

GANDHI – INDIA’S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO MANKIND

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ABSTRACT: Gandhi led his life by example only by experiencing the truth and the spirit of self-belief. Basics of Gandhi’s political ethos and philosophy took off in South Africa where the perception had shaped the mind and resolutions of Gandhi. The resonance of South African political safari directed the socio-economic-political destiny of India so decisively that swept the entire colonial world. Gandhi faced a series of racial discrimination in South Africa because of his colour of skin and heritage. Gandhi Ji amidst mass meeting held in Johannesburg, adopted the concept of “Satyagraha”, an exercise to search the truth in a manner distinctively non-violence. Gandhi Ji landed on Indian soil in 1915. Gandhi Ji established Sabarmati Ashram which became the center point of the pursuit of truth in character and Satyagraha. Gandhiji’s first experiment with Satyagraha occurred in 1917 when he led a movement in Champaran district of Bihar. Gandhiji with Ballavbhai Patel led another successful mass movement at Kheda in Gujarat with victory for the distressed farmers. Different forms of Satyagraha had already made Gandhiji a mass leader with close connections to the masses and he was being referred to as Bapu. Gandhiji’s call for a countrywide Bandh against the oppressive Rowlatt Act was a great success. Indian populace was prohibited from producing or selling salt independently, and instead, Indians were required to buy expensive, heavily taxed salt. Gandhiji in March–April 1930 took up a march on foot spanning over 385 km. from Sabarmati Ashram to the Arabian Sea coast city of Dandi garnered widespread support among the Indian populace and considerable worldwide attention as well. The Quit" India movement was launched in 1942 under the leadership of the Mahatma Gandhi which swept across every nook and corner of the country. This was probably the biggest ever mass movement of the people that took place in history.

Keywords: Gandhi, Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience movement, Swaraj, Sarvodaya

INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is a name being referred to all over the world as Gandhi only. Another name by which this man being referred to is Mahatma. If Gandhi is his



truncated name which attaches an unassailable personality to the man to be a politician among the Saints, Mahatma bestows the smearing character which transformed Gandhi to a Saint among the politicians. It is when the two names of Mahatma and Gandhi merged into one, it makes an icon named Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest ambassador of truth and nonviolence. Ever since the days of setting forth for South Africa in April, 1893 till the eventful day of January, 1948 when he was shot at by the Right religious fundamentalist, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's journey of life from being a legal professional to the greatest iconic human being, the mankind witnessed an epic voyage of a soul who led his life by example only by experiencing the truth and the spirit of self belief. The journey of life of Gandhi saw the placenta of a legacy conceived in the womb of the great Indian civilization transcending to a fetus by actual practice showcasing the very Indian culture and traditions of love, peace, and wisdom and delivering a legacy incubated with truth and non-violence.

It is all the more significant that the journey of an iconic Indian started in the soil of South Africa instead of India. Perhaps, the basics of Gandhi's political ethos and philosophy took off in South Africa where the initial success of a different character, practice and perception had shaped the mind and resolutions of Gandhi and the events to come, but who knew that the resonance of South African political safari would direct the socio-economic-political destiny of India so decisively for the first time in its political history and which message and impact were so strong that swept the entire colonial world.

The legacy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is multi-dimensional, be it socio-political or social economic or socio-cultural. It is a herculean task to reduce Gandhi's legacy in some hundred or thousand words. The most vibrant legacy that Gandhi endowed by spearheading peoples' movements one after another for 55 long years by leading from the front. The gravitas and importance of Gandhi's legacy may be felt by his sheer magnitude and a wide spectrum of activities.

It is the toughest job for any individual at this era to understand and get to know a man who authored more than 100 books being preserved in Sabarmati Ashram. The legacy of Gandhi also emanates out of the enormity of depth of his teachings and actions which may be visualised to some extent from the facts in terms of statistics rendered by Rambhau Mahaskar of Seva Gram Ashram that out of approximately 12075 days which Gandhiji spent in India



after he came back from South Africa where he spent in jail for 2 months and 26 days, he spent 2151 days in Kochrav and Sabarmati Ashram and 2588 days at Sevagram Ashram. He was jailed and kept under house arrest for 2119 days. Besides all these, another aspect which differentiates Gandhi from the rest has been the fact that he sat for fasting for 32 times spanning over altogether 159 days (Sen, Kolkata).

