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**Relevance of Gandhi in 21<sup>st</sup> Century****Dr Dipak Kumar Dash\* & Dr Sangram Behari\*\****\*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Christ College, Cuttack, Odisha, India.**\*\*Assistant Professor, Sri Sri Bayababa College, Mahakalapada, Kendrapada, Odisha, India.***Abstract**

In the sky of humanity, a number of stars are dazzling. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is one of such star. He throws light to the whole mankind through his ideas. He was a rare combination of ideas and action. Gandhi was unique in his fight against injustice and exploitation. He is a propagator of truth and non-violence. Gandhi could be counted as the real representative of Indian ethos and global peace. Now a question arises in the mind of the ultramodern man about the relevance of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhian philosophy is immortal in nature. In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, industrialization, urbanization and modernization create many problems such as pollution, ecological decay, poverty, terrorism, communal violence etc. Amidst this a question is arise in the mind that what is the importance of Gandhian philosophy in this present world. This article is an attempt to examine how Gandhi and his ideas are now more relevant and gives light as a beacon to humankind.

*Keywords: Gandhi, Satyagraha, Swaraj, Decentralisation, Khadi, Charakha, Non violence, Truth*

**Introduction:**

In the sky of humanity, a number of stars are dazzling. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is one of such star. He throws light to the whole mankind through his ideas. He was not only a representative of ideas but also action. Gandhi was unique in his fight against injustice and exploitation. He has spreaded the message of truth and non-violence to the humankind. Gandhi could be counted as the real representative of Indian ethos and global peace. Now a question arises in the mind of the ultramodern man about the relevance of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhian philosophy is immortal in nature. In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, industrialization, urbanization and modernization create many problems such as pollution, ecological decay, poverty, terrorism, communal violence etc.

Gandhiji has enriched the world philosophy with his ideas of spiritualization of politics, swaraj, sarvodaya, satyagraha, constructive programmes, Trusteeship, Swadeshi and Khadi, basic education, Truth and Nonviolence, 11 vows, peace and sustainability of human society. All such ideas of Gandhiji contribute to his dream of equitable, just and egalitarian society. Gandhi's political thought is multidimensional. He is one of the great activist as well as theoreticians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Generally, Gandhism consists of the ideas and work of Gandhiji. Gandhism primarily comprises of Gandhiji's contributions to the conception of non-violent struggle against Britishers. Truth and Non-violence are the cardinal principle of Gandhism. Gandhiji was not quite in favour of the concept of 'Gandhism'. He explained the cause for his disagreement by saying that there was no such concept as "Gandhism". As he explained: "There is no such thing as "Gandhism" and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. ... The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills". (Homer: 1956). He said that "I have made a simple attempt to relate the eternal truths to peoples' daily lives and problems that exist" (Mohanty: 2004).

So, he himself said that he had not taught any new thing to the world. 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" (Nehru: 1946).

### **Relevance of Gandhi in 21<sup>st</sup> Century:**

For all time a question lurks in the mind of the modern man with regard to the relevance of Gandhian thought. Gandhian philosophy can never die. In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, we face the challenge of ecological pollution, ecological scarcity, industrialisation, urbanisation and terrorism. Taking the present world scenario, one must find the validity of Gandhian philosophy.

Now, relevance of Gandhian political philosophy is felt through worldwide. Gandhian philosophy has touched all aspect of human life. In his philosophy he showed his love to individual and national freedom. Gandhi was a social reformer at large context. He had a multifaceted character. He was a visionary.

In today's world, Gandhiji is warmly remembered for his technique of truth, nonviolence and satyagraha. Gunnar Myrdal also said "In a time of deepening crisis in the underdeveloped world, of social malaise in the affluent societies, it seems likely that Gandhi's ideas and techniques will become increasingly relevant" (Prabhu & Rao: 1998).

Gandhi and his ideas are how deeply more relevant in present situation can be analysed in the following ways.

#### **1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):**

CSR is now the catchphrase in the corporate world as well as in the Government. This is an impression among some both in business and public at large that Now, the Government enacted a law by which the corporate and the business world must spend 2% of their profit for social betterment. This idea was germinated from Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship. (Iyengar: 2019)

#### **2. Critique of Modern Western Civilization:**

Gandhi has criticised modern western civilization. He viewed the modern civilization is based on violence. It was emerged and domesticated by violence. It generated and encouraged further brutality. Another shortcoming of the modern western civilization was that it has not accepted the role of religion and morality in human life. It calculated the level of human civilization development from the angle of its development in the field of technology. Through technology it dominates, manipulate and control the nature. Gandhi gave a warning in "Hind Swaraj" that as "modern civilisation functions on the basis an instrumental view of the physical nature and human beings, it will turn out to be a nine days wonder or even take humanity eventually to its doom, unless checked and corrected" (Anand: 2019). This is reflected in the writings of many scholars.

