



Impact Factor: 4.081

The Contribution of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy: And it's Relevance to our Society

Subhajit Dutta

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal.

Cell No +919064565995. Email: subhajitdutta4322@gmail.com

Abstract: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi held a unique place in the history of the Indian freedom movement as well as in the historic transition from tradition to modernity. He transformed the principles of Truth, Ahimsa and purity of Ends and Means into a social and political technique for transforming the individual and the society. Gandhi has a deep-rooted suspicion of the apparatus of the government and thus advocated the idea of “Gram Swaraj” and “Sarvodaya” by implementing Constructive Programme in which people would take the initiative to solving their own problems. Gandhiji is an instance as a leader who achieved everything through the involvement of the people and voluntary action. The present world is full of disputes. There are political disputes, economical disputes, disputes of colonialism, imperialism, communism etc. Mutual hatred, narrow nationalism and separatist tendencies are in full swing. At this critical time, Gandhian philosophy can serve as a great relief and sincere helper to all peace lovers. This philosophy will serve as a great unifying force among the different nations of the world. It can serve as the light house of eternal peace, spreading spiritual light of humanism, divinity, integration and oneness throughout the world. If we see the history of philosophy there are two types of philosophers - those who try to understand the world and those who seek to change it. While philosophers belonging to the former group tend to idealize lives of contemplation, the philosophers belonging to the latter group envision lives of action. Gandhi opines that philosophy is not merely an academic intellectual exercise. For him, philosophy is primarily a call for action. So the accepted view would be to think of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as belonging to this second category of philosophers whose primary objective is to effectively change the world. The present study attempts to analyze the social relevance of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. The study will describe Gandhi's basic ideas and concepts are very much relevant to our society. This study is analytical as well as exploratory and descriptive. The work will try to show that Gandhi's philosophical thoughts are also very much relevant today.

Keywords: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Non-violence, Truth, Ahimsa, Sarvodaya, Universal Brotherhood, World Peace, Humanism, End and Means.

Gandhi's Philosophy of Non-violence: Mahatma Gandhi the holder and bearer of Indian Culture, was an ardent follower of ‘ahimsa’ (non-violence). He was as worshiper of truth and to him ahimsa and truth were the two sides of the same thing. His greatest contribution to his countrymen was the introduction of a new method of movement – Satyagraha-founded on truth and ‘ahimsa’ or non-violence. The concept of ‘Ahimsa’ was not a new concept invented by Gandhi. Before him the great

historical personalities like Mahavira, Goutam Buddha, Nagasena, Asoka had preached Ahimsa. What Gandhi did, was to bring it out of the personal limit and applied in the social and political field. He learnt this concept of 'ahimsa', its course and objective from the evolution of the history of human civilization. Analyzing the evolutionary process of the history of mankind he found that, as civilization advanced men gradually abandoned the path of the violence and embraced ahimsa. In analyzing this course of ahimsa in the history of mankind Gandhi was greatly influenced by the great heritage of Hinduism, and his own deep faith on God, honesty and morality. Throughout his life he followed the path of ahimsa as because ahimsa was the essence of his philosophy.

In his own words- "Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed."¹

To Gandhiji 'ahimsa' or non-violence is something which has no relation with injustice, weakness or cowardice. Instead it is a symbol of great moral and spiritual power. Ahimsa is not weakness or cowardice; it is the inherent power of valiants, the heroes.

Gandhi's concept of non-violence or ahimsa has some special characteristics. According to Gandhi – ahimsa is not a negative approach; rather it is a positive approach, a positive concept. Literally, the word 'ahimsa' or non-violence means not to commit any crime or cause any harm to others. But ahimsa is something more than that. In its wider and positive sense ahimsa means giving love to others, even to the enemies and also to win over his heart by doing good to him. Ahimsa is the symbol of self- sacrifice or self-restraint. It is the symbol of love, of thinking good or others. The main objective of ahimsa or non-violence is to love everyone, even to the enemy. Gandhi advised people not to hate even the enemy, rather to love him. This is because he believed that enmity leads to more enmity and that gradually creates an environment of heated. Here we find the similarity in the thoughts of both Gautama Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. Hence it is always better to win the heart of our enemy through love. Gandhi wanted to apply this principle of ahimsa in politics as well. Ahimsa is thus bondage of natural love and cordial relationship. By developing the feelings of love and cordial relationship, of appreciation and admiration, this principle of ahimsa can be expressed in all human activities. Gandhi earnestly believed that ahimsa was the only power which could bring permanent peace in the world.

