

**The Philosophy of Gandhi and the Changing World of Today With
Special Reference to “My Experiments With Truth”****Dr Tarit Agrawal**

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.4.6.14**Abstract**

The moment the image of Gandhi comes before our eyes, certain questions arise in our minds: In what way does Gandhi have his relevance in the world today and to come? How can Gandhian thoughts influence today's generation? How can the world of today be benefited by what is called Gandhism? As a matter of fact, Gandhian philosophy is something which has its relevance today and will have its relevance in the time to come. The whole life of Gandhi was like a pilgrimage. He was a Mahatma in its true sense and spirit. The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi still keeps on influencing the generation of today by his philosophical thoughts whether it is his pacifism or truth and non-violence or satyagrah or vegetarianism or bramhcharya. It is really interesting to observe that this Mahatma, this half necked man sitting on a prayer mat shook off the British rule from India by sheer spiritual power. It really confirms that to understand the life and philosophy of Gandhi and its relevance today and in future is not an easy task. One will have to spend hours and hours in going through all this. Today in a world where we get up in the morning and read in newspapers and watch in news channels how the society we live in is altogether in grip of what we term as inhumanity, animality, cruelty and many others, we surely sometimes feel the indispensable and urgent need of Gandhi and his preaching. We dream of a world which is characterized by such ideals as liberty, equality, fraternity on the one hand and peace, truth and non-violence on the other. This is itself a clear proof how Gandhian philosophy rules our lives, our world.

Keywords- Gandhism, Pacifism, Non-violence, Satyagrah, Vegetarianism, Bramhcharya,

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most religious-minded souls in the modern world, gave the practical message of spirituality, love, Truth and non-violence but at the same time, it should be acknowledged that he did not enunciate any system of philosophy in the academic sense of the term. He lived a life of action, and sacrificed himself at the alter of Truth and non-violence. He is rightly called “a practical existentialist.” Indeed, there is concord between his

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philosophy and his daily conduct. Gandhiji's autobiography, his voluminous writings and speeches contain imperishable values which for the sake of convenience may be called "Gandhism" or "Gandhian philosophy" but he did not consciously formulate any system of philosophy either on speculation or empirical evidence. His ideas on God, Truth, non-violence, Satyagrah, politics, religion, education and social problems have permanent validity and are relevant in the fast changing world of Science and technology. Gandhian ideology or Gandhism is not a compendium of dogmas and doctrines, rules and regulations, inhibitions and injunctions; it is a way of life. Gandhiji did not say any new thing but he allied the old ideals of love, truth and non-violence to modern problems. In short, Gandhian thought contains "ancient solutions for modern problems."

In fact, "My Experiments With Truth" is an autobiographical work of Gandhiji, which unfolds almost all the facets of Gandhian philosophy. Of course, Gandhiji viewed life as a whole and did not divide its various segments. He prescribed only one set of values – truth and non-violence – for all walks of life. Gandhian thought is comprehensive. Faith in the existence of God is the cardinal element in Gandhian thought. According to Gandhiji, God is not an external reality, but an abiding presence in the human heart and an indefinable mysterious power pervading all things. Man without faith in God drifts like a rudderless boat on the pathless sea of life. We feel this mysterious power but do not see it. This unseen power makes itself felt but defies proof. It transcends reason. God is eternal. The phenomenal world changes but "there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together that creates dissolves and recreates : That informing power or spirit is God". This invisible divine power is purely benevolent. All national explanations cannot define God. God is indefinable; we can realize him only with "a simple child-like faith. God lives in our hearts but we do not realize his presence in ourselves. Therefore, the purpose of life is self-realization. Self-realization is God-realization and God can be realized if we learn to identify ourselves with all that lives. Hence, "boundless, selfless service according to Gandhiji, is the instrument of God-realization. Gandhiji realized God in the service of humanity. To Gandhiji, "God is Truth" and Truth is God." The greatest source of strength for Gandhiji was this absolute faith in God. His faith in God turned brighter and firmer with every trial he faced.

