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Relevance of Gandhian Thought in Contemporary Time

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Abstract:

Once Einstein rightly said that coming generation 'will scarcely believe that such a one as this, ever in flesh and blood, walked upon this earth'. For Gandhi politics is only a pathway to the service of God. He throws lights to the whole mankind through his noble ideas. He could be counted as the real representative of Indian ethos and global peace. In modern India a question arises in the mind of modern man about the relevance of Gandhian philosophy. His philosophy is guided by morality. In the time of industrialisation, urbanisation and hatred the world facing many problems like pollution, ecological degradation, poverty, terrorism, communal violence. Ghandhi gave us his ideas which can relates to the modern era of both India & rest of the world. He attempted to create a social framework which is based on moral values, altruism, and equality. It appears that Gandhi's theory is still relevant in light of this modern society.

Keywords:

Political thoughts, concept of economy, education, Swaraj, Non-violence, Satyagraha

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Introduction

Gandhiji's life and work transcend the specifics of India's struggle to address universal questions of ethics, power, and human dignity. Born in 1869, Gandhi evolved from a barrister in London to the leader of India's nationalist movement, making a practical philosophy that united metaphysical rigor with grassroots activism. Gandhiji was a man of versatile. He wedded by morality and gave these ideas a coherent form by putting his ideas into reality. Although his context was colonial India, his concepts of non-violent resistance (satyagraha), village republics, trusteeship, and communal harmony resonate globally. This paper maps Gandhi's key ideas, explores their theoretical underpinnings,

and assesses their applicability to modern political, social, economic, and environmental dilemmas.

Gandhian Political Thought

1. Non-Violence (Ahimsa)

Gandhi believed in non-violence. It was the weapon which he used to gain India's independence. He taught the us that one can achieve anything through the weapons of non-violence, tolerance and love. To him non-violence means not to abstain from violence, but it is much more profound in practice and its application. No doubt that it is the weapon of the strong and not that of the weak. Gandhiji is admired for his continuous encouragement for peace and non-violence. Presently the world is moving through the phases of war, violence incidents, brutal killings and terrorism. Gandhi's idea of non-violence is now more significant requirement of the time.

2. Sarvodaya – Welfare of All

It was Gandhiji who was the first to use the term 'Sarvodaya'. It means welfare of all. Sarvodaya represents the highest form of self-sacrifice and social service. He conceptualises a society which will based on love, unity, solidarity, cooperation, sacrifice and service. The driving force of Sarvodaya is humanism. Gandhi's political vision was guided by **Sarvodaya**. It is the idea of upliftment for all and especially the poorest and weakest section of the society. Gandhiji was aware that many people for long have remained weak, neglected & underprivileged. These people should be enabled to have their say in the governance. He believed society must be judged by how it treats its most marginalized members. In today's world of economic inequality and social exclusion, Sarvodaya urges us to build more just and inclusive systems. Policies aiming at social equity, universal healthcare, education for all, and poverty alleviation resonate with this idea. Gandhi's emphasis on dignity of labour and equitable distribution of resources remains crucial as we confront the negative effects of unchecked capitalism. By using the idea (Sarvodaya) Gandhiji aimed at building a new order which would be truly democratic. His idea of Sarvodaya offers solutions to many present challenges. It can be applied to address the problems of economic inequality to social injustice and many more. In the era of consumerism and capitalism Gandhis ideas continues to guide initiatives focused on sustainable development, social justice and equitable society for the marginalised people.

3. Decentralization and Sustainable Development

Gandhi's preference for **village industries** and **simple living** has become increasingly relevant in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. In the Gandhian idea of decentralised state, Gandhiji emphasised on Panchayati Raj system where the person and the flow of political power are both given equal weight from bottom to top. By the amendment of 73rd & 74th amendments local self-government got more power than before. Gandhian idea is reflected in the 73rd & 74th amendment of our

constitution which is related with the improvement of rural administration of India. Directive Principles of our constitution are direct reflection of Gandhian principles.

4. Civil Disobedience and Satyagraha

Movements like the Arab Spring, anti-apartheid protests, and climate strikes by youth activists like Greta Thunberg have adopted similar methods, proving that Gandhi's legacy is still alive in how people seek justice peacefully. Satyagraha means to be with truth. It is Gandhi who successfully designed and developed Satyagraha as a political weapon against British raj in India. According to him satyagraha is, "the exercise of the purest soul force against all injustice, oppression and exploitations". Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha is a high-level philosophical credo. Here the word Satya comes from the word Sat that means which is eternal, unchangeable and pure. In spiritual philosophy satyagraha is equivalent to God. If the existence of God can be accepted in all beings, then there was no hatred to anyone. Satyagraha wants not to endanger the opponent but to overwhelm him by the power of love. With forgiveness and non-violence in mind satyagrahi will win everyone's heart. These efforts can be applied to the government and to the common man.