Ahimsa to Gandhi, is not a weapon of the weak or cowards, rather it is the weapon of the strong. It is the symbol of supreme moral and spiritual power. The weak and coward men never take the risk of life; so they take the help of arms to protect themselves. Only the brave men, as such, can follow the ideal of ahimsa or non-violence. Even facing them who have come to kill him the brave follower of the principle of non-violence can remain clam. Such a brave follower of the principle of ahimsa in fact increases the security of his own life because no body will dare to do harm to him. Non-violence is thus, the rigid expression of the firm determination of the heroic hearts. No coward can ever become non-violence.

“Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the observe, and which the reverse? Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.”²

According to Gandhi truth and non-violence i.e. ‘Satya’ and ‘Ahimsa’ are closely linked with each other. Gandhi believed that truth is in ahimsa and ahimsa is in the truth. Truth, to Gandhi, is God and ahimsa or non-violence too was this God. As such Gandhi considered ahimsa or non-violence as the highest religion, true and eternal. To find the truth the person who is searching for truth has to face many types of problems. Non-violence means ultimate love and ultimate love means the ability to face unspeakable miseries and sufferings.

This is clear from the following words of Gandhi: “My path is clear. Any attempt to use me for violent purposes is bound to fail. I have no secret methods. I know no diplomacy save that of Truth. I have no weapons but Non-violence”.³

Non-violence is a great spiritual philosophy and is common in all the religions of the world. The only weapon which Gandhi had during freedom struggle was ‘Non-violence’ i.e. ‘Satyagraha’. In short ‘Non-violence’ was the soul Gandhi’s all political movements. Non-violence is a clear path towards world peace. As has been said earlier, that ahimsa is the expression of love and affection it is naturally superior to violence and hatred. Non-violence (ahimsa) is, as such, the expression of pure love mingled with the feelings of and readiness for self-sacrifice. Hence Gandhi advised all conflicting parties to follow the principle of ahimsa. Such a feeling and practice of non-violence (ahimsa) will enrich and strengthen both the conflicting parties mentally and morally. Practice and faith in ahimsa is an attempt to abandon violence and hatred. Gandhi strongly believed that such practice of non-violence and deep faith in it was absolutely necessary for the sake of a good social life. But the expression of ahimsa or non-violence should be spontaneous, mingles with compassion and a feeling of good for the others.

Gandhian Philosophy of End and Means: The relevance of Gandhian philosophy lies in the application of the moral principles namely, Truth and Non-violence in all sphere of human life. For him non-violence is the means and truth is the end. Both are so intertwined with each other that it is practically impossible to separate or detach them. They are like two sides of the same coin. Now the question comes: what is the relationship between end and means: which one is essential, the end or means? In young India he wrote:

“They say, ‘means are after all mean’s, I would say means are after all everything’. As the means so the end...”

There is no wall of separation between means and end. Indeed the creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, nor over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception.”⁴

Nevertheless, Gandhi considered ahimsa, as the means and truth as the end. According to Gandhi, ends do not justify the means and that clarity of means is an important condition of realizing good ends. He gave importance to the means and ends. If the means are good the ends would also prove good. By keeping non-violence as means we can attain the end truth. Gandhi gives very great importance to 'means'. Thus we can say that, Gandhi's concepts namely means and ends are relevant in worldwide level. In another context he likened means to a seed and the end to a tree and maintained that:

