

RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract: The tenets and principles of Gandhi are relevant in present times too. These include: Satya (Truth); Ahimsa(Non-violence); Vegetarianism; Mauna (Silence); Nai Talim (Basic Education). His entire political strategy, satyagraha, ahimsa and fasting was based on the superiority of 'soul force' to physical force. Today, on the one side when we are advancing with technology, its' responsible use can help in addressing many problems of the society like corruption, lack of transparency, etc. The paper explores how Gandhian principles can be realized by adopting technology-driven interventions. The paper focuses mainly on issue of corruption and transparency and links how technology, can contribute to address the problem and realize 'truth' through transparency. The paper is based on review of secondary data

Keywords: Gandhiji's tenets, Information and communications technology, corruption.

Introduction

Gandhism contains the ideas and the body of work of the father of the nation, Mohandas karamchand Gandhi. Gandhism primarily comprises of Gandhiji's contributions to the conception of non-violent struggle, also called civil resistance. Truth and Non-violence are the main stay of Gandhism.

Gandhiji has been called a bodhisattva by Prof. Ramjee Singh. In fact, bodhisattva is a Sanskrit term which basically means a person who, driven by empathy, has engendered *bodhicitta*, which is an unprompted, on the spur wish to attain Buddhahood. This is deemed to be for the benefit of all responsive and sensitive beings. In fact, Bodhisattvas are a well-liked subject in Buddhist art of the twentieth century.

Gandhiji did not quite approve of the concept of 'Gandhism'. He explained the rationale for his disapproval by saying that there was no such concept as "Gandhism". He did not believe in leaving behind any sect after him. Moreover, he did not claim to have created or conceptualized any principle or doctrine that had hitherto not existed in the past. He claimed to have made a simple attempt to relate the eternal truths to peoples' daily lives and problems that exist. The opinions that he formed and the conclusions derived were not final. He claimed that all

these were dynamic in nature and may change with time. He was modest when he said that he had nothing new to offer to the world by way of teaching. For, he believed that Truth and non-violence were as old as the hills.

In the absence of a "Gandhism" that was approved by Gandhi, there exists a school of thought that believes that we have to derive what Gandhism stands for, from Gandhiji's life, his work and living. An important deduction is that his philosophy essentially was based on "truth" and "non-violence". We need to acknowledge the truth that people are different at all levels and accept it. Second, that we should never resort to violence to settle inherent differences between human beings at all levels.

Martin Luther King Jr opined that if humanity is to progress, than Gandhi can never be ignored. He observed that ignoring Gandhi would be at our own risk.

Objective of the study

1. To study and understand Gandhian principles and their relevance in the present era.
2. To understand how technology could be used to enhance their effectiveness.

Source of data

Secondary data.

Principles that Gandhiji stood for:

The tenets of Gandhiji which are relevant in present times are as follows:

- Satya (Truth).
- Ahimsa(Non-violence).
- Vegetarianism.
- Mauna (Silence).
- Nai Talim (Basic Education).

Satya as propagated by Gandhiji

"Satyagraha" is essentially a combination of two words, namely the words satya which means "truth") as well as agraha which means "polite insistence". The word Agraha also means

“holding firmly to”. In other words, nothing but the truth exists or prevails. In the context of satyagraha, Truth would include the following:

- a) Truth with respect to speech.
- b) Reality as it exists.
- c) Good or Worthy as opposed to, immoral, evil or bad.

Gandhiji had implicit faith in the concept of nonviolence:

According to him the entire world rested upon the foundation or bedrock of truth which is also called satya. In a nutshell, this is the inherent doctrine of Satyagraha.

