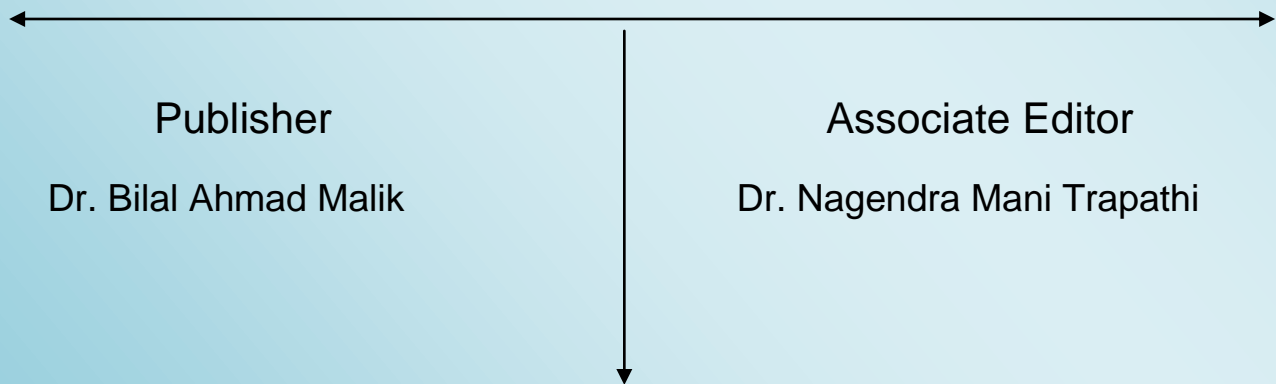


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SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

India follows the democratic type of Government. India is a big country and hence needs to be governed in a proper and an effective way. Mahatma Gandhi's imagination of the democracy -fully encircled with non-violence -exists in no nation of the world as up to now. His ideal is a stateless democracy, in which there is a federation of satyagrahi village communities, functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence are relevance in the context of Indian democracy. In the present day democracy, there is a great deal of centralization and inequality. Gandhian concept of Self Rule means Swaraj is real democracy, where people's power rests in the individuals and each one realizes that he or she is the real master of one's self. These issues are still relevant to what free India is and represent. The main cause of worry today is intolerance and hatred leading to violence and it is here the values of Gandhi need to be adhered to with more passion discussed in this study.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi Philosophy, Democracy, Swaraj, intolerance, India.

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY:

Democracy is a form of Government which is very popular and also considered as one the most effective forms. In this form of Government, the majority of decisions are taken by the representatives that are chosen by the people. India follows the democratic type of Government. India is a big country and hence needs to be governed in a proper and an effective way. The representatives chosen by the people are the ones who take major decisions pertaining to the development of the country. Democracy is the best kind of government because one has lot of benefits. India is truly democratic since one enjoys freedom of speech and expression here. Here people can voice their opinions openly and straight. In a way democracy makes sure that equality is maintained. In India all the citizens are treated equally and have the same set of rights as the others. By true definition democracy does not differentiate on the basis of religion, colour, caste and creed. However, there have been instances when the term

democracy has been misused. The main reason for this being ignorance. The government which runs the country is chosen by the people, for the people.

MAHATMA GANDHI'S THOUGHTS ON DEMOCRACY:

Non-violence: Mahatma Gandhi's imagination of the democracy -fully encircled with non-violence -exists in no nation of the world as up to now. Democracy of his imagination happens to be one, which does not have any provision of punishment and even an organization like 'State' happens to be obsolete in it. This is because Mahatma Gandhi holds, "...State is symbolical of centralized and organized violence." As non-violence is connected with human soul, man can be non-violent whereas in opposition to it, "... State is a soul-less machine. On this accord, it is impossible to get rid of violence. Its very existence depends upon violence." Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, non-violence should be admitted as invariable part of our life and it is on the basis of this dictum that modern politics must operate.

Stateless democracy: Gandhi's ideal is a stateless democracy, in which there is a federation of satyagrahi village communities, functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence. Non-existence of state as cherished by Mahatma Gandhi is impossible instantly or in near future. Even then, it is incumbent on the people, who are living in state organizations, to develop non-violence that is permanently present in their nature and to enhance it gradually up to adequate level. Along with that, democratic system should work in direction of development of non-violence at individual, community, social and national levels. The atmosphere of fear which we see, the diminution of values in life and the problems having cropped up vividly cannot be eradicated without developing it.