5. Communal Harmony and Unity

In a world increasingly divided by religious, ethnic, and cultural conflicts, Gandhi's efforts to promote **communal harmony** hold great significance. Gandhi's message is especially crucial today as societies face polarization, hate speech, and religious intolerance. Gandhi was a religious person. He has deep respect to the religious sentiments of others. He propagated the secular idea of Sarvadharmā Sambhava. It means all religions are equal. According to him all great religions have the ability to set up brotherhood and unity among its people. Religion must work as unifying force to create togetherness among people. Religion is the doctrine about the creator and the method of worshipping creator. Religion not only makes personal purification but at the same time it creates powerful social bond. Religion is an integral part of human life. Religion teaches people to be just, moderate and inspires them to achieve their own character perfection by achieving success and well-being in life.

Gandhian Concept of Society

The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was very much inspired by Gandhiji. He learnt a lesson from Gandhiji that in the time of decision making one always should keep in mind whether the decision will be helpful for the poorest people of the country. Only by this way a value-oriented society can be formed. In the time of distrust, suspicion and hatred Gandhi's concept of love for the common people is the dire needs of the time. To achieve this goal, one should need to purify himself. Gandhi's idea of society was based on the principle of Swaraj, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya and Ahimsa. According to him Dharma unites all irrespective of their social position and Adharma makes society into pieces. He said that ideal society only can be possible when societal

harmony, village development, economic equality, development of the Adibasis, and moreover development of cottage industry is established.

Concept of Economy

In the era of globalization, Gandhi's focus on sustainable development and minimal consumption resonates strongly. His idea of "simple living and high thinking" encourages reducing waste, conserving natural resources, and living in harmony with nature—principles vital for tackling environmental crises such as climate change and resource depletion. Being a great champion of individual freedom, Gandhi was deeply suspicious to the state. He was opposed to state controlled, regulated economy. To him violence of private property is less injurious than the violence of state. Here Gandhiji proposed 'trusteeship' for the surplus property of rich people. He proposed that the rich man will act as the trustee of his surplus wealth. It will be their duty to ensure the surplus be invested in social development. Actually, Gandhiji stressed on individual purification and moral regeneration of the society. To him only a religious or moral approach could usher in economic equality & justice. The desire to accumulate more wealth and property can be destroyed not by violence but by moral campaign. Moreover, Gandhi's economic thought promotes equity and social justice by prioritizing the needs of the poor and marginalized.

Concept of Education

Gandhiji believed that education needed to change and be revolutionized such that needs of the lowest of the poor were met rather than those of the imperial exploiter. He believed that education should bring out the greatest qualities of man. Gandhi's ideas on education continue to be highly relevant in the modern world. He introduced the concept of "Nai Talim" or Basic Education, which emphasizes learning through productive work such as crafts, agriculture, and community service. In contrast to traditional education systems focused on rote memorization and theoretical knowledge, Gandhi's philosophy promotes holistic education. He believed education should develop the head (intellect), the heart (character), and the hands (skills). This balanced growth nurtures not just academic abilities but also moral values like truth, non-violence, empathy, and respect for others. These values are critical for creating peaceful, ethical, and harmonious societies today.

Gandhi was a strong advocate for universal education, including for marginalized groups, women, and rural populations. His vision of education as a tool for empowerment and social justice is significant in addressing contemporary issues of inequality and exclusion in education systems worldwide. Gandhi placed strong emphasis on the development of democratic values in children when it came to schooling. In summary, Gandhi's educational philosophy fosters practical skills, moral integrity, social inclusion, and environmental responsibility, making it a timeless guide for building an inclusive, just, and sustainable education system in the 21st century.

Concept of Swaraj

Swaraj, meaning "self-rule" or "self-governance," was a central idea in Gandhi's political philosophy. Naoroji & Tilak also used the idea of Swaraj against British rule. But they used the concept negatively. To them Swaraj means national independence or emancipation of a country from foreign rule. But Gandhiji used the term positively. To him Swaraj means complete or real democracy. He speaks of 'Purna Swaraj' to emphasize this positive connotation of democracy. For Gandhi, Swaraj was not just freedom from British colonial rule but a deeper concept involving. Swaraj meant to be free from external influences and foreign control. Gandhi's Swaraj aimed at building a society based on truth, non-violence, and self-sufficiency, where people actively participate in their own governance and social welfare. It refers to a form of government in which every individual has a voice. If the authority abuses power, the people will have the right to resist them. According to him, "... real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority". Swaraj stood for a rigorous disciplined moral way of life for every Indian. Gandhiji emphasised that swaraj being a moral entity had to be attained by moral means. In today's competitive and fast-paced world, we must have control over our inner conscience. Gandhi's concept of **Swaraj** goes beyond political independence; it means self-rule at every level – individual, community, and nation.

