



Mahatma Gandhi And His Philosophy -A Philosophical Idealist

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Abstract

The twin cardinal principles of Gandhian philosophy are truth and non-violence. The ultimate station Gandhi assigns nonviolence stems from two main points. First, if according to the Divine Reality all life is one, then all violence committed towards another is violence towards oneself, towards the collective, whole self, and thus “self”-destructive and counter to the universal law of life, which is love. Second, Gandhi believed that ahimsa is the most powerful force in existence. Ahimsa had himsa been superior to, humankind would long ago have succeeded in destroying itself. The human race certainly could not have progressed as far as it has, even if universal justice remains far off the horizon. From both viewpoints, nonviolence or love is regarded as the highest law of humankind. Peace and harmony is an essential component of human life. Gandhian philosophy is supposed to promote universal human values, peace, harmony and co-existence. India has been a country of universal brotherhood in promoting global peace and also could solve any prevailing problems on the ground of truth and non-violence.

Key words: *co-existence, cardinal principles, divine reality, global peace.*

Introduction

Origin of the Gandhian Philosophy is mainly integrated with religion and society which developed by M.K. Gandhi during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 and later of course in India. Gandhian Philosophy is a body of ideas that describes the emotional feelings, mission, vision, goal for Indian Independence and the life works of M.K. Gandhi inspired him by all philosophers what he contact or read those books particularly written by Leo Tolstoy, Thoreau, John Ruskin, etc. Gandhian philosophy is not only very much systematic in manner as Marxism which is mainly focussed on nature and society but also connected/related with Indian philosophy, Eastern philosophy, Western philosophy etc, with the four-pillar/principle such as, truth(satya), non-violence(ahimsa), sarvodaya (welfare of all), satyagraha (peace protest) means for holding the truth or firmness respectively. Further Gandhian philosophy is totally based on idealism but not materialism however, it goes toward the practical way because of sarvodaya and satyagarha, in the meantime, truth and nonviolence are the foundation of Gandhian philosophy so that Gandhian philosophy is mainly focussed on the practical idealism. We came to know that all human being started as brutes but became human and divine through social evolution so that Gandhi affirmed that non-violence is the law of the human beings and violence is the law of brute. It further stated that human nature is the product of the society whatever it came to across/happen in our day today life. In accordance with the different philosophers observed that human mindset can be classified into four such as, idealist, materialist, pessimist and optimist respectively. However Gandhi goes to the path of idealism as well as optimism. Social surrounding for the survival of human being takes a different peculiar stand on the prevailing issues/conditions to overcome by any means. It is further

stated that human being is basically good and source of evil was man's will to power in order to achieve their own goals directly or indirectly. Frankly speaking Gandhi was ahead of his time in championing a different paradigm of human nature. M.K.Gandhi was a voracious reader so that he came to know all the philosophers' thoughts/views from the different perspective disciplines such as, biology, physics, psychology, social sciences, philosophy etc. (Varma Vishwanath Prasad 1961:343). These studies reveal that the intricacies of human nature and complexity of human existence. Further human nature and complexity of social conditions have not remained intact right from man's evolution to the present age. There have been a lot of changes, such changes have not stopped at all but continued in course of time which is the process of historical and social development. In reality he emphasised on human freedom and individualism so he could be regarded as a great champion of human dignity and freedom. The overall views of human nature are speculative, simplistic but not permanent so that human nature is mixture of good and evil. As regard he also strongly reacted against the nature of the state as Marxism and also more emphasized toward the individual freedom so that he was called as an anarchist. All men became good if we minus evil. The early part of his life upto the age of 13/14 years was not so good but later part upto the end of his life was extremely good and outstanding in character as the third son of the Indian soil after Lord Buddha, Ashoka respectively. According to him, men lived on the two sides of the world such as, natural world, social world so that men need to survive in balance. Gandhian human nature and his views emphasised toward the universal self rather than individual self which based on truth and non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi was not a systematic academic thinker in the field of metaphysics and political philosophy. He was an inspired teacher and prophet. He was neither a Samkara nor a Kant. Instead he is akin to Socrates and Buddha pouring forth the results of his deepest feelings and his most sincere realizations of truth. In all the writings of Gandhi from 1908 onwards, one finds a unity of theme with the minimum amount of contradiction. It is essential to stress the significance of Gandhi message which makes an appeal to the values of the human being in an age when the humanistic structures has been rudely and savagely attacked by the extraneous might of weapons of mass destruction. Gandhi appears as another Plato and Cicero vindicating the cause of the spiritual and moral approach to political problems. As cited above from 1893 to 1914 Gandhi rendered great services to the cause of racial equality in South Africa although he was working there for the amelioration of the cause of Indians it was no mere parochial nationalistic fight. It was a fight for the deep truth that all men are free and equal, and it was this message which made Rev. C.F. Andrews, one of the greatest Christians of this century, the devoted follower of the Mahatma since the days of the South Africa Satyagraha movement (Girani Singh E. (2020:196). From 1915 to 1948 Gandhi worked in India for the sake of the country's freedom. He was much more than the liberator of a country. Although as a patriot he will be ranked with Washington, Mazzini and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, his achievements are not confined to bringing independence to four hundred millions. Gandhi's message for the unification of emotions and a coherence of personality through the realization of creative non-violent spiritual life is very significant for millions of disturbed, exasperated and unhappy persons throughout the world. The life of Gandhi was a manifestation, a vindication of the noble truth of the Bhagavadgita and the other great scriptures of humanity that one grain of truth is infinitely more powerful the mountains of falsehoods. The Bhagavadgita is the Bible of the Gandhian Philosophy. Gandhian philosophy is mainly based on its own principle with four pillar such as, truth, non-violence, satyagraha and sarvodya. Beyond the truth, there are three important words such as, good, love and beauty which different from the Marxist and other philosophies so as he was regarded as one of the greatest philosophical idealist in the era of the 20th century.

