
POLITICAL IDEAS OF GANDHI

Shubha Sinha

Associate professor

Department of Political Science

S. P. M. College For women

University of Delhi

Abstract

Gandhi, the enigmatic figure of the twentieth century has remained relevant for his recipes for socio-economic and political transformation of a given society. The present paper is an argumentative articulation reflecting the fact that despite not being a system builder his thoughts are exemplary exposition of ways and means for radical change.

Gandhi will always be remembered for his attempt to spiritualise politics or introduce purity into politics. He was not a philosopher like Kant . He did not preach any startling theory or ism .In his own words “So my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace.....for me there are no politics devoid of religion Politics bereft of religion are a death -trap because they kill the soil.” Addressing some Congress workers in 1936 he admitted that there was no such thing as Gandhism nor was he inclined to leave after him a sect of followers. He never claimed to have originated any new ‘ism’; he had merely tried to apply the eternal truth in his own way which is being confronted as problems/ challenges in everyday life. Moreover, he did not say that his opinions or the interpretation of truth was final and unchangeable . They were amenable to changes in new context . He had nothing new to teach to the world . His principles of truth and Ahimsa were as old as the hills of India . His effort had been only to make new experiments with truth and non-violence in a broader field . Gandhi advised his admirers not to give the name of Gandhism to his philosophy for there was no innovation in it , nothing doctrinaire .

Gandhi was a religious man in the strictest sense of the word . His religion, however, was more broad based and inclusive of all that was ethical and good in any religion of the world. Religion according to him was a belief in the ordered moral governance of the world . Humanism was the keynote of his outlook and behaviour .Politics and religion were for him two sides of the same coin .He gave religious basis to politics and he consented to dabble with politics because there was no escape from it and he wanted to temper politics with religion . He said “All religions are founded on the same moral laws.My ethical religion is made up of laws which bind men all over the world .”

If truth is the ultimate reality and highest ideal ,it has to be safeguarded not by brute force but Ahimsa . Non -Violence ,as Gandhiji meant, was the cult of love which alone promised a safe harbour to erring humanity .Ahimsa and truth were inseparable , they compliment and supplement each other . The weapons of Ahimsa could be handled not by a coward but by a strong man who could lift the sword but refrained from doing so on moral considerations . The true test of a votary of Ahimsa is to be decided by restraining oneself despite the strongest provocation to use force and acting with reason in a non-violent way .

Gandhi’s noblest gift to mankind is satyagraha which literally means ‘holding on to truth’.He used to call it spiritual force or force of love . He made a distinction between passive resistance and satyagraha. “Passive resistance may be a political weapon based on expediency ;satyagraha is a political weapon . Passive resistance is a weapon of the weak;it is only a man who is morally and spiritually strong who can practice satyagraha.Passive resistance does not entirely ignore the possibility of violencesatyagraha will not tolerate violence in words or deed.”So Gandhi’s satyagraha was not a negative act, it was a positive effort to correct the wrong doer by the exercise of the purest soul force . There was no place for malice/ ill will against the opponent to the philosophy and technique of satyagraha. A true satyagrahi never tries to overpower the opponent by physical force or by inflicting physical injuries.This is the way to win his rival’s mind and heart by his arguments and sacrifice. Satyagrahi is a real karmayogi who accepts no defeat . He fights for truth with full awareness of the ordeals on the way .He

accepts death cheerfully as a gateway to Heaven and welcomes imprisonment as a step towards freedom .

He believed that even armed aggression on one's country can be resisted with satyagraha . A styagrahi should prefer death to slavery . He should try to knock down the foreign rulers by holding back his cooperation and even by disobeying the laws of Government . He claimed that the impact of non-violent resistance was more formidable than all the warheads in the arsenal of the most well equipped country . Even Hitler could be run down by the earnest application of non-violent ways. Warring people became more desperate and cruel if resisted with force . They become milder when they themselves face an array of unarmed men, women and children who refuse to submit to the destructive power of arms . Gandhiji practised his principles in South Africa against racial hatred . His experiment was a resounding success. He recommended this weapon to the Indians as an alternative to the cult of bombs which the terrorists were practising .In Champaran , Ahmedabad and Kheda the efficacy of satyagraha as a political weapon was conclusively proved . He clung to this belief firmly that howsoever heartless or imperialistic the British might be they were bound to respond to the wishes of non -violent satyagrahis of India .