Truth and non-violence are very old principles which Gandhiji did not originate. Indeed, Truth and non-violence, the two basic principles of morality, were put before the people by the earlier prophets – Buddha, Mahavira and Christ. Gandhiji himself said, "Truth and non-violence are as old as hills." Mahatma Gandhi discovered the law of Ahimsa which had been submerged under conflicts, wars, dissensions and violence and extended its scope and application to all spheres of life – political, economic, social, individual and collective. Ahimsa and truth are correlated and can never be disentangled and separated. According to Gandhiji, Ahimsa is the means and truth is the end. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. Since Ahimsa is the means for the attainment of truth,

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we should firmly observe it in our daily life. Ahimsa is love infinite. None should be regarded as an enemy. We should love the evil-doer but should fight the poison of evil in his heart. "Hate the sin and not the sinner." With the observance of Ahimsa in thought, word and deed, truth cannot be realized. Truth, harmony, brotherhood and justice are the attributes of Ahimsa. It is soul force, himsa is physical force: "Man as animal is violent, but as spirit he is non-violent; the moment he wakes to the spirit within, he can not remain violent." The vow of non possession and the allied abstinences are essential for the practice of Ahimsa. Humility, consciousness of the living presence of God within one's heart, complete abstention from exploitation in any form and sound moral character are the perquisites for the practice of Ahimsa. Non-violence does not encourage passivity. It is an active force of the highest order. Ahimsa does not mean resignation from all real fighting against wickedness. Ahimsa is the doctrine of overcoming evil with good and doing well unto those who do evil unto you. To him, it was a practicable ideal. Cowardly people cannot practice it because it requires much of physical and moral courage in order to control the violent instinct in man. According to Gandhiji, non-violence is not a negative policy or doctrine, but it is a positive and honorable method of meeting violence, injustice, repression, tyranny and cruelty. It brings about harmony, peace and amity. Mahatma Gandhi was a practical idealist who practiced Ahimsa in his own life. He had his first object lesson in Ahimsa when he made a written confession to his father about his habit of stealing money for smoking. His father wept and forgave him. Apart from this, the observance of non-violence in international relations can ensure permanent peace, end of internecine conflicts among nations of the world and the fear of the third world war. World peace can be established only by following the doctrine of Ahimsa.

Satyagrah is a powerful weapon in the hand of a non-violent person. The principle called Satyagrah came into being before that name was invented. In South Africa Gandhiji launched a non-violent and peaceful agitation for redressing the grievances of the Indian community. He felt that the English word "passive resistance" was too narrowly constructed to explain the real nature of the Indian movement. In short, Satyagrah is the science and art of overcoming evil with good. It is absolutely a non-violent weapon. It is an abundantly powerful weapon which shook the foundations of the mightiest British Empire and liberated India. Satyagrah combines satya and ahimsa and, thus, its votary has infinite spiritual power. It has been fully successful in the political sphere. The aim of Satyagrah movement is not to capture power but to control and guide power effectively without capturing the machinery of government. The intention of a satyagrahi is never to embarrass the wrong doer. He appeals to the heart and not to the sense of fear. His object is to convert and not to coerce the wrong doer. A Satyagrahi never ignores the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He does not harbour any ill-will or bitterness against the latter. A Satyagrahi will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, himsa by ahimsa. There is no other way of

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purging the world of evil. The doctrine of Satyagrah is not new. It is merely an extension of the rule of domestic life of the political. The law of love is observed in settling family disputes and differences and on a wider scale; Gandhiji applied it to political and nation life. The essence of Satyagrah lies in refraining from violence, ill-will seeking continually to win him by love and self-suffering. In fact, Satyagrah is one of the most powerful methods of direct action. But before launching Satyagrah, a Satyagrahi should exhaust all other means. Apart from this, moral fitness is essential for a Satyagrahi. He goes to prison, not to embarrass the authorities but to convert them by demonstrating to them his innocence. A Satyagrah is fearless and he unhesitatingly trusts his opponent. He has implicit trust in human nature. He feels spiritual pleasure in forgiving his enemy. "Forgiveness is the virtue of the strong." Gandhiji further extended the scope of Satyagrah for the maintenance of liberty and peace in the world. Gandhiji developed three general types of Satyagrah :

(a) Civil Disobedience: A specific law is selected to be broken openly by one or by a group of Satyagrahis, who afterwards surrender themselves and cheerfully accept that full legal penalties for their actions.

(b) Non-Cooperation: The Satyagrahis refused to cooperate with an unjust system or action. This may take the form of no-tax-campaign or boycott of the government institutions. Non-cooperation implies that no person or group has power over us unless we grant it. In the joint conference of Hindus and Musalmans, which was convened at Delhi to deliberate on the Khilafat question, Gandhiji first of all presented a resolution for non-cooperation; "It is an inalienable right of the people thus to withhold cooperation. We are not bound to retain Government titles and honours, or to continue in Government service. If Government should betray us in a great cause like the Khilafat, we could not do otherwise than no-cooperate. We are therefore entitled to non-cooperate with Government in case of betrayal." Gandhiji prepared a draft of non-Cooperation resolution for the Gujarat political conference.