Objective of the study:

1. Content and implication of Gandhian thought in all aspects;
2. Nature of social institutions and relationships from the Gandhian point of view;
3. Popular movements/programmes of action that have been undertaken in pursuit of the objectives of a Gandhian social order or adopting methods that draw inspiration from the Gandhian approach of social change
4. Conduct inter disciplinary research on Gandhian philosophy in the context of contemporary issues.
5. Encourage and promote Gandhian perspectives for face progress, equality and justice.

6. Bring publication for various sections of people to enhance their knowledge about Mahatama Gandhi and the values he propagated.
7. Plan and carry out activities for the promotion of Gandhian ideals and philosophy.

Importance of the study:

Gandhian philosophy and human society are closely related so that Mahatama Gandhi is very much important whenever human society is co-existence on the earth.

Methodology: The work is based on secondary sources largely and it also involved historical, exploration, descriptive, analytical observation, review of literature, the personal views of the selected authors etc.

Relevance of Gandhism:

Gandhian views/philosophy are still relevant and important because of many certain reason/factors due to the unavoidable circumstances. First and foremost he frequently mentioned the importance and significance of philosophical statement- 'I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills and rivers'. 'I am not the philosopher but the kama yogi'. He further advocated for Rama Rajya where the princes and paupers interest were protect on the contrary to communist principle who advocated Praja Raj. Rama Rajya is a system where the society is run by the principle of lord Rama. It is a term popularised by Mahatma Gandhi. Rama Rajya means Divine Raj, kingdom of God, sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Rama Rajya of Gandhi's dream ensure equal rights to prince and poor man. From these above statements/sentences we came to know that Gandhian views are totally focused on the society and religion on the basic foundation of truth and non-violence so that his philosophy or thought are still significant and important in the modern times even in the complex society within the first half of the 21st century. He further mentioned that there is no any question of failure when non-violence is being practiced. Due to this reason most of the social activists/freedom fighters practiced his ideology for the cause of their aim and objective such as, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kye etc. Besides the date of his birth has been proclaimed as the Non-Violence Day by the United Nation Organization and every year at least two or three books are written about him in some part of the world or other so he is being constantly discussed at every seminar and intellectual discourses all over the world. From all these perspectives we know that Gandhian philosophy is still relevant and important in the minds and hearts of the people of the globe forever.