“there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.”⁵

Gandhian Concept of Sarvodaya: Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya is based on the concept of unity of existence. Gandhi's Sarvodaya center's around the small republic where the mass of people manage their affairs without depending upon the state. Sarvodaya is a non-violent socialism, for distributive justice. Sarvodaya means the welfare of all. According to Gandhi, love and non-violence are the stronger forces than atom bomb. Love and non-violence have spiritual power. These are such powers which will utilize our humanity. Sarvodaya, by way of: 1) service to humanity and 2) to live for others, infuses the rule of brotherliness, love and peaceful co-existence in all human beings. It means upliftment of all in all ways. Gandhi's notion of socialism is an extension and application of the economic outlook of his Sarvodaya philosophy. The term sarvodaya is used with Gandhi's own approval to mean the philosophy of life that he propounded. The concept of sarvodaya is based on Gandhi's metaphysics. It also requires peaceful resolution of conflicts, constructive work to build up a non-violent world-order. He envisioned the term Sarvodaya as constructing of the welfare of all beings, 'service to all', 'welfare of all' and 'good of all'.

“Sarvodaya implies the greatest good of all as against the greatest good of the greatest number. It stands for a society which would strive for the good of all and which everybody would be happy. In such a society there would be no distinction of high and low.”⁶

The notion of sarvodaya as a moral ideal is embedded in our tradition. According to Gandhi, Sarvodaya is a way of life.

He wrote, “A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number).

He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and, therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself.”⁷

Gandhian Philosophy of Education: In his educational philosophy, naturalism and pragmatism appear to be complementary and not contradictory to his idealistic philosophy. Basic education teaches us the golden principles of peace. Gandhian philosophy of education focuses on self-realization. Gandhian scheme of education includes all sorts of development in the child, i.e., 1) physical development, 2) Mental and Intellectual development, 3) Moral and Spiritual development. This scheme of education should develop body, mind, and spirit of the child completely resulting in his harmonious development. Gandhi's philosophy of education has two sets of aims 1) Immediate aims, 2) Ultimate aims. The immediate aims of education are manifold, because they are linked with human life each and every stage. Of all these aims like character-building, spiritual training and Intellectual training are very much important. Gandhi opines that the highest and ultimate aim of education is self-realization. This self-realization leads us to the perfect knowledge of God. According to Gandhi, self-realization, i.e., merging of finite being into the infinite, is the highest and the most supreme aim of education. Our body is mainly composed of three things 1) physical body, 2) Mind and 3) Spirit. Gandhi clearly pointed out during his life time that the prevailing system of education should lay great stress on the need of the development of this spirit (human soul) in the interest of perfect human welfare, world peace and international prosperity. Gandhian educational philosophy teaches us that one can realize 'self', i.e., 'God' by serving humanity and living like brothers, free from jealousy, hatred and all separatist tendencies. Gandhian educational philosophy teaches the students to do good to others. In the present age, most people are being carried away by the sweeping tide of materialism. In this wide sphere of ignorance and darkness, Gandhian educational philosophy acts as the lighthouse and teaches the main purpose of human life and education.

He wrote, “By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit.”⁸

It aims not only at character building but also social, political, and economic uplift of all sections of the society. It is a self-supporting system. It also advocates a novel philosophy of life. Through his educational scheme usually known as 'Basic Education' he wanted to bring about a social revolution in our country, that would result in the creation of a new social order, that would reflect his philosophy of

education and life. Gandhi was at the same time an idealist, a naturalist, a pragmatist and a humanist. His philosophy of education is naturalistic in its settings, idealistic in its goals, pragmatic in its method and humanistic in outlook.

