

The Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation was a great man. His contributions to society, polity and economy are immense. He was a symbol of peace. His relevance is being felt today in almost all walks of life especially in today's violent, degenerated social order and socio-political corrupt system. Social harmony is at stake. Society is moving towards over-conscientious life styles. The answer to these socio-political problems lies in the teachings and philosophy of Gandhi.

The basic philosophy of Gandhi was truth and non-violence. He used these weapons against the British rule during freedom struggle and became a mass leader by making the struggle a mass movement. He used to say that India lived in villages. He was really concerned about the downtrodden and poorest of the poor. His philosophy was that means are equally important along with the goals. It is not only for the goals to be just but means should also be just and moral. For means he advocated non-violent means. He did not believe in merely preaching but did what he said. He was a man of practice. He believed in decentralization of polity and economy. The power should move from downwards to-upwards. Setting up of 'village republics' was his dream and goal. His emphasis was on rural development and small scale industries. He believed in basic education and all round development of personalities. He was a critic of modern civilizations and called it to be nine days wonder. He stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and gave his life for communal harmony.

His relevance can be seen in the present context of prevailing conditions in India. What are the present conditions? On the political front criminals are entering the polity in large numbers. As a result criminalization of politics is increasing. Violent means and other unfair means are employed to get power which is really threatening the democratic processes. Our democracy is becoming weak. Caste and regional factors are dominating our political processes. Secular polity is at stake. According to Gandhi, religion and politics should not be separated. Religion should play a role in politics for moral ends and not for communal politics to secure vote banks. Politicians should be men of character and emphasise on public morality. If public morality is practiced, no politician will be corrupt and hence they can serve the people in a better way with integrity and commitment.

Since Independence our polity became centralized. It affected the federal nature of our political system. It also resulted in emergence of regional problems, e.g., regionalism to solve the neglected aspirations of those particular regions. As a natural corollary to this, many regional parties cropped up. Gandhi had a solution

to this problem also. He emphasized on decentralization of polity and advocated for 'village republics' to serve the basic needs of the local problems. Local people know their problems better and can solve their problems with local resources and local approach.

Similar on the economic front, economic development through various five year plans could not eradicate poverty and improve the quality of life of the people. The gap between rich and poor widened. The conditions of poor went on becoming miserable. The dream of Gandhi of wiping tears from every eye could not be fulfilled. The element of Swadeshi was neglected and we fell prey to the domination of foreign economic powers for our economic development. The condition is such that sometimes we import foodgrains to feed our people. In recent times, we have come back to Gandhian ideas on pooling our own resources, strengthening small scale industries and agricultural development to become self reliant with equity. Until the distribution of resources is done in an equitable manner, we will be far from egalitarian society which is the root cause for mounting social tensions. The culture of consumerism has to be discouraged. The increase of consumerism is a sign of greedy society which we are imitating from the West. Gandhi was vehement critic of this greedy society which causes alienation and make people dehumanised. Gandhi was a true humanist.

Divisive trends are increasing in our society. The caste and religious identities are asserting which can pose real threat to our unity and integrity. These tendencies need to be checked and curbed. The gap between rich and poor need to be lessened. The degeneration of values is rampant which have made the people corrupt. Social tensions have been increasingly manifesting in communal and caste riots. Various social ills are still intact. Gandhi was a man of duty. The need for duty has to be practiced in all walks of life. Simple living and higher thinking was his mantra. He was against untouchability and all forms of oppression and domination.

As long as these problems continue, Gandhi's relevance will be there. There is no problem where we can't have solutions from Gandhian ideas. It is only a question of acting on it. We need wills, whether political, social or individual wills. Also how sooner we want to act on it. The sooner it is better for the nation to come out of political, individual, and social ills. Among the three wills, political will is at the top of the priority. But at the same time social and individual wills also should be in coordination with the political will in order to be effective and for well being of the whole nation.