



Gandhi: The Prophet of non-violent Change.

Srikant Pandey
Assoc. Professor
Delhi college of Arts and Commerce
University of Delhi .

Abstract

Gandhi, the naked fakir, occupies the center stage of the twentieth century influencer whose innovative ideas for non- violent structural change in the realm of socio-economic and political transformations have positively touched upon the people globally. The present paper intends to inquire and explain the basic tenets of his prescription for a free a fair civil society.

Key Words:

Truth, non-violence, satyagraha, passive resistance, swaraj, decentralisation,etc.

Gandhi , the believer in saintly politics, advocated to inject spirituality/ purity in politics. Not being a system builder he did not come out with a astounding theory. However,he believed that politics should not be devoid of religion as delinking/ separating these would lead to negative/ disastrous consequences for the civil society . He neither believed in any ism nor did he attempt to formulate any such ideational tool. He himself made it clear during his interactive address to Congress workers in 1936 as he declared that there is nothing called Gandhism nor does he intend to leave behind any sect of followers. In fact he appealed to his followers that they should not call/ term his understanding of socio-economic and political issues as Gandhism as his ideas are neither new nor innovative. The reason being that he believed in applying the eternal truth in his own way. He also took care of the fact that his opinions/ understanding of the problems/ challenges and interpretation of truth should not be believed to be final as these are contextually amenable to change.

Gandhi,no doubt,was a religious person but his understanding was inclusive/ broad based rather regimental and myopic as he appreciated anything and everything that was ethical and good in any religion of the world. His critical concern for socio- political probity was to be ensured by adaptation/ adherence of those commands of religion which emphasises moral governance. Naturally one may trace humanism as the guiding force of his outlook and behaviour. His firm belief in the normative value of moral governance led to his dictum that religion and politics must not be separated from each other as politics devoid of morality/ ethics may prove injurious/ fatal for any society. Being fully aware that he cannot keep himself away/ insulated from the contextual political issues he tried to find out the best



possible remedy or ideal guiding force of politics. As he believed in the ethical route of salvation it was natural corollary to find solace in the religion which was supposedly the ultimate source of ethics/ morality/ dharma. According to him religion through out the world may appear distinctly different but in essence these are based on the same moral/ethical laws. Hence, he affirmed that his ethical religion is nothing but made up of laws which bind men all over the world. His concern for ethical politics, in fact, can be seen as application of his belief that means is more important than the end. In other words purity of means has always been primary concern for Gandhi.

Having set his ideal moral grounds of politics he believed that the next step to be followed in politics is to employ ' Ahimsa'/ non-violence rather than brute force to protect the ' truth,' which is the endmost reality as well as highest ideal. He chose Ahimsa' because in his scheme of saving humanity love has critical role to play as being the cullt of love none other than Ahimsa can can achieve this. Since Ahimsa and truth are intertwined they can act as positive catalyst in complimenting and supplementing each other. However, he cautioned that Ahimsa being a moral weapon can never be used by a coward rather by a strong person who can patiently restrain oneself despite strong provocation for use of naked force.

Another critical component of his prescription for ethical politics is 'satyagraha'/ holding on to truth . According to him satyagraha is spritual force or force of love which can act as a potent weapon against the brute force of power. However, he does not forget to make it clear that satyagraha should not be understood as passive resistance as both have different qualitative properties. While passive resistance being a political tool of the weak/ coward does not rule out the use of violence; satyagraha being tool of the morally and spiritually strong does not have any place for violence either in words or in deed. Infact, being a positive and dynamic element of his prescription satyagraha was intended to act as a reforming tool for letting the wrong doer realise and move in the right direction. However, the satyagrahi would never try to coerce the opponent/ wrong doer rather arguments and self sacrifice should be pursued to win over the mind and soul of the wrong doer. And, this is possible only by those who are satyagrahis as they are real karmyogis who are willing to accept defeat for the truth. Such satyagrahis are so fearless that they do not mind accepting/ welcoming death cheerfully as a gateway to heaven as well as imprisonment as a step towards freedom.

Gandhi's core concern for his firm belief in nonviolent systemic change by means of satyagraha evolved in the backdrop of exploitative imperialist policies in general and India in particular. He minced no words while exhorting the satyagrahis that it's better to resist the gun power/brute force and lay down one's life rather than living as a slave. In order to uproot the alien exploitative imperialist power the people must not only pursue non- cooperation but disobey/ flout the laws of the government; if required. Emphasising the potent power of non-



violence he said that it can remove any oppressive power; even ruthless power like Nazi Hitler can be removed.