Historical background of Gandhian philosophy:

We came to know that every great thinker/philosopher cannot escape from the circumstances or influences around him. Greek philosopher Plato was disturbed by the deteriorating condition of democracy in many of the city states of Greece and he believed that an ideal state could be a provider to this malady. If the Industrial Revolution could not cause the unbound misery of the working class, it would not have been an opportunity for Marx to write vast literature on the miserable conditions of workers and revolution. Gandhi cannot be an exception. (Das P.G. 2011:226). He came under the influence of many factors which moulded his thought and ideas. Some of these factors are briefly stated below:

- 1) One important element that created impact upon Gandhi's thought was Indian philosophy consisting of civilisation, culture, history, religion etc. Although these are different, they combinedly to form Indian philosophy. Though he received Western liberal education he never ignored Indian culture and civilisation. In his personal life he was out and out an Indian and strictly adhered to Indian life and style. Slowly but steadily Indian philosophy and thought system imbued him.
- 2) We observed the influence of morality and ethics on his ideas and philosophy. He did not separate politics from ethics and religion and on this count he roamed on the opposite pole of Italian statesman Machiavelli. He did not think that politics can claim separate existence from ethics, morality and religion. All are closely interlinked and there is interdependence on each other. The result has been that his political ideas

including his conception about state have come under the strong influence of religion, ethics and morality as we find in the political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. This gives a new meaning to his political philosophy and he receives separate treatment.

3) Three great thinkers of the Western world impressed him enormously and they are Count Leo Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau respectively. Today's Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' and Ruskin's 'Unto this Last' and Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' influenced Gandhi in various ways. Again the anarchist philosophy of the Eastern world also impressed him.

4) His unbound sympathy for common men and downtrodden section of the society can be traced to Marxist philosophy. There are clear and remarkable differences between Marx and Gandhi but at least on one issue both stand on the same plank and this is oppressed people's friend. Like Marx he wanted to set up a society which would be free from all sorts of misery, politics, exploitation, inequalities etc.

5) The contemporary British rule was another factor that influenced his political ideas. He earned firsthand experience of the oppressive character of British rule during his stay in South Africa and after his returned to India in 1915 he found the same thing. The British rule exposed the same thing. The British rule exposed the character of state, bureaucracy, sovereignty etc. and all these led him to strengthen his disbelief about Western state structure.

Statement of the problem:

The genres of literatures produced so far discuss on nature which are biographic, socio-political, economic, cultural etc. The destiny of MK Gandhi took a paradigm shift from an armed advocate to Indian freedom fighter that stood against the British Colonial master as well as exploitation of men by men inspired me to study his crucial roles and socio-political economic problem during his period is quite challenging and innovative idea also inspiring me. Taking into consideration, the present paper is being taken up to study "Mahatama Gandhi And His philosophy - A *Philosophical Idealist*". This study is still lagging behind and quite distinct from others' earlier works on MK Gandhi and his activities.

Review of Literature:

In most of the write ups on Mahatama Gandhi such as, books, journals, research papers, pamphlets available, etc. claims that during this phase, he saw the turmoil situation in India during the British Colonial period. Gandhi is known to Indians as a freedom fighter masses leader. Gandhi is also popular to us for his philosophy ranging from economics, politics, religion to all social problem from which Indians were suffering. He was the most influential and popular leader. Even before independence his popularity and influence spread throughout the length and breadth of India. He had also a dominating personality which very few persons possessed in his time. Gandhiji was popular among all the sections of Indian people for his candid views on all matters. On some issues such as religion, morality, ethics he appeared to us orthodox but on politics he was never adamant. He never hesitated to revise or change views which he held earlier. It may be noted here that in any formal sense Gandhi was not a political scientist or philosopher as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx were. But from a broader perspective his views about state, government and other related concepts cannot be ignored. Gandhi had a clear philosophy and it is based on the tradition, religion, history and culture of India. His politics is based on this philosophy. Again once more, in the book entitled Modern Political Theory written by P.G. Das in 2011 and expressed that Gandhi began to read various literatures and finally came to contact with Leo Tolstoy, Ruskin and many great thinkers so that this ignited his philosophical idealist feelings. He further believed that only mass movement based on Satyagraha could emancipate to Indian people suffering from colonial servants and ultimately got Indian independence.