Information and communications technology can be used as an effective tool to combat corruption

Information and communications Technology play a significant role in the fight against corruption. It facilitates movement of data or information amongst government institutions, amongst citizens as well as between the citizens and the government institutions. These technologies help promote translucence, answerability and public participation. There are several ways in which ICTs can play a pivotal role in triggering positive change by bringing about automated processes, excluding intermediaries, and limiting the role of bureaucracy and cutting out red-tape. In several developing countries the Program for ICT has succeeded in developing an exhaustive list of the possible domains in which ICTs can resolve the issues relating to corruption. In fact corruption can be contained by automation particularly with respect to repetitive operations. Thus, there are multiple ways in which ICTs can contribute to identify and reduce corruption and bribery. Technology innovations can be used by governments to improve the efficiency and transparency of public administration and to improve communication with and provide information to citizens.

Gandhiji and Non-violence

His entire political strategy was based on the superiority of 'soul force' to physical force. He opined that Nonviolence meant fighting or pitting of one's whole soul against the resolve or the will of the oppressor or the tyrant. In other words, to abstain from violence to settle inherent differences between human beings at all levels. This would include violence emanating from conflicts between people, nations, races, religions.

Use of technology to propagate Non-violence

People talk about the wisdom of the crowd in the age of the Internet. And electronic communication does harness the wisdom of the crowd. Satyagraha and non-violence depended on the word of mouth to spread. In contemporary times, digital technology would have facilitated faster dissemination of the principles amongst the public. Technology facilitates people to get faster insights about what to do, and they share these insights in the group electronically. This knowledge will be far greater and faster than the word of mouth, which was adopted in the time of yore.

Gandhiji and democracy

Gandhi's opinion of democracy was indeed remarkable. According to him, democracy was something that provided the weak the same chance as the strong. However, he was also equally wary of this human institution as he felt that it had its flip side too. According to him the greater the institution the greater was the chance of abuse. Democracy, he believed was a great institution by itself and hence it was liable to be greatly abused.

Innovations in Technology facilitate effective democracy

Innovations in technology and social media have had a significant impact on democracy globally. Technology has empowered citizens to amplify their voices and hold governments accountable. But while citizens have begun to harness tech innovation, many democratic institutions – governments, parliaments and political parties – have been slower to react, often using outmoded processes to respond to increased citizen demands. Technology enables institutions to be more engaged with citizens. Information and communication technologies are making our world more democratic.

Gandhiji's views on education

According to Gandhiji, education should transform and revolutionized in such a manner that instead of answering the need of the imperial exploiter, the needs of the poorest of the poor

should be fulfilled. He realized the important role played by basic or primary education and opined that irrespective of villages or cities, basic education links children across cities and villages to all that was best and needed in the country. He spoke about the relevance of taking Vidyapith to the villages to impart education to suit the need of the villagers.

Digital India initiatives to spread education in India

In keeping with the relevance and significance of education, the digital India initiatives put together a number of digital services for improving the dissemination of education in society. Various levels including the primary level, secondary level as well as higher education and research facilities, the various digital schemes in the educational sector have revolutionized the system in the country. 'SWAYAM' launched by the Government facilitates access to courses imparted in classrooms from ninth standard to post graduation. These courses can be accessed by any student anywhere at any time. This digital scheme brings education at the door step of numerous students and aims to bridge the digital divide. This scheme is indeed a major boon for underprivileged children who may not be able to access formal education due to various factors including lack of vital resources like time and money. 'ePATHSHALA' is one such scheme that facilitates dissemination of educational content through the channels like website and mobile app.

Several apps and programs like 'Mid-Day Meal Monitoring App', 'Shaala Sidhi' and 'Shaala Darpan' focus on the quality of school administration and evaluate the schools and kendriya vidyalas to enhance the quality of education. In the area of higher education Government has the 'National Scholarship Portal', 'eGranthalya', 'National Knowledge Network' to name a few.

These digital initiatives are aimed at improving the educational sector. They make an earnest attempt at reaching out to the underprivileged section of youngsters to facilitate them to avail of the fruits of digital revolution. In a nutshell, an attempt is made through digital revolution to bridge the gap between the privileged sections of society and the under privileged ones.