These statistics are vital to understand the very essence of Gandhi's legacy as the churning of all these activities ultimately enshrined a legacy which not only created India's Gandhi but simultaneously Gandhi's India as well. The legacy of Gandhi was born out of the essence and wisdom of multi-dimensional character of India's civilizations deeply entrenched that the British historian and philosopher Arnold J. Toynbee opined that an icon like Gandhi can only take birth in India. The legacy is so strong and dominant that India is known as the land of Gandhi to most people under the sun.

Legacy of Gandhi in South Africa

Perhaps, it was the wish of the destiny that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi landed in South Africa only where apartheid was the institutional system to enforce the rule of the whites by pushing the blacks and the brown-skinned humanity to the corner to deprive them of any access to humanity. Immediately on landing at South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi faced a series of racial discrimination because of his colour of skin and the heritage. Those discriminations were humiliating on every occasion which at times use to lead to physical assaults. Out of the above, one particular incidence changed the entire narratives which had gone down to the annals of the history of civil rights movements when he was thrown out of a railway compartment at Pietermaritzburg for traveling in First Class.

The incidence also took Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to ponder while sitting in the railway station after being thrown out as to whether to return back to India or to rise and protest. Gandhi decided what history called for to script fight back of humanity over oppression, wisdom over intolerance, truth over evil and justice over inequality and equality over discrimination. Each segment of Gandhi's activity manifests the legacy of a distinct character. Gandhiji was destined to stay back in South Africa as Natal Government meanwhile, had passed a law 1894 debarring the Indian from voting, which exclusively remained as the right only for the Europeans. Though the bill was passed despite Gandhi's



movements, his campaign was successful in drawing attention to the grievances of Indians in South Africa. His endeavor led to the initiative for bringing the Indian diaspora in South Africa under one unified umbrella group to form Natal Indian Congress in 1897.

Gandhi volunteered service during the Boer War in 1900 but not in a conventional way as generally happen to highlight the flavor of the legacy of India's own culture and civilization by forming a group of stretcher-bearers under the name Natal Indian Ambulance Corps. The striking feature of this Corps was that they extended helping hand to both the parties under conflict, the Britishers as well as the Zulus. All these activities gave prominence to Gandhi in public eye modulating him to a different dimension of activities while pursuing matters of interest and importance of public at large in an evolving manner as opposed to hatred, force and violence. By the time Transvaal government promulgated a new Act in 1906 compelling registration of the colony's Indian and Chinese populations as mandatory, Gandhiji meanwhile, was shaping the future and legacy of peoples' mass movements as his protests and movements were assuming bigger and greater in terms of participation of people. At this juncture, Gandhi Ji amidst mass meeting held in Johannesburg, adopted the concept of "Satyagraha", an exercise to search the truth in a manner distinctively nonviolence. At this juncture only, Gandhi Ji impressed upon the Indians in South Africa to defy the new law and to suffer the punishments for doing so. Gandhi Ji himself indulged a gradual transformation of the methodology of political movements to political struggle by initially going through a moderate phase of dialogue and engagement during his stay in South Africa while later on graduated to on-field passive resistance or civil disobedience. In South Africa, Gandhi Ji also engaged in a struggle against acute racial discrimination in which field, he followed the moderate exercise of prayers and petitions to rouse the conscience and wisdom of the oppressors. The new legacy of Gandhi's ideas of protests, persuasion skills and public relations had emerged which he carried as his own distinct legacy when he came back to India in 1915.

