violence or harm done to other is like doing to oneself. The problem behind many violence and exhibition of untruth is the lack of consciousness amongst humanity that LIFE IS ONE. The mindset of humanity is not well knit in the hearts of human beings. Only the consciousness of humanity can give one, the sense of belonging and the sense of owning other. Stephen Murphy writes,

"The social goal was described by Gandhi as Sarvodaya, a term he coined in paraphrasing John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*, meaning the welfare of all without exception. Its political aspect was expressed by the late eminent Gandhian Dr R.R. Diwakar in the following words: "The good of each individual in society consists in his efforts to achieve the good of all."<sup>1</sup>

Society is a place where all individual lives mingle together. It is expected that there should be peace and harmony in midst of various mindsets, a variety of differences and difference of opinions. When all in the group or collective life thinks about the good of others, then the individual is doing good to himself and to the society at large.



Gandhian philosophy of life regarding truth and non-violence sounds to be a replica of what Jesus taught his disciples and followers during His tenure in the world. Quoting verses from the Gospel according to Mark chapter 12 and verses from 30-31,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a clear semblance between the above quoted verse and Gandhi's perception of truth and non-violence. A man, who loves God, loves truth as truth is God and a man, who loves the other, will love peace as the neighbour is owned.

Society according to Gandhi is a group. It is very clear that the man is a social being and one cannot be independent or in other words cannot disconnect oneself from the law of togetherness. God has gifted humanity with Atman which is supposed to be very divine. The Atman in man enables a man to identify and understand one's own self thereby renders man a chance to understand the other selves too. Society is nothing but a consciousness of other selves, which is the replica of one's own self. Will a man harm himself? In general, the divinity of man's self prevents him from harming himself. Likewise the strong conviction about the collective self will never allow any, to harm others.

Politics and society are interlinked and inseparable. It is the society that determines the political set up of a country. Politics and society follow the discipline of man, as it influences, aims and conduct of one's self in the society. Gandhi's idea behind society and politics was that the collective self should be ruled by the individual self with a degree of welfare for the fellowmen. Man is a superior being than brutes. The aspect in which man differs from brutes is, man has control, but brutes don't. The way in which a man can control himself is the way in which he can abstain himself from doing harm to other fellowmen. Applying Gandhian philosophy of politics to the current scenario, one can clearly decipher the vast deviation from the source. This is exactly because of the percentage of awareness

regarding such great philosophies amongst the masses is null. Survival of women in postmodern society has proved to be very hectic and dangerous. India, once a peace loving country is now literally torn into pieces by the selfish rulers and brutal mindsets. Women safety is completely and thoroughly at stake. Gandhi always emphasized equality of women with men. He was the staunch supporter of women. Also he strived hard to remove the disparities that existed between women and men. Gandhi's political emphasis of freedom and release of girls from the dominance of men was his clear idea of equality. In a male dominated society women were the victims of widowhood, dedication of ladies to the temples, purdah, child marriage, whoredom, economic burden etc., He strived hard to bring equality with men and he felt that the equality can be achieved only through making women participate in all events of life. He wanted women to shoulder the responsibilities of the state thereby the degree of victimization will get lowered. Equal rights, equal participation in all aspects of private and public life will render power to the subdued mind. This will enable them to stand erect in society to face challenges meted out to humanity. In reality, as all the good philosophies are forgotten, disharmony has crept in into socio-political set up of this country. The Gandhian philosophies though followed by some atom of people, but in general at large extent it has completely lost its relevance in 21<sup>st</sup> Century India. The research on this title can be furthered into various perspectives such as economical, religious, philosophical etc.

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Dr G Immanuel completed his doctoral study at Madras University through Loyola College, Chennai in the year 2018 under the able direction of Dr. TMJ Indramohan (Former professor of Pachaiyappa's college) and guidance of Dr. Louis Joseph Chandra (Loyola College). He has published nearly 25 international papers and has participated and presented papers in various national and international conferences and seminars. He holds 15 years of teaching experience. He is an invited speaker in many schools and colleges all over Tamil Nadu. At present he is designated as Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English at Aalim Muhammed Salegh College of Engineering, Avadi, Chennai. His area of specialization is American Literature and he often publishes papers in both literature and language.

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