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The Gandhian Way to provide a Stable world with Planetary Peace & Human Well-Being

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Peace is not merely the absence of war & violence. It demands freedom from oppression, from hunger & from ignorance. Only under these conditions can people develop their capacities freely & responsibly," said Willy Brandt¹ highlighting Peaceful Co-existence as the spirit of solidarity. The quotation echoes Gandhian Thought. Mahatma Gandhi, a legendary figure in Indian History has laid down the way leading to Planetary Peace & Human Well being. Peace promotes well-being by creating congenial conditions or conducive atmosphere which leads to the general well-being.

It may be noted that the human well-being consists in harmonious development of all aspects of life—economic, social, political, physical, psychological & spiritual. Gandhian Philosophy caters to all of these needs & provides solid theoretical structure comprising of the pivotal concepts of Truth & Non-violence, Bread-labour, Trusteeship, Sarvodaya, Village-reconstruction, Local Sovereignty, Decentralization etc. The first part of my paper elaborates on this conceptual framework of Gandhian thought-structure whereas the second concluding part deals with critical evaluation & relevance of Gandhian principles in 21st century.

Part I

Gandhiji emphasized concept of 'Truth' so much so as the sole justification for human existence. He asked us to devote ourselves wholly to truth whether working, eating, drinking or playing till dissolution of the body makes us one with truth.

Truth is so important for Gandhiji that he identifies it with God. At one stage, he declared that God is truth but his experiments with truth made him to realize that the order is to be reversed. When we say, "God is

truth," it also means "God is Love," "God is Light," etc, but when we say "Truth is God," it has the power to convert even the atheists into theists because even the atheists are the votaries of Truth.

Gandhiji was convinced that both Truth & Non-violence are inherent in human nature. He regarded both as old as the hills & are actually the two sides of the same coin. Truth is the end & non-violence is our Supreme Duty. It is believed that if means are taken care of, the end will be reached positively.

Satyagraha, the means, according to Gandhiji is a relentless search for Truth. It literally means "insistence on Truth" or "Firm adherence to Truth." Gandhiji called it "Love-force" or "Soul-force." It is to be practised in all spheres of life including politics. Therefore, we find that Gandhiji insisted on Purity of means. "End never justifies the means" was his strong conviction which is in accordance with his principles of Truth & Non-violence. Purification of Politics, Moralizing of Economics, and fighting evil without hating or harming the evil-doer was his watch-words. Neither rude & violent counter-attack nor embarrassed & shame-faced retreat was approved by Gandhiji because he realized that violence thrives on counter-violence & can breed nothing but violence. Violence not only has a tendency to escalate but it also precludes "Dialogue."²

The question is often raised whether Non-violence can be applied as Absolute Value. It is applicable provided it is against opponents with a moral conscience but useless against an enemy without qualms. As said by Nelson Mandela, "Non-violent passive resistance is effective as long as your opponent adheres to the same rules as you do. But if peaceful protest is met with violence, its efficacy is at an end."³ Gandhiji would differ from Mandela because he believed firmly that no indi-

vidual can be without conscience. His point is that tendency for violence increases with attack being revenged by another & hence such tendency needs to be avoided. To recall UNESCO Preamble, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed."

The main thrust of Gandhian Thought is that individual change is a necessary pre-requisite of social change. Only a changed man can change the world. The mindset of an individual has to be changed in order to bring out seminal, concrete social change.

With a view to bring out Social change & to promote peace & well-being, Gandhiji laid down Eleven Vows called Vratas emphasizing Celibacy, Self-control, Dignity of Labour, Swadeshi etc. Swadeshi implies optimum utilization of local resources & benefits derived out of it being shared by the same group of people. For avoiding lop-sided development, Gandhiji put forward the ideas of Decentralization & Village-Reconstruction. He said that our capacity for self-rule depends on our capacity for solving without reference to, or intervention of Government.

Gandhiji, being influenced by Thoreau believed that the government which governs the least is the best government. This reflects Gandhian understanding of Swaraj. It implies minimum rule of the government over the people & the society. It means self-rule & self-restraint. It is the ideal which aims at promoting the welfare of all, the upliftment of all called "Sarvodaya."

According to Gandhiji "Sarvodaya" is an all round development of all people irrespective of all people, class, creed, religion or caste. Contrary to the principle of the survival of the fittest, Sarvodaya believes in the protection of the weakest & the survival & development of all. Thus, Sarvodaya envisages integrated development of the entire nation with no distinction such as haves & have-nots, privileged & under-privileged.

The philosophical foundation of the idea of Sarvodaya is the deep faith in Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship. It is believed that everything belongs to God & is from God. It follows, therefore, that it has to be shared by His creation. The creation is not entitled to possess anything beyond the rightful share & beyond what we need. We all should regard ourselves as Trustees & the Trust has to be used for the welfare of the society. The idea of trusteeship is beneficial to various sectors—rural-urban, rich-poor &, hence, is necessary for Village-reconstruction too.