Gandhi and Universal Brotherhood: The present India, lays great stress on Human-Brotherhood. In the light of Gandhian Philosophy of Equality, a common uniform is proposed for school students, so that they may not discriminate one another on the basis of rich clothes, wealth, caste, creed, or religion. From the very beginning a spirit of 'Brotherhood and Equality' should be fostered in the sacred minds of the children. Their holy minds should be kept free from the most harmful germs of communalism and separatist tendencies. From the above words, Gandhi's concept of 'Human Brotherhood' is very much evident. All men are brothers, no matter to what religion, caste, nationality, the other belongs. According to Gandhi, the world is a big family. There is Fatherhood of One God and Brotherhood of all Human Beings. We are all brothers. Gandhi took the world as 'A Big Family'. We are all one, we are all equal. 'All Men are Brothers' this is the crux of Gandhian Philosophy. When we believe in Father-God, we will automatically believe in his Human Creation i.e., Brotherhood of All Human Beings. All men are brothers, irrespective of any caste, creed, colour, language or religion. God has not created these barriers. It is only human being, who has created these separatist tendencies. It should be ours as well as students' primary duty to do good to the whole world by improving their physical, social, moral as well as spiritual conditions.

According to Gandhi, "the golden way is to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family as one. He who distinguishes between the votaries of one's own religion and those of another mis-educates the members of his own and opens the way for discard and irreligion."⁹

Gandhi laid great stress on 'Mutual Toleration' in his philosophy. According to Gandhi, intolerance is a species of violence and, therefore, against our creed. Intolerance or violence can be the creed of animals and not of human beings. We should forget the distinctions of white and black, high and low, rich and poor, haves and have-nots and should realize the equality of all men irrespective of religion, faith, caste, creed, nationality, colour, region, province etc. Humanity is one. All men are brothers, whether they inhabit in one country or another. They should work ceaselessly for the establishment of world peace, by making the 'Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty' a Universal one. Gandhi laid stress on 'Peaceful Co-existence'.

Gandhi said: "my mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India. But through realization of freedom of India, I hope realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man."¹⁰

From the above most worthy words of Gandhi, it is quite clear that we are part and parcel of One-Integrated Mankind. World is one. Humanity is one. This Humanism is the most important contribution of Gandhi to this ignorant and suffering world facing a danger of nuclear war. According to Gandhi, God is not apart from Humanity. According to Gandhi, everyone should struggle hard for the freedom of his country, but not at the cost of other nationalities and by exploiting others. The students of Gandhain philosophy are all brothers. There are most powerful spiritual ties, which bind them together for ever. They are all members of One-World-family.

Gandhi and World Peace: Gandhi was the prophet of peace and non-violence. Gandhian way is the hope of the world's desire for peace on the basis of humanism. Gandhi showed us that love and non-violence are stronger forces than Atom and Hydrogen Bombs. He conquered not only India, but the whole World by the force of love. His kingdom extended over the hearts of Humanity. Gandhian philosophy is a lighthouse of international peace for the whole world. Western countries mostly focus their attention towards materialistic things, i.e., nuclear weapons, war steel planets, armament factories, destructive aspect of technology and drink, dine and dance. India, following Gandhian philosophy, has focused its attention towards spirit, self, soul, prayer, meditation, pence, non-violence and other necessities of human life. According to the west, materialism is everything but according to Gandhian philosophy spiritualism is everything. India, whose spiritual type of culture is a symbol the universal truth, urges the worldly powers that they should always worship spiritual power, in the interest of world peace and human prosperity. According to Gandhi, peaceful co-existence is a royal road to world peace.

“The force of the spirit is very progressive and endless. Its full expression makes it unconquerable in the world. Without the recognition of this truth and due effort to realize it, there is no escape from self-destruction.”