Other principles

Gandhiji was concerned about environmental pollution. In fact, Gandhi had forecasted long before the issue of Global Warming. Rachel Carson in his book (Silent Spring) had highlighted the noxious effects of pesticides. He warned that if humans will destroy the nature than nature will be definitely retaliating to humans. But Gandhiji long before of this book had written, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed.....the wars of our times spring from greed". He also mentioned earlier that, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed". His concern for environment now getting more importance in the agenda of governments and non-governmental organisation. He focused on his "Hind Swaraj" that the machine culture and industrialisation will harm the environment and endanger other species. Sustainable development is necessary in present times. He actually advocated for Green Thought. His idea of sustainable development is highlighted by UNO in its programme of sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the early part of twentieth century, Gandhi was the man who organised mass women participation against British rulers. Before Gandhi liberation movement in India basically participated by men. Gandhi was a key figure in bringing about dramatic improvements to the position of women. The emancipation of Indian women, who were and still are the most suppressed and downtrodden group in society from a variety of social dimensions, was essential in his view for the liberalisation and overall progress of humanity. Gandhiji

believed that by only empowering women India's future will be saved. He was instrumental in removing women from household duties and integrating them into society. The Gandhian concept of Women empowerment is still relevant because public glass ceilings have yet to be broken.

Gandhi's concept of character building is still relevant today. Character development was given more weightage in his educational concept because it included nonviolence, purity of ideas and actions. The world is facing societal detrition in present times. Political parties are using violence in today's world to suppress any criticism which poses a severe danger to democracy. Men and women work to provide for their daily requirements as a result of industrialisation and the increased cost of life. Industrialisation creates anti-social traits all over the world. These anti-social traits are the outcome of an impure soul and corrupt ideals. Companies are finding employees who are trustworthy, capable and helpful. In order to achieve this aim, we should move further on the path of non-violence and truth. It is necessary to adapt such curricula (Gandhi's beliefs) in schools for the fulfilment of viable society.

Gandhi's concept of Nationalism was dedicated to independence. He was an ardent nationalist. According to him, "For me patriotism is the same as humanity." His first mission was to see India freed from foreign rule. In India there were contradictions between castes, classes and religions. He was aware about these contradictions. But he tried to carry the whole nation with him in the struggle against the British Government. He mentioned that other questions could be addressed after independence was won. Actually, was a broad-minded nationalist. He mentioned that, "I do not want my house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to live in other people's house as an interloper, a beggar or a slave". His final mission was to see the world was a single family with unity, peace and happiness. "The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind", he said. He was keen on maintaining balance between nationalism and internationalism.

Are Gandhian principles still relevant?

Once Rabindranath Tagore told we often cannot recognise the great man. The mind does not have the simple power to understand of his greatness. This happened many times. We have left those who are superior to us. Even after hundred and sixty years of his birth, no full biography of Mahatma Gandhi has been published however Jawaharlal Nehru had that good fortune long ago. This is perhaps because such a complex character as an individual is rare in history. Though he is known as Mahatma, he is completely different from Goutam Buddha, Jesus Christ or Chaitanya. We can find a strange even a contradictory level of consciousness in him. Sometimes he is liberal, sometimes an uncompromising anarchist. At the same time, he is the spokesperson of the rich and the merchant and also the comrade in arms of the peasants and the workers.

The mixture of cooperation with non-cooperation and compromise with conflict made him very much attractive to the common man.

In his book "Hind Swaraj" he expresses his views on modern civilisation. He saw some ugly aspect of materialistic civilisation. We have lost our peace in the pile of consumer goods. He showed a different path. According to him in ancient India there was no exploitation in agricultural or cottage-based industry or exchange-based village life. People lived in peace there. There was no violence. From materialism to the industrial revolution and from that to imperialism which made violence global. It must be stopped but it should not be with the weapons, but with truth and violence.

Historian Amalesh Tripathi called Gandhi a messianic nationalist. It is a political ideology where religion and messianic thinking combine. In case of India sometimes it was established in the Aryan age sometimes in the Ram Rajya. In his book 'Hind Swaraj' Gandhi favoured a village-oriented society. He also wanted to established Ram Rajya. But in the same time if we see Rammohan to Swami Vivekananda they held great views on Indian civilisation. But they did not consider it the best. Instead of chasing old glory they wanted to build a new India by combining the best traditions from the East and the West.

One question often arises in our mind that what has large scale industry and welfare state given us. It has given rise to license raj, a vicious circle of ministers, bureaucrats, big scams and growing unemployment along with class-wide violence. In fact, the market economy cannot solve our problems. Not state industry, not market economy, may be the direction of human society's evolution is hidden somewhere else. Until we find it Gandhi will not be irrelevant.

Conclusion

After so many years still the question arises in our mind are Gandhian principles holds significance in present times. So many years after independence Gandhi's place in India today is in museum, in some dusty marble statues and in some lifeless ceremonials. Gandhi was the first political leader in the modern world who sought to inspire the search for truth, acknowledging the responsibility of politics to the people and to the morality. In today's India, devoid of Gandhi, politics is completely disconnected from values. Today's politics is filled with violence and the display of brute force, lies and corruption and the prevalence of lawlessness in political competition. Naturally the 'Swaraj' that Gandhi dreamed of is still beyond our reach even after several years of political independence. Gandhian thought is neither a relic of colonial India nor a utopian fantasy. Its core principles—satyagraha, swaraj, trusteeship, and non-violence—continue to offer practical insights for contemporary dilemmas. While adaptations are necessary to address scale, complexity, and digital transformation, Gandhi's insistence on ethical coherence and community solidarity remains a beacon for global justice, sustainable development, and human flourishing.

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