Decentralization and equality: While in the present day democracy, there is a great deal of centralization and inequality. In a stateless democracy there is decentralization and equality. Non profession and bread labour should be the ideal of the society. In a stateless democracy every individual gets the maximum freedom to devote himself to the service of the society according to his caliber or capacity.

Village economy: Gandhiji was again highly centralized production and advocate decentralized production. The idea was not to do away entirely with machinery as such, but to prevent the concentration of power in the hand of few rich. He aimed at the eradication of poverty by a revival of village economy. Emphasis was laid on intensive,

small scale, individual and diversified farming and a cattle based economy.(Pyarelal, Toward New Horizons-1959, page201.)

Voter's qualification: In the Gandhian democracy will play an important role. Their members are being directly elected. Voters are to have the qualification of manual work. Whose importance was always emphasized by Gandhiji. Village democracy would be decentralized political order.

Swaraj: Gandhian concept of Self Rule means Swaraj is real democracy, where people's power rests in the individuals and each one realizes that he or she is the real master of one's self. Thus people are sovereign in a democracy but in a parliamentary democracy, party system has a vital role to play. However, Gandhi was highly critical of the parliamentary democracy and in his monumental book "Hind Swaraj" (Self Rule or Home Rule, he has called the British Parliament as a "sterile women and a prostitute" (Hind Swaraj-Ch-V, p.12), though for him "good government is no substitute for self-government." (Tendulkar, DG, Mahatma, Vol.II, p.24)

Form of Democracy: There is contradiction in the statement of Gandhi about parliamentary democracy but while diving deep into the democratic ideals, he has said, "Democracy, disciplined and enlightened is the finest things in the world." (Prabhu, R.K., and Rao, UR,-The Mind of Mahatma, Oxford University Press, P-130) At the same time, he also cautions people against a whole-sale copying of the Western Model of democracy, where there are only nominal democracies. However, he has highest regards for Democracy and he calls it as "a great institution" and again conscious people and says, "It is liable to be greatly abused."(The Mind of Mahatma-p.345.) Even today, all over the world, democracy is widely accepted principle of the system of governance and there is no alternative to democracy.

Future of Democracy: Thus it is abundantly clear that for future, Gandhian concept of democracy is the only hope, where it must be practiced at the grass-root level, party system to be built up on accepted principles and not on partisan line, defection should be done away with and recall of recalcitrant representatives must be adhered to. Defects and demerits must be removed from the present democratic form of governance. People's power must be accepted to make democracy safe; otherwise if the democracy is abused or misused, the future of people is doomed.

Present Situation of Democracy in India: Democracy Though India is democratic country, today the definition of the same has changed to a certain extent, mainly due to the ignorance and unawareness of the masses. Illiteracy

is one reason for this. What we need to thoroughly understand is that democracy lets us use our freedom and we as citizens have to make sure that we use it in a constructive way which will help in the development and progress of the country. India proudly talks of being democratic but citizens should take special care to see that the term democracy is not misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Extraordinary character for Gandhian Democracy: Gandhian ideas are difficult to be put into practice, unless people are of extraordinary character, high moral capacity and integrity. Gandhian philosophy really speaking did not strike deep roots even in India. Most of Gandhi's followers paid only lip sympathy to it. But they are not owing to Gandhiji's failure or weaknesses of his thought, but owing to the drawbacks and weakness in ordinary human being.

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA:

The Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha is a natural outcome of the supreme concept of truth. If truth is the ultimate reality, then it is imperative to safeguard the criteria and foundations of truth. A votary of God which is the highest Truth and the highest Reality must be utterly selfless and gentle. He should have an unconquerable determination to fight for the supremacy of spiritual and moral values. Thus alone can he vindicate his sense of ethical devotion.

Satyagraha means the exercise of the purest soul-force against all injustice, oppression and exploitation. Suffering and trust are attributes of soul force. The active nonviolent resistance of the 'heroic meek' makes an immediate appeal to the heart. It wants not to endanger the opponent but to overwhelm him by the over flooding power of innocence. Satyagraha or stupendous effort at conversion can be applied against the Government, the social Czars and leaders of 'orthodoxy'.