Relevance of Gandhism to India and the world outside

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to state that the entire world realizes the essence of *Gandhism* and that it would be wrong to premise that *Gandhism* has lost its relevance in the world. Indeed the irony is that like *Buddhism*, a religion that took birth in India is in the present,

mostly prevalent outside India, similarly, the significance of *Gandhism* today is recognized outside India. In fact in several countries of the world activities along Gandhian lines are carried out in several countries across the Globe. There are very few countries in the world which are totally oblivious to Gandhian practice. In a nutshell, all across the globe there appears to be an awareness of the significance of non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi is a name that surpasses the bounds of race, religion and nation-states. In fact it has to be given due credit for having emerged as the prophetic voice of the twenty-first century. In today's world, Gandhiji is fondly remembered for his avid observance of the practice of non-violence and his ultimate humanism.

In fact one may wonder about the relevance of Gandhi in this all-permeating, avaricious, dubious and consumerist culture? One may wonder about the significance and relevance of Gandhiji as well as Gandhism to the modern world and what is the secret of his success?

Gandhiji has impacted several noteworthy International leaders, both spiritual and political. In fact the Tibetan leader Dalai Lama has put Gandhiji's success in the right perspective. According to him, there have been several Indian masters who have practiced and preached non-violence as a philosophy; however, Gandhiji was instrumental in producing a very sophisticated approach as he successfully implemented the noble philosophy of ahimsa in modern day politics. That, according to Dalai Lama was a very great thing.

Despite extensive practice of violence across the world over, eventually the power of guns will have to be changed by the will of the ordinary people. Dalai Lama believes that in order to fight these big wars, the common people of the world need Gandhism.

Disaku Ikeda, the Japanese Buddhist leader also takes great inspiration from Gandhi. He likens Gandhism to spiritual practice that is urged by the inner urging of the conscience.

The remarkable success Gandhiji was able to garner in South Africa which was embroiled in its fight for human rights and civil liberties is vindicated by the fact that his teachings were adopted not only by the South African Freedom fighter, Nelson Mandela, but also the former South African President De Klerk. Several Leaders, the World over were deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. These include the greats like Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

In fact Martin Luther King was inspired by the tenets promoted by Gandhiji. He felt that Gandhiji won freedom for his country- men against the British based on the principles of Gandhism. Whether it was the willingness to go to jail, resisting the British by peaceful means, undertaking the Dandi March or simply boycotting British products, everything was carried out without resorting to violence. There is great resonance of the historic *Salt March* at Dandi with the courageous *Montgomery Bus Boycott* against racial segregation in United States.

In fact Barack Obama, former US President perceives Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration and used to keep Gandhiji's portrait in his office as a champion of peace. According to him, he has always looked to Mahatma as an inspiration and that is so because he remark *In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he exemplifies the sort of*

transformation that can be brought about when ordinary people set out and come together to do something extraordinary.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader who was under house arrest for several years, was greatly inspired by Gandhiji. She learnt the importance of fearlessness in order to be able to translate the doctrine of peace and reconciliation into practice.

Findings and conclusion

Gandhism is very much relevant in the present day world. Gandhi has inspired and will continue to inspire leaders – political, social and religious, all over the world. Whether is Joan Baez, the American folk singer and human rights activist, or Cesar Chavez, the American social activist, or Joanna Macy, the environmental activist, or Mubarak Awad, the non-violent Palestine leader, all these men found Gandhi and his nonviolent struggle highly inspirational. Thich Nhat Kanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist also derives inspiration from Gandhiji who focused and stressed upon the process rather than the end. Nhat once remarked that one may fail in their attempt, yet one may succeed in the correct action especially when the action is authentically nonviolent and is based on love and understanding. This is real Gandhism, he said. Thus the world over great men were deeply influenced and continue to be inspired by Gandhism. Gandhian principles of non-violence, self-sufficiency, communal harmony, simple living and truth find resonance in our daily existence. These are principles that can never go out of sync with human existence. Moreover these principles can be effectively utilized to find solutions to problems such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment etc.

Thus as discussed above, given the fact that Gandhian principles are extremely relevant not only nationally but also internationally, this paper discusses how each of Gandhian principles can be propagated, thanks to the revolution that has taken place in the space of Information Technology.

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