Such examples are Rachel Carson's "The Silent Spring"(1962), Marilyn Ferguson's "The Aquarian Conspiracy"(1980), Denis Meadows, Donella Meadows and Jorgen Randers' "The Limits to Growth"(1972), E.F.Schumacher's Small is Beautiful"(1973), "A Guide for the Perplexed"(1977), Alvin Toffler's "The Third Wave"(1980)(Anand:2019).

### **3. Green Thought:**

Environmental problem is now a major challenge to the humanity. Threats of Environmental pollution, depletion of natural resources and ecological imbalance are in top list problems of the human society. The world is now faced many disastrous. Albert Schweitzer remarked, "It is clear now to everyone that the suicide of civilization is in progress". (Sabri: 1999).

Gandhi has been forecasting the issue of Global Warming long before. Rachel Carson(1962) in his book "Silent Spring"he highlighted the noxious effects of pesticides. He warned that if humans will destroy the nature then nature will be definitely retaliating to humans. Yet three decades earlier Gandhi 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." In this context we remember Gandhi's message that "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed". It has been now used as one of the prime slogan of United Nations Environmental Programme(UNEP)(Nazareth:2019). His concern for environment is now getting priority in the agenda of governments and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). He apprehended that the machine culture and industrialisation will harm the environment. Sustainable development is quite essential in present times. So Gandhiji strongly propagated the idea of "Green Thought". His idea of sustainable development is highlighted by UNO in its programme of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For this, our economy and various developmental models should be based on it by which we can save earth from the catastrophe.

### **4. Sparsh Bhavana and Sharirshram:**

Gandhi by propagating the idea of Sparsh Bhavana and Sharirshram wanted to establish an egalitarian society. Now, it is very relevant to the contemporary age. During our freedom struggle, many freedom fighters experienced these ideas in their private as well as public life. Now government is working in different fields to remove untouchability. Already untouchability was abolished by law. Article 17 of our constitution clearly says about the abolition of untouchability.

### **5. Nationalism as a part of Internationalism:**

"For me patriotism is the same as humanity" observed Gandhi nearly 50 years ago. "In trying to serve India, I serve humanity at large". These words reflect Gandhiji's outlook on international affairs-which is neither national nor international but basically human. "Isolated independence is not the goal of the world status" he wrote in 1925, "it is voluntary independence". He is a broadminded nationalist. He said: "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 houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave"(Mehta: 2019).

### **6. A great communicator:**

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has rightly said, "Gandhiji was the first and foremost a great communicator. More than anyone else, he recognized that communication is the most effective tool to shape opinion and mobilize

popular support”. (Anand:2019) He has used ordinary as well as extraordinary means to communicate with Indian masses and got their impulsive response. He was able to reach all sections and classes of people of India. For this he used the verbal, non-verbal, written, sensory and extra-sensory means. He was able to touch the very hearts and souls of Indians. Gandhiji had emerged as a unique communicator through his multifaceted roles in public life. He was a teacher, a lawyer, a unique journalist, a writer, an ideal practitioner of universal code of ethics and moral behavior, and a non-violent revolutionary.

### **7. Gandhi as Management Guru:**

Gandhi is most often titled as an “Apostle of Non Violence”, “Father of the Nation”, “Architect of Non Violence Conflict Resolution” and a “Peace Icon”. Now a new facet of Gandhiji is discovered. Alan Axelrod called him as a Management guru. Alan Axelrod is a renowned author. He wrote the biographies on Queen Elizabeth I, Winston Churchill and Gen. George Patton. He wrote a book titled “Gandhi CEO: 14 Principles to Guide and Inspire Modern Leaders”. In this work he said “There is no doubt that Gandhiji was a good man and an intensely spiritual man, but he was also a manager and executive, a supremely practical leader for change (management)” (Nazareth: 2019). His book consists of 14 chapters. Each chapter is presenting one of the mentioned 14 principles. Among them he gives more stressed on the “humane and people-oriented approach” which is based on Gandhiji’s “Talisman”.

Axelrod highlights Gandhi’s vital insight that even oppressive governments derive their authority from the consent, voluntary or coerced, of the governed. He focuses that CEOs must learn that business cannot be run by coercion. So entrepreneurs should win the cooperation and trust of their employees or stake holders. They should welcome dissent because “if everyone is thinking alike, no one is really thinking”.