Satyagraha is an inherent birthright of a person. It is not merely a sacred right but it can also be a sacred duty. If the Government does not represent the will of the people, and if it begins to support dishonesty and terrorism, then it should be disobeyed. But one who wants to vindicate his rights should be prepared to bear all kinds of suffering.

Gandhi referred to the teaching of Thoreau in this connection. However, Gandhi stated that Thoreau was not a complete champion of nonviolence. Probably Thoreau limited his breach of governmental laws to the revenue law, i.e., he refused to pay taxes. The dynamics of satyagraha as formulated by Gandhi are broader and more

universally applicable. From the family to the state—wheresoever one meets injustice and untruth—one can resort to satyagraha. In his autobiography, Gandhi has referred to some experiences of satyagraha practiced in his own family life. He said that the alphabet of ahimsa is learnt in the domestic school and can be extended to national and even international levels. Gandhi felt that the Abyssinians, the Spaniards, the Czechs, the Chinese and the Poles could have offered nonviolent resistance against the aggressors.

There are different techniques of satyagraha. Fasting can be one form of satyagraha, but it has to be applied only against those who are bound by ties of close personal affection. Voluntary migration can be another form of satyagraha. “Tyranny is a kind of plague and when it is likely to make us angry or weak, it is wisdom to leave the scene of such temptation,” said Gandhi. He even supported Hijrat. The exodus refers to the planned flight of the Israelites. In Russia, there was the flight of the Doukhabours who were nonviolent. Gandhi would not consider the ‘scorched earth’ policy to be a form of satyagraha. He ruled out underground activities, even though entirely innocent, as a part of legitimate fight for freedom based on truth and nonviolence.

Satyagraha as conceived by Gandhi is not a formula of social and political disintegration. A satyagrahi must have first rendered willing obedience to the laws of the state. Gandhi writes: “a satyagrahi obeys the laws of the society intelligently and of his own freewill, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are good and just and which are unjust and iniquitous and only then does the right accrue to him of the civil disobedience of certain laws in well-defined circumstances.” Gandhi claimed to have been by nature law-abiding. The capacity for civil resistance comes from the discipline undergone in the process of obeying the civil and moral laws of the state. A satyagrahi while resisting the laws of the government should see that the social structure is not subverted.

Gandhi laid down strict canons of moral discipline for the satyagrahi. He must have an unshakeable faith in God, otherwise he will not be able to bear calmly the physical atrocities perpetrated on his person by the authorities with superior force of violence at the command. He must not hanker after wealth and fame. He must obey the leader of the satyagraha unit. He should practice Brahmacharya and should be absolutely fearless and firm in his resolve. He must have patience, single-minded purposefulness and must not be swayed from the path of duty by anger or any other passion. Satyagraha can never be resorted to for personal gains. It is a love process and the appeal is to the heart and not to the sense of fear of the wrong-doer. Thus, satyagraha is based on personal

purification. The Gandhian stress on purity as a criterion for political power is a great contribution to political thought. It is essential to employ pure means for serving a righteous cause.

There are different forms of satyagraha. Non cooperation with the evil doer is a mild form. Civil disobedience of the laws of the government is a strong and extreme form of satyagraha. There can be individual as well as mass civil disobedience. The latter means spontaneous action by the masses. In the beginning, masses will have to be rigorously trained for action. According to Gandhi, complete civil disobedience implying a refusal to render obedience to every single state-made law can be a very powerful movement. It can become more dangerous than an armed rebellion; because the stupendous power of innocent suffering undergone on a great scale has potency. By bringing the scrutinizing glare of public opinion on the evils of an autocratic state, the fall even of a despotic political regime is ensured.

It is not correct to say that Gandhi would not sanction satyagraha in a democratic form of government. He had no special attachment for parliamentary democracy. He did not accept the axiomatic superiority of the majority within parliament. The basic problem, according to him, was life in accordance with the canons of truth. Several times Gandhi opposed a law or system even if he were in a minority of one, because for him non cooperation with evil was a sacred duty. A democracy can be swayed by all types of passions, prejudices and petty considerations, but a devotee of truth would not tamely accept this. He would not be content with merely trying to change the membership of the legislatures after four or five years. He should certainly educate public opinion. According to the political teachings of Gandhi, satyagraha is a perpetual law against anything repugnant to the soul. Even if alone, a man of truth and conscience will resist the laws and commands issued by a representative legislature if they go against the higher law of the atman. A true satyagrahi will risk all dangers for the sake of truth. Gandhi wrote: "But even so a call may come which one dare not neglect, cost it what it may. I can clearly see the time coming to me when I must refuse obedience to every single state-made law, even though there may be a certainty of bloodshed. When neglect of the call means a denial of God, civil disobedience becomes a preemptory duty."