Gandhi in India; legacy of Satyagraha, Non-Violence and Civil Disobedience

Gandhi Ji landed on Indian soil in 1915. He felt the necessity of knowing India and its people as he was out of this land for more than two decades. Gandhi Jib's urge to get himself acquainted with India and its people at the outset prompted him to meet World Poet



Rabindranath Tagore and that too at Shantiniketan only. Perhaps, there could not have been a better meeting other than with Tagore and a better place than Shantiniketan where Gandhi Ji got fillip to his quest of what road map laid before him after arriving India. Ever since Gandhi Ji arrived in India, his multifaceted personality started blossoming much beyond his association with the Indian National Congress.

disobedience i.e. In 1916, Gandhi Ji established Sabarmati Ashram which became the center point of the pursuit of truth in character and civil, Satyagraha in practice for himself and his friends and followers to set out an experiment with a new method of struggle that engulfed the Indian freedom struggle scenario. Gandhiji's first experiment with Satyagraha occurred in 1917 when he led a movement in Champaran district of Bihar which in no time turned to a mass movement with the participation of more and more indigo farmers protesting against the oppression of landlords. When Gandhiji was arrested, thousands of protestors assembled in front of the Jail to achieve his release. The movement resulted in more compensation for the farmers and withholding of hike and collection of revenue due to famine. Gandhiji's endeavor to experiment Satyagraha got a boost from two subsequent events in 1918. In the first event at Ahmadabad, Gandhiji resorted to another form of Satyagraha, the hunger strike to a dispute between the workers and the owner of a mill and was successful in wage increase of 35% for the workers (Global Nonviolent Action Database – Ahmedabad textile laborers win strike for economic justice 1918). In the same year, Gandhiji with Ballavbhai Patel led another successful mass movement at Kheda in Gujarat with victory for the distressed farmers in withholding the increase and collection of taxes on the ground of famine. The movement also saw the confiscated properties been returned to the farmers. By the time, these three mass movements through different forms of Satyagraha had already made Gandhiji a mass leader with close connections to the masses and he was being referred to as Bapu. The word "Bapu" in the Hindi language means father.

In this backdrop, let us visualize the perspectives that were prevailing in British India of those days. India was not the same political India as we see now. The vast territory having religious and cultural affinity had its roots emanating from the Indus Valley civilization. The striking feature of the cultural and religious affinity was its diversity bound by the tread of unity. The land epitomized the continuity and assimilation of various streams of humanity where different religion, culture, language, social practice, political belief etc. were all merged



within. Perhaps, no other land under the sun can boost such diversity where people's culture, language, religion, etc. changes every 50 kilometers. The land was never under a unified command of a single kingdom or administration at any given time in its history. Under all these perspectives, achieving a political India looked a far cry till the British could succeed to some extent but still, that was not more than an administrative India which to a great extent was to enable the British to rule over this territory. Lack of political identity under a unified Kingdom command rendered this vast land vulnerable to repeated foreign aggression throughout the period of its existence. Any other land would have disintegrated but for the inbuilt strength of its civilization, the aggressors became it's own with respective religion, culture and practices forming part of the land and lineage of the ever continuing and evolving civilization. The vulnerability of the boundary of the land was manifested in the fact that a British company, not the Throne assumed control over its vast territory and ruled for hundred years until the Throne took over through the Grant of Dewani in 1858. Even the British rulers could not get control over the entire territory as besides the areas on which they established direct administrative control, there were more than 560 Princely States which had their respective internal administrative control of themselves with a contribution to the Throne depending upon their size, population, and geographic importance. Even there were many areas which remained independent throughout the period till independence. Besides these, there were some places which were under another colonial rule of France and Portugal.

Under this deeply rooted fragmented political identities, the radical adversities can be very well understood that encompassing to put forward the comprehensive narratives of the concept of one nation beyond innumerable nationhood that existed, the roadmap of a sovereign political nationhood called India was looking to have been a hypothesis even in the first two decades of the 20th century. A vast majority of the people of this land were complacent to be ruled by the British, rather they thought it was their virtual destiny and they were happy about it. Many of them were even averse to the idea of self-rule. There were many factors behind this mass mindset but the most dominant of them was lack of basic education, access to health care, sanitation and much more. At this juncture, Gandhiji identified those negatives and stressed the need to fight against those evils. He also identified that knowledge and information should be transmitted to attune the masses according to their needs as opposed to the prism of western viewpoints.