Gandhi being a practitioner rather than an out and out utopian philosopher decided to apply these political tools during the struggle for freedom as he had successfully experimented these in racist South Africa. He recommended this weapon to the Indians as a more effective alternative to the cult of bombs/ violence which the revolutionary terrorists were practising. He not only advised but conclusively proved it in Champaran , Ahmedabad and Kheda. He not only stood firmly with his conviction/ belief but proved as well that howsoever the British imperialist might be they were bound to respond to the wishes of non-violent satyagrahis of India .

Having outlined his basic postulates , based on the dictum that 'means justifies the end', as explained above, he moves on to prescribe that the ultimate goal of any political/ civil society ought to be the accomplishment of 'Swaraj'. His ideational conceptualisation of swaraj implies a political system which is based on the true representation of the people of all sections without any bias/ discrimination. Such a systematic organisation would be based on democratic norms and free from the evils of corruption and nepotism. In fact such a system of swaraj would be based on absence of state power as the authoritative power would be decentralised among the people at large through panchayat which would function on the principle of oceanic circles. In order to establish supremacy of the people he prescribed the reverse flow of power and said that instead of delegation the governance should be based on upward approval of the desired consent for appropriate action in the interest of the society through the representatives of the people. In such a scheme of governance the central authority would have minimal power as the panchayats/ local bodies would have the maximum power.

Gandhi being a pragmatic idealist always believed in a classless and stateless society. His ideal state, therefore, appears similar to the ideational conceptualisation of the Marxists and Anarchists. However, unlike these two his ideal state was not to be established by violent revolution rather through non- violent means. His scheme of transforming the political economy was not based on violently eliminating the capitalist and the feudal class rather through application of 'trusteeship' and 'bread labour'. In other words he intended to convert the owners of the capital and the land into a trustee which would automatically eliminate the class character of the state as there would be neither a class of exploiters nor that of the sufferers. He clearly affirmed that " ...i believe that some key industries are necessary...i would have state ownership (of key industries,) where a large number of people would have to work together. But as i can conceive such a state can only be based on non-violence; i would not dispossess moneyed men by force but would invite their cooperation in process of



conversion to state ownership. There are no parihās of society, whether they are millionaires or paupers." However, being aware of the difficulty in transforming the self seeking individuals into self sacrificing individuals he did not describe in detail his concern for an ideal society. He preferred to elaborate upon the task of transforming the state into an approximation of his ideal state as he assumed it to be less difficult.

Being a pragmatic practitioner rather than an utopian philosopher he envisioned to do away with the prevailing state of miserable condition of teeming millions by means of invoking innovative political economy that was supposed to free them from political as well as economic subjugation. This realism inspired him to come out with the idea of 'Sarvodaya' which proposed to replace the politics of power by the politics of cooperation.

Gandhi, no doubt, invested most of his time and energy in successfully experimenting his innovative ideas during the struggle for freedom of India but the concerns raised by him were applicable globally. His teachings found prominent global acceptance which is reflected in socio-economic and political charter of the global body, namely the United Nations. His critical concern and remedial advisories are being positively appreciated and accepted. Important among these are racial inequality, political subjugation, role of tolerance and Ahimsa. His ideational emphasis on Khadi and spinning wheel, spiritual dynamics of politics, non-violent change, communal harmony, decentralisation and devolution of power and rural development/ upliftment etc. have found appreciative endorsement by most of the political systems. He may occupy centre stage in the realm of Indian politics but it must not be forgotten that his ideal has not only acted as a guiding principle of socio-economic and political change in India but throughout the world.

Select Bibliography

Andrews, Charly, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas, New York, Macmillan, 1930.

Bakshi, Rajani, Babu Kuti: Journeys in Rediscovery of Gandhi, New Delhi, Penguin, 1998.

Bandopadhyaya, Jayantanuja, Social and Political Thoughts of Gandhi, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1969.

Bhattacharya, Budhadevs, Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi, Calcutta, Calcutta Book House, 1969.

Bose, Nirmal Kumar, My days with Gandhi, Delhi, Orient Longman, 1974, 1999.



Brown, Judith, Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope, New Heaven, Yale University press, 1989.

Choudhari, Manmohan, Explaining Gandhi, New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1989.

Deshpande, P.G., Gandhinama, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Publishing House, 1948.

Gandhi. : The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Public Affairs Press, Washington, D. C, 1948

Hardiman, David, Gandhi: In his Times and Ours, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2004.

Nanda, B.R., In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflection, New Delhi, Oxford University press, 2004.

Veer, Raju, Gummadi, Gandhian Philosophy: Its Relevance Today, New Delhi, Decent Book Store, 1999.