Now concepts like Total Quality Management (TQM), Customer Relations Management (CRM), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Safeguarding the Interests of All Stake Holders (SIASH), Frugal Engineering (FE), Lean Management (LM), Core Competence (CC), Building Scale at Lower Price Points (BSLPP), Culture and Innovative Thinking (CIT) and Visionary Leadership (VL) have come to take a prominent place in management theory and good corporate governance practices (Nazareth: 2019). Gandhi had urged practice of all these by 1920 and 30s.

### **8. Production of the Masses:**

Recently the Robotic Revolution has already brought a tremendous change in the human life. Because of it, many professions in the US and Europe have already become obsolete. The technique of automatic billing and drones is a major challenge in the way of employment opportunity. Thousands of jobs in accountancy and the delivery business had already been eliminated. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has given the statistics that “there will be a net loss of over 5 million jobs by 2020 across 15 major developed and emerging economies of the World” (Nazareth: 2019). Jack Ma, Chairman of the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba has proposed a surprisingly Gandhian antidote to this crisis. He said “In the next 30 years, the world will see much more pain than happiness. . . . Machines should only do what humans cannot. . . Only in this way can we have the opportunities to keep machines as working partners with humans, rather than as replacements (Nazareth: 2019).

In the past, Gandhi had foreseen that “labour saving” machines will put a barrier in the way of making labourers. He was in favour of “production by the masses”. He rejected the idea of mass production”. Gandhiji said humans to be industrious, “not like a machine, but like the busy bee”. (Johani & Mahakul: 2009) So he used Charka (spinning wheel) as his amulet for generating employment opportunity. Now

India's different policies and programmes to promote traditional cottage and village industries is nothing but a reflection of Gandhian ideas of production of masses.

### **9. Ethicisation of Politics:**

For Gandhi, politics should not be separated from ethics. Arnold Brecht described it as Scientific Value Relativism. Ethicisation of politics is a clarion call of the time. Political systems and constitutions will not work by undermining the moral and spiritual qualities of the people. (Brecht: 1959). Morality can bring social revolutions in our society. Now politics is designed as a game of corruption and deceitfulness. Thus, it is essential to inject morality and ethics into politics.

### **10. Gandhi's economic philosophy:**

Gandhi in the field of economy was inspired by John Ruskin. Ruskin's book "Unto This Last" has a deep impact on Gandhi. He has developed his own economic approach according to the situation of India. He has not supported the process of large scale industrialization. To him, many problems are arising in the modern world because of large scale industrialization. Gandhi said that labour not capital is the sole factor of production. In 1921, Gandhiji wrote, "that hurts the moral well being of an individual or a nation is immoral, and, therefore, sin". Again in 1924, he said that economics is wrong which ignores or ignore moral values. Khadi stood for the restoration and renovation of the Indian cottage industries. For him, khadi was the main instrument of Swadeshi.

Gandhian economy is still more relevant in our times. He was not completely against machine culture. To him, India is a country where capital is less and labour is plentiful. So it would be essential to establish labour intensive industries. He was alarmed that the use of machines in a rampant manner would create more unemployment. Modern industrial age is met such problem in every nook and corner of the society.

### **11. Decentralisation of Power:**

Gandhiji followed the principle of decentralisation of power. To him, Power should not be concentrated in a single hand. Gandhiji had a negative view point for the parliamentary democracy. In his magnum opus "Hind Swaraj" (Self Rule or Home Rule), he has criticised British Parliament as a sterile woman and a prostitute. For him good government cannot take the place of substitute for self-government. Gandhian idea of decentralisation of power is still relevant India in the form of panchayatiraj system. It is reflected in the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of our constitution which is related with the improvement of rural administration of India. Article 40 of our constitution is a direct reflection of Gandhian principles.

### **12. Gandhi on Secularism:**

Gandhi was a religious person. He has deep respect to the religious sentiments of others. He propagated a secular idea which is known as *Servadharma Sambhav*. It means equal respect to all religions. It represents his ideology of secularism. Religion was the cardinal principle of his life. He viewed that religion is not only worked as a way to detach men from one another but also a thread to bind them together. He said that all

great religions have the ability to set up brotherhood and unity amongst people. He said religion must work as a unifying force to create brotherhood and togetherness amongst men. He also said that the state must be a secular institution. Its foremost duty is to look after the secular welfare of public. He asserted that an individual's love to his religion is measured by looking his services to the needy. Gandhiji rightly said that "Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions. Its creed is all embracing... and all their religions are being weighed in the balance. Eternal truth is one. God also is one. Let every one of us steer clear of conflicting creeds and customs and follow the straight path of truth" (Gandhi: 2008). This reflects the secular perspective of Gandhi.