The advent of Gandhi in the national scenario was at a time when there was some silver lining also because on one hand he faced a morally materially degenerated India while on the other hand trends of the reformative movements in different spheres were visible and both these contributed in shaping his thoughts and programs forming his distinct legacy. Gandhiji embarked upon a journey more so a quest to discover the land through the eyes of its people. It was a journey for inventing nationhood with the confluence of multiple sub-nationalism imbibed in it to shape a colossus political entity called India, that is Bharat. In his first three years since Gandhiji arrived in India in 1915, a churning of a different political tide started flowing which already turned Gandhiji to Bapu, as he was fondly called. Gandhiji's endeavor was bearing fruits as a greater political awakening was visible when his call for a countrywide Bandh against the oppressive Rowlatt Act was a great success. The Satyagraha was percolating down the society and made people fearless to disobey the Act to court arrest and imprisonment. Common people started feeling the strength of truth through Satyagraha to such a great extent that even after a massacre of the magnitude of JallianwalaBagh in 1919 didn't deter them to stage a mass protest to defy the ban on public meetings knowing fully the extent of wrath that was supposed to have been invited.

Meanwhile, Gandhi's endeavor in the form of Satyagraha through non-violence was becoming relentless and was gaining from strength to strength be it the form of Khilafat movement of the 1920s or establishment of Swaraj which carries the mark of Gandhi legacy of striving for Hindu-Muslim unity and bringing the Muslim community to the mainstream national movements. Gandhiji had brought in another aspect of non-cooperation to his concept of non-violence. This double-edged mass participative movements started showing considerable success all over the country. People all over the country observed Hartal or general strike in November 1921 to register protest against the visit of Prince of Wales. In February 1922 Gandhiji also called for civil disobedience movement demanding the release of all political prisoners and removal of government control over the press. The movement gathered hyper momentum which led to police firing at ChauriChaura in Gorakhpur which was retaliated by an angry mob by attacking the Police Station killing by burnt alive 22 policemen. Gandhiji felt that his civil disobedience movement was drifting away from the designated path of non-violence which he professed and therefore, he withdrew his motion. Gandhiji showed his great character and regimentation to sustain his ideology in actual



practice, a legacy which is not found in the annals of mass movements anywhere in the world (Aggarwal, M.).

Ever since Gandhiji's arrival in the Indian political scenario, the common people were getting the sense of political integration and with the mass movements those took place under the leadership of Gandhiji, the common people of India started many political activities without resorting to power and in non-violence manner and carrying the legacy of Gandhi by giving up and burning the foreign cloth, boycotting educational Institutions, surrendering titles conferred by the British. There was a sense of fearlessness among all against the oppression of the British government

Gandhiji in March–April 1930 took up a march on foot spanning over 385 kms from Sabarmati Ashram to the Arabian Sea coast city of Dandi garnered widespread support among the Indian populace and considerable worldwide attention as well.

Salt production and distribution in India had long been a lucrative monopoly of the British. Through a series of laws, the Indian populace was prohibited from producing or selling salt independently, and instead Indians were required to buy expensive, heavily taxed salt that often was imported. This affected the great majority of Indians, who were poor and could not afford to buy it. Indian protests against the salt tax began in the 19th century and remained a major contentious issue throughout the period of British rule of the subcontinent. Gandhi and his followers picked up handfuls of salt along the shore, thus technically “producing” salt and breaking the law (Pletcher, Indian History). This particular mass movement shows the connect to earth legacy of Gandhiji in taking up the issue of salt which affects each and everybody.

The Quit" India movement was launched in 1942 by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of the Mahatma Gandhi. It swept across every nook and corner of the country. The countrymen were filled with patriotic fervor and urge to act and suffer for the nation. The call of “do or die” by Gandhiji heightened the passion of all to gain freedom from the British. This was probably the biggest ever mass movement of the people that took place in history.