(c) Fasting and Penance: Fasting and penance are important factors in the technique of Satyagrah. Mahatma Gandhi believed in fasting for various purposes, first for health, secondly for penance and thirdly for non-violence and Satyagrah. Whenever Gandhiji found his followers going astray from the path of truth, non-violence and Satyagrah, he used to take religious fasting in order to create an atmosphere of repentance around the erring people. Fasting produced a salutary effect upon the erring people who never repeated their unbecoming behaviour in future. Mahatma Gandhi's fasting had magic effect even upon the English men.

The greatest achievement and lasting contribution of Gandhiji consists in giving the shape of action to the ideal of Satyagrah. He was both the propounder of the technique of Satyagrah and its practitioner. His experiments in Satyagrah in South Africa from 1906 to 1914 are given in detail in his book "The History of Satyagrah" in South Africa. He along with his followers observed miniature Satyagrah in connection with the Indian Volunteer

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Crops in England. Mahatma Gandhi envisaged Satyagrah as a powerful means of nation liberation and well being, as an instrument for establishing a non-violent society and also for maintaining it. He envisaged Satyagrah as a power that the people themselves could wield the defender and basis of their hard-won Swaraj.

To Mahatma Gandhi, brahmacharya meant “the fullest control over all the senses” and not merely “physical control over the organ of generation.” Control over the organ of generation is impossible without proper control over all the senses. “Without control over the mind mere physical control, even if it can be attained for a time is of little or no use.” Brahmacharya is an ideal form of conduct – “conduct which puts one in touch with God.” Brahmacharya means complete control of the senses in thought word and deed. Control of the palate is very essential for the practice of brahmacharya. Gandhiji pursued his own dietic experiments not merely from the vegetarian’s point of view but also from that of a brahmachari. As a result of these experiments he concluded that the brahmachari’s food should be limited, simple, spiceless and uncooked. As an external aid to brahmacharya fasting is as necessary as selection and restriction in diet. Gandhiji did not condemn the sex urge but he called it sheer ignorance “to believe that the sexual act is an independent function necessary like sleeping and eating. The world depends for its existence of the act of generation, and as the world is the playground of God and a reflection of His Glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world.” Absolute brahmacharya is an ideal state. If one dare not think of it, one may marry by all means, “but even then live a life of self-control” uncontrolled sex urge is animal-like. It is meant only for the act of creation and any other “use of it is a sin against God and Humanity.” it is the duty of married people to understand the true function of marriage. They should not violate the law of Brahmacharya “except with a view to having a child for the continuation of the race.” The attainment of brahmacharya or the conquest of lust is the highest endeavour of a man or woman’s existence.

Mahatma Gandhi propounded a conception of education which aims at developing the total personality of men and women. He laid great stress on moral and spiritual education and he also emphasized the need of manual or vocational training. Gandhiji envisaged education as an instrument of fulfilling the social purpose and did not approve the Western system of education. He aimed at evolving a pattern of education which suited the genius and exigencies of India and ushered her in an era of peace, prosperity and happiness for all. The aim of education, according to Gandhiji, is the complete development of physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral faculties of man. He repented all through his life for not participating in physical training in his student life and later on realized that “physical training should have as much place in the curriculum as mental training.” The supreme aim of education is “to make men who can see clearly and imagine vividly, think soundly and will nobly, plan quickly and act faithfully for their country’s service.” This is the Gandhian ideal

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of education which aims at the perfect development of intellectual facilities, but intellectual brilliance unaccompanied by sound moral character and spiritual development cannot deliver the goods. Therefore he regarded character building as proper foundation of education. Just as physical training is imparted through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit is possible only through the exercise, of the spirit. The exercise of the spirit entirely depends on the life and character of the teacher. Mahatma Gandhi felt that literacy was essentially not he did not put emphasis on literal education. He especially decried to English educational system because it did not inculcate the spirit of liberty and national welfare in the youths of the country. It developed slave mentality. He thinks that it is a superstition to think that the fullest development of man is impossible without the art of reading and writing. Literal knowledge adds “grace to life,” but is in no way indispensable for man’s moral, physical or material growth. He puts emphasis on natural training. “The eyes will read the pictures of letters and words as they will know other things in life; the ears will catch the names and meanings of things and sentences. The whole training will natural responsive, and therefore, the quickest and cheapest in the world.” Mahatma Gandhi laid much greater stress upon manual education than upon literary or theoretical education, because he knew that man has to earn his bread by the exercise of his hands. Education must make the youth self sufficient and for it manual or vocational training can be extended to the remotest corners of India. This kind of education was aimed at under the Wardha Scheme of education.