### **13. Gandhi on Education:**

According to Gandhi education is an instrument by which tool which the world can be changed. He said that those are literate that doesn't mean they are educated. To him, education is the only medium by which the overall development of an individual can be possible. Free and compulsory education for all girls and boys between the age of 7 and 14 years is at top in his list of education. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a reflection of this. He has stressed on vocational and functional education. Earning with learning was the motto of Gandhiji's scheme of education. He viewed that priority must be given to vocational courses because it will improve the efficiency of the students. As a result, self-sustained and self-employment villages can be established. Gandhiji's main aim was to build character through education. He was a votary of women education because without the development of half of the population of society real development is a myth. His view on education is very much relevant in the present age.

### **14. Gandhi on Socialism:**

Socialism is also one of the cardinal principles of Gandhian philosophy. His socialism is known as "Sarvodaya" whose literary meaning is "the welfare of all". To him, Sarvodaya is the instrument by which mobilizing the natural, material, economic, and spiritual resources of the society can be used for the advantage of whole society. It aims to establish an equitable socialist order. The growth and upliftment of every one will be ensured in such socialist order. He said that equality in real sense is not possible. So, efforts should be made to minimise the gap between the rich and poor as far as possible. Now Ayushman Bharat, poverty alleviation programmes, schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Obamacare policy (USA), are some examples by which the contemporary world has been trying to adopt the concept of Gandhian socialism (sarvodaya) as a basic principle.

### **15. Gandhian Values:**

Now the World is eyewitnessing the ruin of values. Gandhian principles are of vital importance now. His idea of self-empowerment and self-control are now considered as highly accepted principles. The degradation level of values is so high. Even now people are geared up to slay others only to satisfy their own desires. Respect of women is another idea of Gandhism. It is the need of the hour as the world is witnessing increasing brutality and suppression against women. It can be possible by following the exercise of self-control, respect to women, honesty etc. These are the essence of good administration and governance.

## 16. Idea of Swadeshi:

Gandhiji's another important concept is "Swadeshi". "Khadi" and "Charkha" are the centres of Gandhi's swadeshi. Swadeshi implies self reliance and liberation from poverty and hunger. It is the means to achieve the end of swaraj. It is now revived in our country particularly after the emergence of Multi-National Companies (MNCs). Because of Globalisation MNCs do their monopoly over the industrial products? So, people have no other way. They only talk of swadeshi. No doubt, the modern name of "Swadeshi" would be "self-reliance". Presently Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan of "Atma Nirvara Bharat" is nothing but the reflection of Swadeshi.

## 17. Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM):

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is the reflection of Gandhian idea of Swachhagraha. It was launched on 2<sup>nd</sup>, October, 2014. The main objective of this mission is to make our country free from the shame of open defecation. By it we can eradicate uncleanness as well as to build a Clean India. Actually it was Gandhi's dreams. Slowly and slowly SBM is gradually getting popular. Now it is counted as one of the world's largest people's movement. More and more Political leaders, volunteers, civil society members, common masses and stakeholders from Delhi to Pali are working as activists of this movement.

## 18. Cottage Industries:

Gandhi was in the support of the promotion of cottage industries to gratify the economic needs of poorest of the poor and the last man left in the society. New schemes such as Honey Mission, Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojan, Leather Artisans Development Scheme etc were launched for the benefit of farmers, Adivasis, SC and ST and marginalized communities of potters and cobblers. He always loved the marginalized community of the society-whom he called Harijan (the loved ones for the God). Following Gandhian principles, Government has recently launched programme for the development of another marginalized community of cobblers-polishing and mending shoes and footwear sitting on the footpaths. To give them a social status, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has renamed as Charkha Vikas Yojana (Leather-technicians) and set to distribute 70,000 advanced leather tool-kits in the year 2019 to provide proper training to them.