It is impossible to bring out rural development with-

out proper education of rural population. Of course, by education, Gandhi did not mean mere literacy but a medium for the development of mind, body & soul.

Incidentally, following Indian tradition, Gandhiji modestly made no claim of the originality of his views. He says "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides & my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to live in other peoples' houses as interloper, a beggar or a slave."⁴

Part II

While evaluating the Gandhian thought-structure, it may be observed that Gandhian views, in certain fields are modernistic &, at times, post-modernistic. His belief in human rights, in equality of all human persons, in Democracy, in the principle of governance through persuasion rather than coercion indicate that he cannot be said to be antagonistic to Modernity.

Though up to a certain extent, he appears to be Modernistic in his outlook, he also seems to be the critique of modernity. He is the critique of materialistic & consumerist approach to life, of the notion of scientific & technological progress, of practices such as large-scale methods of production, rapid transportation, allopathic medicine. He never agreed with the idea that it is the duty of those who subscribed to such values to impose the same on the rest of the world.

To put it differently, in Gandhi's opinion progressed sciences or developed technology, rapid means of transport & superior printing presses are not the defining features of civilization at all. Gandhian understanding of civilization is peculiar. He maintains that civilization is the mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Thus a civilized person is one who consistently discharges his or her duties cheerfully, disinterestedly & selflessly. Does not such a soul fit perfectly in modern professional work-culture? I think citizens or 'Cosmozens' who believe that there are the inhabitants of the cosmos are the need of the hour.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that Gandhiji may be regarded as a post-modernistic thinker because of his concept of 'Truth'. Prior to the post modernists, it was realized by him that 'Truth' is a relative concept. As far as we are in the mortal frame, it is difficult, if not impossible to realize the perfect Absolute Truth. It is Imperceptible but its glimpses are possible. We can have its glimpses during life. Life is nothing but the con-

stant, persistent search for the realization of Absolute truth passing through various stages of relative truths. Though relativity of truth is the meeting point of Gandhism & post-modernism, there is a point of divergence too. Gandhiji necessarily presupposes Absolute Truth which is discarded in Post-modernistic world-view.

Gandhism echoes the contemporary environmentalist concern too. Like all Indian philosophers, his idea of Developmentalism positively embraces or encompasses ecological awareness. Of course, his works did not speak of ecology as such. But his concern for the environment is obvious, natural, and spontaneous. It flows from the realization that humans are essential parts of organic whole of the life-systems & not only human life is precious having sanctity; animals, birds, plants & other living beings too need human protection. Humans have no moral authority to destroy them as they do have life. On the contrary, it is the supreme duty of mankind to protect, preserve & sustain the environment. That is why, I want to conclude by pointing out that the Gandhian way does not intend to promote just the human well being but the well beings of all the earthlings (called Sarvabhutahita) inhabitants of the beautiful earth – the only home we have to care for & share in.

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Following the presentation of this paper, the discussion triggered the controversy between Tilak & Gandhi. B. G. Tilak, a great freedom fighter, is not as widely known as M. K. Gandhi for various reasons. He is popularly called ‘Lokamanya’ i.e. ‘Acknowledged by the masses’. Though he attained utmost popularity at the national level, his popularity could not transcend the limits of the nationality. Actually, he is one who sensitized the man in the street to struggle for freedom. There are two possible views - to attain freedom by any means whatsoever & to attain it non-violently. To put it differently, one way is to fight the evil with equal force. This is the militarist approach of Tilak but Gandhiji, a pacifist, following Buddha & Christ, upholds the noble principles of Truth & Non-violence even for the enemies—rather, especially for the enemies. Taking recourse to the most ancient & sacred Hindu scripture ‘Bhagavad-Gita’, Tilak justifies his position that war & violence are at times inevitable & it is ones duty to face it without any sort of negativity. Gandhiji, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to control one’s own desires & passion which are breeding grounds of the war & vi-

olence. Tilak’s policy is known as ‘Shatham prati Shyatham’ where as Gandhi’s policy is known as ‘Shatham Prati api Satyam’. It is interesting to compare & contrast their views & to show how Gandhian view goes close to the African Concept of Ubuntu.⁵ The discussion during the session suggested the parallel between Malcolm X & Martin Luther King.

Endnotes

1. From a speech on 6-Nov-1968 at UNESCO conference.
2. M K Gandhi – Speech at YMCA at Chennai, 27-Apr-1915, *Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol 14 P 424
3. The Autobiography of N Mandela – “Long Walk to Freedom” – PP 146-147
4. Young India – 1.6.21 P 170
5. An attempt is made to show the same in the paper presented in the conference on Satyagraha – A pro peace agenda (11-13 Sept 2006) at Durban, South Africa. The paper is published by Gandhi Development Trust.

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