It is the true religion of humanism. The world should encourage Gandhian philosophy of ‘One-World-Brotherhood’ by putting an end to all the forces of separatism i.e. racialism, linguism, religious fanaticism, communalism, provincialism, regionalism, narrow nationalism etc. According to Gandhi mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. The Western science and technology is going towards destruction, as it lacks right direction. The scientists in the West are using Atomic Energy (the best achievement of science) for destructive purposes i.e. for the preparation of Atom and Hydrogen Bombs will reduce the total humanity into zero within a few minutes in the next World war. Gandhian philosophy of the East can surely give the proper constructive direction to the Western science, in the interest of world peace. Gandhian philosophy is an antidote to nuclear tests. India, with the backbone of Gandhian philosophy, always stands for the peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion: In this 21st century when the world is facing violence and terrorism in every aspect of human life, the ideas and thoughts of M.K. Gandhi are found to be very relevant. His ideas and thoughts applicable to establish a new social order based on love and non-violence. This might be the main reason for declaring 2nd October, 2007 as the International Year of Nonviolence by United Nations. Every year 2nd October has been observed as Non-violence Day in many countries of the World. During the present nuclear age, when the warmongers are diverting atomic energy towards destructive channels, we must follow a new discipline of ‘Gandhian Peaceful Co-existence’ at this critical stage. The indiscipline of destruction, violence, mutual fear, hatred and war has to be replaced by the discipline of construction, non-violence, mutual confidence, love and peace respectively, during the present critical nuclear age. It is only through this way that we can save ourselves from self-destruction. At this critical hour, when atomic tests and manufacture of atomic weapons is in full swing, we must follow Gandhian Peaceful Co-existence in the interest of permanent and ever-lasting world peace counteracting whole-sale slaughter of mankind by dint of Atom and Hydrogen bombs. The horrible diseases of separatism, narrow-nationalism, religious-fanaticism, racialism, communalism, provincialism etc, are to be put to and throughout the world by laying great stress on Gandhian principle of ‘Live and let others live’. It is only in this way that we shall be having a happy world in which people live like brothers, help one another in misery and share jointly in the greatest Gandhian mission of ‘world without fear’. Gandhian India wants ‘Peaceful Co-existence’ between ‘Anglo American Bloc’ and ‘Communist Bloc’ and between Arab countries and Israel. Nowadays science runs counter to spirituality; it would bring about total annihilation of the world. Nuclear weapons should be abolished. Where from do these destructive weapons, big or small originate? They are the product of unhealthy feelings of mutual hatred, jealousy, fear and exploitation which are prevalent among nations, societies, and individuals owing to ignorance and misunderstandings. Therefore, we should try to strike at the roots of these evil dispositions. Gandhian philosophy can change the war-mentality of the students, teachers, and lecturers into peace-mentality. Under the supreme influence of this philosophy, science will become the most sincere and best servant of humanity. Scientific inventions should serve mankind in the best way, giving a death blow to war-mongers. In short, it is Gandhian philosophy of ‘Live and let others live’ that has really made India the light-house of international peace. In the 21st century, when the war-mongers are busy in their diplomatic talks and when Western scientists are busy in their nuclear tests; Gandhian secular philosophy from India is the lighthouse which throws its spiritual light of peace, non-violence, philosophy of emotional integration and universal brotherhood of all sides. The present world is full of sufferings. There are many people in this world, who are semi-starved, homeless, diseased, idle-slaves, poor etc. The rapid diseases of absolute materialism, colonialism, imperialism, war-mentality, mutual hatred, greed etc. are crushing the millions. In my opinion, Gandhian philosophy is the source of eternal happiness, in this world of sufferings. It takes us from false religion to ‘true religion’. It gives all the teachers and students a right direction towards ‘Supreme Bliss’ and ‘Eternal Happiness’. It takes us from

mortal materialism to immortal spiritualism. It takes us from violence to non-violence. Gandhian philosophy lays great stress on the fact that we should live for others, in this way paving a permanent spiritual road to world peace.

Works Cited:

1. M.K Gandhi, *Young India*, 23 March, 1922, P,166.
2. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi* P.13.
3. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Pub. House, 1949, Vol.I, p.30.
4. M.K Gandhi, *Young India* July; 17, 1924, P. 236.
5. M.K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, (1952). P.71.
6. Jayaprakash Narayan : *A Picture of Sarvodaya Social Order*, P.51
7. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, (1952). P.71.
8. M.K Gandhi, *Harijan*: July 31, 1937.
9. Pyarelal Nayyar, *Mahatma Gandhi, The last phase*. Ahmedabad, Navajivan Pub. House, 1958, P.359.
10. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 02.07.1925, P.232.
11. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, dt. 10.02.1946.