## 19. Gandhi on Non-violence:

We find conflicts today all around diverse in nature, degree and intensity. While some conflicts are resolved within a limited timeframe, others take long. Gene Sharp rightly said "A pertinent question lies here: How effective can a violent means be settling the long pending conflicts? Outcomes of such methods are often destructive. For these inflict untold sufferings on the innocent people, even if apparently resolved with violent means. Such outcomes are also short-lived." (Sharp: 2005). The only answer to such situation is Gandhian concept of non-violence. It is in this context the effectiveness of nonviolent struggle comes into limelight. No doubt, it is a weapon of the strong and not that of the weak. Gandhiji is admired for his constant encouragement for peace and nonviolence. In India, Nonviolent struggles are being taken up

against the continual neglect of the farming community, economic policies favouring multinational companies, votaries of special economic zones (SEZs), forcible acquisition of fertile land for industrialization, environmental degradation, construction of big dams resulting in displacement of people from their roots, inadequate compensation to the displaced, etc. President Frauen of Seychelles said that the principle of non-violence, that “We need to teach our children in present days, had been propagated by Gandhi a century ago” (Sharp: 2005).

### **Gandhian Philosophy after Gandhi:**

Gandhiji has influenced several prominent international leaders, both spiritual and political. According to Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leader “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”.

The Japanese Buddhist leader Disaku Ikeda was also influenced by Gandhi. He has a soft corner attitude towards Gandhian philosophy for enhancing human conscience. The South African Freedom fighter Nelson Mandela and the former South African President De Klerk are not only influenced by Gandhi but also followed his footprints. Gandhi had a deep influence on Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King Jr opined that “if humanity is to progress, then Gandhi can never be ignored. He observed that ignoring Gandhi would be at our own risk”. (Asopa: 2018)

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 remarked ‘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’. (Asopa: 2018)

Aung San Su Kyi, the famous Burmese leader was greatly motivated by Gandhiji. She was under house arrest for many years and now she is also under house arrest. She learnt the value of fearlessness from Gandhi. Now she is also following the same Gandhian method against the military junta government of Myanmar.

The prominent followers of Gandhian school are Vinoba Bhave, Thakkar Baapa, K. G. Mashruwala, J. C. Kumarappa, Kaka Kelkar, Dada Dharmadhikari, Shankarrao Deo, D. Mazumdar, J. P. Narayan and J. B. Kripalini and others. Scholarly support for the Gandhian peace movement comes from the Gandhian academics spread all over the country. Gandhian Studies is now occupying a prominent place in the syllabus of all universities.

A number of movements like Bhodan, total revolution, Chipko and Aapiko, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Silen Valley Movement, Solidarity Movement in Poland, Green Peace Movements in Europe, Civil Rights Movement in USA, Jal Abhishek Campaign, Rashtriya Jal Chetna Yatra and different Farmer's Movements are nothing but the experiment of Gandhian philosophy. Anna Hazare's Jan Lokpal Andolan of 12 days of fasting at Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi is again proving the experiment of Gandhian method successfully.

### **Conclusion**

Gandhi is now more relevant forever. His ideas are eternal. He is not a leader of local but the fragrance of his personality now is spread globally. In present time, Gandhi is universally accepted as a great leader. His personality is a rare combination of feminist, Liberator, secular thinker, communicator, internationalist, educationalist, environmentalist, social reformer. He is a Prophet of all over the universe. For the very survival of human being Gandhism is badly needed. It is vital for us to act upon Gandhi's blueprint. We shall



survive together if we walk in his path and if we will not do this then we must made up our mind that we are bound to perish . So choice is in our hand. His philosophy is now also working as a guiding factor for the whole humanity. Without any hesitation we can say implementation of Gandhi in a strict sense will create a better world.

If we will not follow the Gandhian principles then we must prepare to see the doomsday of the world. Gandhiji was leader of the past. He is a running commentary in the present. Definitely, he moves towards the future with a strong message for humanity. He is an evergreen leader. Gandhiji could stretch out to all- the high and the low, the rich and the poor, friends and foes. He said “My life is an open book. I have never had any secrets, so you can ask me about anything you wish to” (Pradhan:2019). His life itself became his message. The United Nations’ declare to celebrate 2nd October as the International Day of Non-violence in 2007 further strengthen that Gandhiji’s charisma is eternal. At last we can conclude with the message of Romain Rolland, the noted Gandhian “Gandhi, for us is not only the heroic guide of his immense people claiming its liberty and about to take it. He is the surest, the purest spiritual light shining in the dark skies of our time. Amidst the tempests in which the sinking ship of our civilization risks vanishing with all its cargo, he is the star that shows us the way – the only way still open that leads to salvation”. (Prabhu & Rao:1998) So, the entire humankind will be enormously benefitted if Gandhian ideas are practiced in the true sense. Gandhi is dead, but not his ideas. Like soul his philosophy is eternal.

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