The word Swaraj signifies a government which truly represents the people of all classes and creeds which is thoroughly democratic and in which there is no place for nepotism,corruption or absence of power . Such a state Gandhi said was not a utopia . It could be realised by the people provided they were politically conscious , bold and literate . He preferred decentralisation of authority and favoured the idea of vitalising the Panchayats and letting them work to uplift the villages . He wanted the process of delegation of powers to be reversed . The people, he said ,should play a vital role in the governance of the country . The governments should derive power to the extent the people through their representative body might consent to give. The Centre should be invested with minimum of powers , having maximum of sphere to be controlled by the local Bodies and Panchayats.

Gandhiji was a great idealist . He always kept before him the distant vision of a classless and a stateless society . In this respect his object appeared to be the same as that of the Anarchists and Marxists but the means that he suggested to reach that goal were quite different and novel.He did not approve violence or class war in any form . He proposed to end capitalism not by sending the capitalists to gallows but by promoting economic parity through cottage industries . He wanted the landlords to act not as masters but as trustees of the cultivable land . In case of their unwillingness to do so they were to be deprived of their land in a peaceful way by the State. He advocated the doctrine that the land belonged to those who tilled it . He laid stress on sound and self sufficient village economy .He wrote : "At the same time I believe that some key industries are necessary....I would have state ownership (of key industries)where a large number of people would have to work together .But as I can concieve such a state can only be based on non violence; I would not dispossess moneyed men by force but would invite their cooperation in the process of conversion to state ownership .There are no parihas of society ,whether they are millionaires or paupers ." But since he was practical idealist he knew that the creation of an ideal state or ideal society was not an easy task till man continued to be fallible and selfish .For this reason he did not elaborate his conception of an idael society ;he put accent on ideal state which would not be realised without difficulty.

Gandhiji was not a mere dreamer and idealist .He was visionary ,a prophet practitioner who struck new paths for the downtrodden million to go along to their goal of freedom from want and political subjection .His philosophy was not completely divorced from realism .He believed in Sarvodaya 'which aims to replace the politics of Power by the politics of cooperation .

The reigns of Rama and Ashoka were models before him .All that he taught in his writings ,he practised in real life .The improvements he suggested in politics ,society ,character and state were all practicable ones .He proceeded with his eyes always fixed on the realities .In fact,he was citizen of the world .His teachings have been incorporated in the charter of UNO .

The world is realising increasingly that it's salvation lies in accepting the code of conduct laid down by Gandhiji. Without Racial Equality, political independence, tolerance and Ahimsa world will never enjoy a moment of peace. In Gandhi we come across a prophet and a patriot. He occupies the same place in Indian history as Washington in America and Mazzini in Italy. The ideals of Gandhiji are beacon lights for Indian Government. His ideals about Khadi, Charkhas, spiritualisation of politics, abjuring force, cottage industries, international peace, religious amity or communal harmony, decentralisation/panchayati raj, social equality, rural upliftment, simplicity, ideal society and state, good means to achieve good ends have found permanent place not only in annals of our country but in the history of the world. He will always be remembered as a great seer, statesman, politician and a saint wedded to the unity of mankind.

Select Bibliography

Andrews, Charly, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas, New York, Macmillan, 1930.

Bakshi, Rajani, Bapu Kuti: Journeys in Rediscovery of Gandhi, New Delhi, Penguin, 1998.

Bandopadhyaya, Jayantanuja, Social and Political Thoughts of Gandhi, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1969.

Bhattacharya, Budhadevs, Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi, Calcutta, Calcutta Book House, 1969.

Bose, Nirmal Kumar, My days with Gandhi, Delhi, Orient Longman, 1974, 1999.

Brown, Judith, Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope, New Heaven, Yale University press, 1989.

Choudhari, Manmohan, Explaining Gandhi, New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1989.

Deshpande,P.G., Gandhinama, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Publishing House, 1948.

Hardiman, David, Gandhi: In his Times and Ours, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2004.

Nanda, B.R., In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflection, New Delhi, Oxford University press, 2004.

Veer, Raju,Gummadi, Gandhian Philosophy: Its Relevance Today, New Delhi, Decent Book Store, 1999.