Legacy of Gandhi beyond mass movements



While marshaling civil disobedience movements one after another growing from strength to strength with the participation of crores of people of all segments of the society resurrecting several thousand years old legacies of India, the practicing non-violence, Gandhiji also embarked upon various other aspects issues having decisive impacts on the mass. Gandhi legacy on those aspects can be summarized below;

Gandhiji legacy and society:

Gandhiji very strongly denounced the age-old of the caste system and practice of untouchability in Indian society at large. Gandhi's legacy is exemplified by the equality of men and women. He was a strong advocate of women power and was vehemently opposed to the Purdah system among women and child marriage which were very much dominant practices in our society then. He was also opposed to Sati.

Gandhi legacy and economy:

Gandhiji was an ardent advocate of Swadeshi and patently as opposed to large scale industries. Gandhiji strongly believed that the success of India attaining self-reliance in economy rests on cottage industries. Khadi clothing became and still sustain the legacy of one and only Gandhiji, being the symbol of self-reliance. Gandhiji was in favor of balanced growth as opposed to centralization in the country's economy. Gandhi represented a legacy of the harmonious workable relationship between laborers and the capitalist. Gandhi was in favor of capital but was against capitalism.

Gandhi's efforts towards "spiritualizing economics" are truly reflected in his concept of trusteeship. He based his doctrine of trusteeship on the first sloka of Isopanisad, according to which one is asked to dedicate everything to God and then use it only to the required extent. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal greed. The most significant difference between Marxian socialism and Gandhian socialism lies in the method they recommend to achieve it. Whereas



Marxian socialism harps on violence, Gandhian socialism aims at a change of heart on the part of the rich. There is no place for violence, but only trust (Shukla, 2004).

Gandhi legacy and religion:

Gandhiji's was a very religious person and Ramdhun was his great solace. He professed Ram Rajya where amity between all the religion was his sole motto. Gandhiji firmly believed that religion of love and service cannot be practiced without Ahimsa or non-violence. He further propagated politics should stand on morality taught out of religion. He was a true practicing secular person throughout his life.

Gandhi legacy and education:

Education was one field which Gandhiji gave utmost importance as a tool of nation-building. He introduced Ashram based education system known as "Nai Talim" emphasizing the need to develop physical, mental and moral aspects to be imbibed in a student."Nai Talim" sought to develop a sense of self-reliance and acknowledgment of dignity of labor and manual work. The basic structure of Nai Talim was based on vocational training. For him, Nai Talim was a system to transform a human being by inculcating values like social service, service to the nation and values like social service, service to the nation and 'humanity.' Establishment of national schools and colleges were another aspect born out of the legacy of Gandhi.

Gandhi legacy and Panchayet

Gandhiji's concept was that every village must be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers. Every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. As a Directive Principle of the Constitution, it had been laid down that 'village panchayats shall be promoted as units of self-government'. That provided the basis for the establishment of three-tier Panchayat Raj institutions which ultimately by the 73rd Amendment passed, is providing a constitutional base to the Panchayati Raj institutions (Dubhashi, 2011).

Sarvodaya and Swaraj as the legacy of Gandhi:



Gandhiji's 'Sarvodaya' was a concept to promote the greatest benefit to each and everyone and to establish that, both the state and the individual have equal responsibility.

His concept of Swaraj implied freedom from foreign domination and control of foreign powers. According to Gandhiji, the Government under Swaraj shall be one in which each individual, irrespective of his religion race, caste, sex and place of birth shall have as its motto the welfare of the people in general. Emphasis on self-restraint and self-rule remained a significant cornerstone of Gandhiji's moral dimension of Swaraj.

Gandhi in the modern age:

India, with its rapid economic modernization and urbanization, has rejected Gandhi's economics but accepted much of his politics and continues to revere his memory. Reporter Jim Yardley notes that "modern India is hardly a Gandhian nation if it ever was one. His vision of a village-dominated economy was shunted aside during his lifetime as rural romanticism, and his call for a national ethos of personal austerity and nonviolence has proved antithetical to the goals of an aspiring economic and military power." By contrast, Gandhi is "given full credit for India's political identity as a tolerant, secular democracy (Yardley, 2010).