Although a staunch nationalist, Gandhiji was also a great internationalist. He reconciled the conception of nationalism with internationalism. He reconciled the conception of nationalism with internationalism. India, the land of his birth, had special attraction for Gandhiji because she had represented eternal values and truths through the ages. To him, India is essentially “Karambhumi”, the land of duty. It was his firm conviction that Truth and Non-violence alone could redeem India’s lost glory and she alone could show the torch of peace and love in the present war battered world. No other country could match the Indian civilization, evolved by our great ancestors. India could save her soul only by clinging to her ancient spiritual and moral heritage. India could save her soul only by keeping herself aloof from the materialistic civilization of the West. The use of violence would destroy India. Moreover, Gandhiji believed in the unity of India. India is a one nation because people belong to different castes, communities and religions live in it. Foreigner came here but without any breach of peace they assimilated with the main current of life. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. India has infinite faculty for assimilation. Gandhiji warned that linguistic redistribution should not militate against the organic unity of India. We should give up unhealthy provincialism because we are Indians first. The degrading poverty and the living conditions of millions of Indians appalled him and he endeavoured his best to improve their lot and to mitigate their sufferings. He dreamt of an India in which the distinction of the high and the low, of the rich and the poor will vanish; an

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India in which all citizens will work for the reconstruction and welfare of their country; an India in which all communities will live in perfect peace and harmony, an India in which the peasant will be given a conspicuous place and the village will be regarded as the pivot of democracy; an India in which women shall enjoy the same rights as men; an India which will be at peace with all the world and will have “the smallest army imaginable.” The Swaraj of Gandhiji’s conception is “the poor man’s swaraj” in which the poor will enjoy all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. In order to improve the condition of villages, educated young men should settle in villages and should disabuse the villagers of “their prejudices, their superstitions, and their narrow outlook.” They should spread education and intelligent information among them. The villages are in a condition of decay and the main task confronting every lover of the country is to prevent this decay and to reconstruct the villages. He envisaged a golden age for the Indian villages; “today, the villages are dung-heaps. Tomorrow, they will be like tiny gardens of Eden where highly intelligent folk whom no one can deceive or exploit dwell.” He was distressed to know that the villagers, specially the educated class among them, succumbed to the temptation of urban life and flocked to the cities. He therefore aimed at reviving the village industries and arts so that the villagers could attain self-reliance and self-sufficiency. The affluence of the cities is based on the exploitation of the poor villagers. This self-reliance would end their exploitation. The villagers should develop such a high degree of skill that articles prepared by them should command a ready market outside. He concentrated on the revival of the khadi and the spinning wheel with the intention of restoring spinning “to its ancient position as a universal industry auxiliary to agriculture, restored by the village folk when they have time to spare from agricultural operations.” The India of Mahatma Gandhi’s dreams was a democratic India. He called democracy “the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.” The welfare of all is the cardinal feature of democracy but it cannot be successful without self-discipline and humility. A born democrat is a born disciplinarian and is habituated normally to yield willing obedience to all the laws, human and divine. He thinks only in terms of democracy and thus he acquires the right of civil disobedience. Freedom that springs from humility and self-discipline has sovereign place in human society; unbridled freedom is not freedom in the real sense. It is “a sign of vulgarity injurious alike to self and one’s neighbours.” Individual freedom is the pivot of democracy. Gandhiji dreamt of an India in which every individual will enjoy freedom without any inhibition. Individual freedom can flourish “only under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsa.” In democracy, power is shared by all and in its absence it degenerated into monarchy. Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi disapproved English as the medium of instruction because it had done incalculable harm by isolating the intellectual from the common masses. He recommended vernaculars as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges and Hindi as the national language of India.

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Gandhiji realized that student had to play a vital role in the reconstruction of India. Therefore, in his numerous articles, speeches and discourses he advised the students to develop character and to imbibe the qualities of spirituality, non-violence, truthfulness, charitableness, innocence and sacrifice. He exhorted the students to play a major role in the reconstruction of Indian villages and in the uplift of Harijans. According to Gandhiji, it was quite wrong for the students to take part in the political demonstrations party politics.

In the conclusion of this discussion, it can be summarized that Mahatma Gandhi was a religious and moral force appealing to the conscience of man. His philosophy is not a remedy for local wrongs but it is “a panacea for a universal malady.” The practical application of the Gandhian thought to individual, social, national and international ills will efficaciously cure the suffering humanity and will usher the world in an era of peace, prosperity and happiness for all human beings. Gandhian thought is relevant today because it contains universal values. Pearl S. Buck has rightly remarked that “the name of Gandhi even in his life time has passed beyond the meaning of an individual to the meaning of a way of living in our troubled modern world.” Holmes calls Gandhian philosophy “a social programme for the redemption of the world.”

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