

Relevance of Gandhi Today

Essay No. 01

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. We pay homage to Gandhi on his birthday for the wrong -reasons.
2. Gandhi's thoughts and ideals have relevance even today.
3. Means and ends need to be equally moral.
4. Use of Satyagraha for public good.
5. Gandhian thoughts on economy not as obsolete are thought to be. '
6. His thoughts on religion and morality are of Utmost relevance, as are his ideas on education

The Panchatantra, the great compendium of fables, says

Apujya yatra pujoyarite pujoyanam tu Vimanana I

Trini tatrm pravartante durbhiksham maranam bhyam I I

-meaning, where the irreverent are worshiped and the venerable despised, there will be found famine, death and fear. So, perhaps fearing the onset of famine and death, we organize functions on Gandhi Jayanthi to convince ourselves that we are worshiping the venerable and not despising them! We fear that the epitaph which Einstein wrote for Gandhi, that the coming generations would find it hard to believe that Gandhi was a creature made of flesh and bones, may actually come true. Such functions are a means of constantly reminding people what the saint of Sabarmati achieved. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that Gandhi was an ordinary man able to achieve the extraordinary through simple beliefs and exemplary practices.

Today, Gandhi gains relevance because voices are being heard, though not too resonant, from the political domain that India needs another freedom struggle. Even today, Gandhian tools can be the most effective for this. But it should also be kept in mind that the success of Gandhian tools is closely connected with the prudence of the leader. Fasts, hartals, dharnas and non-cooperation should not be the tools for unproductivity or cheap popularity or petty gains.

Philosophy is based on that experience of truth which one attains by rising above favours and fears. For this very reason, Gandhi 's experiences form a profound philosophy for mankind. The Chanakya Niti Darpan says:

Tatha chaturbhih purushah parikshyate I

Tyagena sheelena gunena karmanaa I I

—meaning, sacrifice, temperance, qualities and deeds are what test a person. There is no doubt that Gandhi's personality and works provide a practical validity to his philosophy.

'Means and ends' hold the greatest relevance for any initiation into Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi believed in God and had full faith in the laws of nature. According to him, nature gives us control only over the means. Hence the greatest importance should be attached to the purity of means. If the means are moral, then the attainment of ends will be beyond doubt. He had simple and straightforward views on issues of violence and non-violence. Gandhi said that he opposed violence because the positive results were momentary while the negative effects were permanent and tragic. But he accepted non-violence only till the level where it was not mistaken for 'cowardice'. Gandhi stressed the development of capacity for creative transformation of emotions like anger and fury, which are the root of violence, analogous to the conversion of heat into energy.

The cornerstone of Gandhi's philosophy was satyagraha, satyagraha for the public's rights. For this he initiated civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements, organised strikes and undertook fasts. Gandhi was honest in his methods of satyagraha and that is why we rarely saw him fail. He had great faith in the public's power, because the initiation and culmination of revolution lie in them. Gandhi, thus, laid great emphasis on people's participation in every political-social programme. He adopted the policy of struggle agreement-struggle for political agitation. He knew and understood the limits of the public's capacity; despite the prevailing mental framework among other leaders for continuing the struggle, he often allowed a pause in the fervour a phase in which some truce was made with the authorities. And in this 'agreement' phase, he infused new energy into the revolution. It was a real tough task to lead different sets of people under one philosophy, but Gandhi succeeded in his venture. Now, it is the turn of the modern politicians to generate a new set of principles, acceptable to each and every one. As regards democracy, Gandhi believed that if democracy was disciplined and enlightened then it was the best system, otherwise, it was the most chaotic. Gandhi was absolutely correct in his view. Witness what goes on today in the name of democracy!

Gandhi's economic philosophy is relevant from the feudal to the capitalistic phase. He emphasised a restraint on and control over consumeristic tendencies. Reason: wars, the colonial race, international tension, stealing, looting and all such crimes are born of man's uncontrolled materialistic views and attitudes. Gandhi was an

advocate of promotion of local, self-sufficient economy. Therefore, he stressed on khadi and household industry. He accepted the inevitability of the industrial sector, but was against indiscriminate mechanisation, to the point beyond which it wasted human resources. He stood by the concept of trusteeship in ownership of industrial assets. Gandhi opposed the colonial character of economy, whether England considered India its colony or our cities consider our villages as their colonies. In the present times, when MNCs are taking over the market in India, and unemployment due to automation of activities is rising to an all-time high, we must try to regulate the economic activities so that labourers are not victimised. Gandhi's religious philosophy is unique because he considered religion integral to politics. But to him religion was something that promoted man's love for man and made one a karmayogin. He said that religion is the basis of morality, and morality, the root of politics; therefore, the segregation of religion from politics is unhealthy for society. It is unfortunate that today we misinterpret Gandhi to either play into the hands of communal forces or act pseudo-secular. Secularism does not mean digging into the past or questioning the rationality of each other's holy books and practices.