Gandhiji cannot be ignored anyway in modern India. He is revered as the "Father of the nation", a title which was bestowed on him by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (Radio Speech by Subhas Chandra Bose) though he was referred to a "Bapu" by the common people of the country decades before. The title Mahatma was given to him by world poet Rabindranath Tagore. The best legacy Gandhi represents is the Swachh Bharat movement as Gandhi Ji use to put cleanliness above everything.

Gandhi as a legacy and the world

Perhaps, no other human could draw as much attention as Gandhi did internationally. The list of great men who admired and revered Gandhi and his legacy is astonishing. The person who fought for civil liberties in the United States against racial discrimination was none other than Martin Luther King who idolized Gandhi as his mentor. Besides Luther King, there were



host of great men of the world of different discipline had admired, revered and followed Gandhi like Romain Rolland, Aldous Huxley, Bernard Shaw, Toynbee, Charlie Chaplin, Tolstoy, Albert Einstein, Tagore, Ho Chi Minh, Benigno Aquino, Aung San (Suu Kyi's father), Aung San Suu Kyi herself, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, Barak Obama and so on and so forth. Perhaps no other leader or human being had and still having such great following like Gandhi.

Gandhi's influence on the peace movement in the United States was felt as early as the 1920s. An early and effective exponent of Gandhi's ideas here was John Haynes Holmes, a prominent Unitarian minister and reformer, and an outspoken pacifist in World War I. He first set forth his discovery of Gandhi in a sermon titled "The Christ of Today" which was widely circulated. In another sermon in 1922 called "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" (Walker, 1967).

The legacy of Gandhi can never wither away, rather it is gaining momentum throughout the world. As the world is facing a threat to humanity in various forms, the clamor for Gandhi's non-violence and civil disobedience doctrines are felt louder and louder.

Estonia, which had endured foreign occupation for centuries, joined its fellow Baltic Republics of Latvia and Lithuania in a nonviolent movement that enabled them to become independent from the Soviet Union in 1991. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Estonians began taking advantage of their unique and rich cultural tradition, particularly in choral music, to encourage a national reawakening, and successfully declared Estonian independence (Zunes, 2009).

Gandhi's civil disobedience and non-violence was the core lesson of the successive protest strategies of the velvet revolutions from Eastern Europe to Tahrir Square in Egypt establishing itself as a potent force in the U.S. civil rights movement, the anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1980s and 1990s such as the "people power" movement in the Philippines and Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution," and the Arab Spring of 2011. (Mantena, 2017).

The Arab Spring extended its periphery of protests that ultimately resulted in regime changes in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Shah Bag in Bangladesh,



through the non-violent method, achieved its goal in proving long-awaited adjudication of justice against the perpetrators of mass killings during its freedom struggle in 1971.

The legacy of Gandhi can never wither away, rather it is gaining momentum throughout the world. As the world is facing a threat to humanity in various forms, the clamor for Gandhi's nonviolence and civil disobedience doctrines are felt louder and louder. Wherever in the world, peace is defeated and violence reigns over wisdom and reasoning, the resonance of Gandhi legacy rings clearer and longer.

CONCLUSION

Gandhiji very strongly denounced the age-old of the caste system and practice of untouchability in Indian society at large. Gandhi introduced Ashram based education system known as "Nai Talim" emphasizing the need to develop physical, mental and moral aspects to be imbibed in a student. Gandhiji's concept was that every village must be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers. Every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. Gandhiji's 'Sarvodaya' was a concept to promote the greatest benefit to each and everyone and to establish that both the state and the individual have equal responsibility. India, with its rapid economic modernization and urbanization, has rejected Gandhi's economics but accepted much of his politics --- no other human could draw as much attention as Gandhi did internationally.

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