Sometimes Gandhian satyagraha is confused with the passive resistance advocated by the Quakers. But there are vital differences between them. To begin with, satyagraha is a dynamic force because it contemplates action in resistance of injustice. Passive resistance is compatible with internal violence towards the enemy but satyagraha stresses continuous cleansing of the mind. It emphasizes even inner purity. Passive resistance is mainly contemplated at a political level. Satyagraha can be practiced at all levels—domestic, social and political. Satyagraha goes beyond passive resistance in its stress on spiritual and moral teleology because the final source of

hope and consolation for the satyagrahi is God. The Gandhian theory of satyagraha is far more comprehensive than the passive resistance as advocated in India in 1906-1908. Tilak and Aurobindo would not condemn violence on moral grounds. But Gandhi accepted the absolute of ahimsa. The passive resistance of 1906-1908 was a political technique of limited application. Sometimes it meant only Swadeshi and boycott, while at other times it was extended to cover disobedience of unjust laws and decrees. The Gandhian theory of satyagraha is a philosophy of life and politics and it contemplates stupendous mass action for paralyzing the total structure of a despotic government.

It is true that there are points of similarity between the ideas of Gandhi and the British liberals, specially in their grudging attitude to the spheres of state action but they emerge from different traditions. Gandhi was more radical and trenchant in his opposition to the state than any British liberal nurtured in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Essentially Gandhi was a moral prophet who had declared his unequivocal resistance to all concentrations of power, force and violence. The influence of the individualistic spirit of the old Sanyasi and the Bhikshu tradition of India combined with the protestant individualism of Thoreau and the radical anti-static of Tolstoy was too pronounced in Gandhi.

OBSERVATION:

It shows that democracy is regarded as a best form of government. At the same time, it is the most difficult form & certain countries democracy has been a great success, while in others it is a total failure or walk like a cripple. I have stated that polities cannot all of a sudden operate as per expectation of the Great Mahatma Gandhi. Non-violence cannot be a part of conduct instantly. But Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion is very important in this regard. However, the polities must forward certainly in this direction. Needless to say that non-violence is true, natural, and enemy of fearfulness, stands at top amongst eternal values including the equality and has been gradually progressive. It's nice and vital example is before us in the form of its development unto today, since the inception of human race-that is since initial human-state. We clearly see that in spite of differences to whatsoever extent, ultimately there is an innovative desire for peace. This is because non-violence happens to be in human nature. Presently a big portion of the world happens to be under Democratic system of Government. Theoretically, this system stands out to be the best up to now. This is a truth. Because people are connected with it directly or indirectly at every level. This provides us maximum opportunities of progress and development. If we peruse it, we first of all find that there is non-equal development of the citizens. We subsequently find that these nations are

more or less victimized by regionalism. They have problem relating to language. They are under clutches of terrorism and communalism. There is also the problem of negation of human rights in these nations.

There are various other problems akin to mention above and peace is far away so long as these problems exist. These nations should get themselves rid of these problems, all citizens of them must have equal development and they should have communal harmony towards making all citizens collective and unified partners in progress.

- System of government should be free from above-mentioned problems.
- It must be capable of ensuring equal development of their all citizens.
- The citizens concerned must march forward on path of progress in unified way along with rendering contribution to world peace.
- His ideology of nonviolence may not succeed, but it opens a world of possibilities and encourages us to think outside the box.
- Truth and Non-violence is not meant for individuals alone but can be applied in global affairs too.

CONCLUSION:

Lastly we can conclude that Gandhi's vision for the country and his dreams for the community as a whole still hold good for India. He got the community to assimilate and reflect true values of humanity and to participate in tasks that would promote the greater good. These issues are still relevant to what free India is and represents. The main cause of worry today is intolerance and hatred leading to violence and it is here the values of Gandhi need to be adhered to with more passion. He is relevant not yesterday or today but forever.

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