The social philosophy of Gandhi is fully reflected in our Constitution. He was against any division of people based on birth, colour, sex and the like. For him, untouchability was a crime against god. He emphasised women's uplift and ultimately established the need of global brotherhood.

Gandhi's ideas on education need serious thought. He said that the aim of education was not to make the brain a storehouse of information, but to impel a person to think and act. He was all for vocationalisation of education. He stressed that the mother tongue should be the medium of education and that Hindustani be the language of work.

Gandhi lived this multifaceted philosophy all his life from his childhood till the last "hey ram". Gandhi went to South Africa when he was a youth to chart his career and earn for his family. But he realised the essence of his legal education-providing justice to the suffering and the exploited. Thereafter, he took up the cause of the oppressed and the exploited without any thought to personal gain. It is a sad fact, however, that today we pay homage to the idol of Gandhi, not to his ideals.

Essay No. 02

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In this materialistic age, where economics has become all important, he is more relevant today and his ideas more urgently needed than even ever before. Despite the unprecedented advancement of and nuclear power a must, the post-

independence generation has begun to consider Gandhi and his principles totally irrelevant in the present context. They think that the Mahatma be logged to a bygone era and his ideas have become obsolete. But, is it really so. Is Gandhi irrelevant today with all his lofty ideals? No, not at all. On the contrary and technology, Gandhian ideas still hold good in economic, social and political fields. Gandhi realised that the fabric of the Indian economy rests on a rural base. The tiller is still the backbone of the Indian economy. If he remains illiterate, his crafts are not properly organised; if education is not centred around the crafts, villages are without water and the ecological balance is disturbed. Indian economy will not be able to progress much. In fact, Indian planners have again and again turned to take a second look at the rural sector from the Gandhian point of view. Gandhi was not against industrialisation but his venue was half a million villages which he wanted to see developed as authentic village republics. He pleaded for the technology that would supplement and complement the man-power and animal-power easily available in India. That was the way to safeguard unemployment and starvation.

Gandhi's concept of a decentralised economy and industrialisation would perhaps have led to a prosperous village population with an exploitation free equitable distribution of natural resources, means and instruments of production as well as the produce. The fact that India is now concentrating on the production of bio-gas and solar energy is itself vindication of Gandhi's ideas. In the political field, we are experimenting with 'Panchayati Raj, Lok Adalats' etc.

Gandhi's education system is very relevant today. According to Gandhi the purpose of education, is to establish a non-violent, non-exploiting social order and all other purposes are sub-servient to it. Education, he said, was not mere literacy, it was in all-round development of mind, body and soul. It was craft-oriented where hand played a vital role. He called it a 'Thinking Hand.' Basic Education was Gandhi's arsenal of non-violence. It was based on this theory that it is the activity of a great educationist called the thinking hand' which has more than anything else, guided the evolution of man and society and therefore, the whole education of man be imported through the medium of basic handicraft. Only such an education can realise the goals of freedom, equality and brotherhood. Gandhi described it as 'all-in-complex' of all the activities in the constructive programme.

Gandhi has often been accused of being consecrating. But it would be wrong to call him so. His views were conditioned by the knowledge of life in the country whose the standards of living were deplorably low, unemployment had assumed staggering proportions and the privileged few were leading the most sophisticated life.

Even on the economic front Gandhi's philosophy and theory of equal and equitable distribution of production – a balance between the two-shall go a long way in guiding the economic policy makers even in future. It was the collective good of the people which was Gandhi's philosophy and he generated a consciousness in this regard after the discriminatory and class-conscious British government had quit.

Gandhi is relevant wherever there is struggle for freedom, wherever there is injustice, poverty, hunger, inequality. His greatest legacy is that he made India fearless and brought back its vanished valour. His greatest heritage is the spiritual force that triumphs over the roar of guns and the might of the aggressors. 'Eye for an eye', he said would make the world blind. In the ultimate analysis it is the mind which rules the matter. The victory of his freedom struggle is the victory of the Indian civilization. His place in history is with Christ and Budhha. Although he did not find any creed or religion, Gandhism is the only alternative to save the misguided man and the war-weary world. Accordingly, like Budhha and Christ he is much more relevant today than he was in his own times.