Different facets of Gandhi as a philosophical idealist:

(a) His education and works:

His father Karamchand was a Dewan in Porbandar and his mother Putlibai was a deeply religious lady, particularly religious fasting. Gandhi was convinced of her intelligence and he was also man of high character and patriotism. At the age of seven he started his schooling at Rajkot while he was truthful and shy. On one occasion his school teacher, during the school inspection day hinted him to copy, the word Kettle which he did not comply, because copying was not his habit. Due to his hard labour he won prizes and scholarship at the high school. Gandhi was married at the age of thirteen to Kasturbai Makherji Kapadia in a traditional manner who was a spiritual girl without any choice on his part. At the age of seventeen he passed his matriculation examination. After his school Gandhi joined Samaldas College at Bhavanagar and was advised to become a barrister in order to get the post of Dewan so he went to England in 1888. During his stay in England Gandhi read Roman and English law. His Christian friend initiated his love for Christianity and read all the religious books so he became a secular minded leader in future (Ghosh P.C. 1995:205). After becoming a barrister Gandhi came back to India in 1891 and he started to practice both in Bombay and Kathiawar but was not successful. He was temperamentally shy and his honesty was against his profession. He went to South Africa to be the lawyer for Haji Abdullah's cousin for only one year for the matter of legal practice and later to fight against injustice and class division where he developed his political views, ethics and politics. He was born in India but was made in shape in South Africa. He stayed there for about 21 years and came back to India in July 1914 after a great successful mission of his life. Gandhiji realised that a peaceful agitation could only be led by trained satyagrahis or non-violent soldiers. In 1920, Gandhiji was elected the president of the All India Home Rule League. With no freedom in sight, he urged a resolution for satyagraha campaign of non co-operation. Gandhiji decided upon an experiment of mass civil disobedience at Bardoli in 1922. He had to suspend the campaign owing to the outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura. He had established Satyagraha ashram on the bank of Sabarmati river called Sabarmati ashram where he practiced Marxist ideology "From each according to his ability to each according to his needs". He founded Sabarmati ashram at Ahmadabad in Gujarat to preach the idea of Truth and Non-Violence. Ultimately Sabarmati ashram converted into Harijan Sevak Sangh for the cause of the downtrodden section of people whom Gandhi called the Harijan or people of God and donated the ashram to them. He participated in three Nationalist Movement with local economic demands during 1917 – 1918: Champaran Satyagraha in Bihar in 1917, Kheda Satyagraha in Gujarat in 1917 and Ahmadabad mill strike in Gujarat in 1918. In 1919, Gandhi joined the nationalist movement and he emerged as the most powerful leader in the Indian National Congress through his policy of non-violence satyagraha and several forms of movements led by him such as, Non-Co-operation, Civil-disobedience, Quit India ultimately independence of India was achieved.

Mahatma Gandhi was an outstanding product of Indian and world history (Jayapalan N. 202:345). He was the most prominent figure of India's national liberation and freedom movement and among the rare historical figure of world revolutionary process. Hence he carried all the dialectical contradictions produced by colonialism and imperialism in the backward colonial world. The numerous evaluation of Gandhiji generally suffered from a lack of historicity, with his weaknesses and mistakes blown out of proportions. The extreme right-wing reaction is busy smearing his role, almost accusing him of betraying the country, a portrayal only serving imperialism. This is being done by those who did not contribute an iota to our national movement. He has also been accused of representing the vacillating and compromising bourgeoisie such an evaluation predetermines characteristics mechanically attributing them to Gandhiji without historical reference. Mahatma Gandhi was active at the turning point and borderline of transition of capitalism into colonial imperialism.

(b) Metaphysical idealism:

The fundamental basis of Gandhism is the conception of God or an omnipresent fundamental spiritual reality, 'an all-embracing Living Light' which could be called Sachchidananda or Brahman or Rama or simply. Truth, God is a 'self-existent all-knowing living force which inheres every other for known to the world. Gandhi inherited the strong faith in the existence of a deeper spiritual existent from his family background, specially

from his devout mother. The writings of Tolstoy, the studies of Buddha's life and the Gita, and his contacts with Raychand Bhai, depended and strengthened his moral convictions. Gandhi was a metaphysical idealist but not of the Samkarite school. He did not adhere to the concept of an undifferentiated absolute but believed in a God who is kind and responsive to the prayers of the devotee (Pant Suresh Chandra 1967:235). His views are similar to those of the theistic interpreters of the Vedanta. The spiritual truth, according to him, was to be realized not by dialectical skill or conceptual cognition but by spiritual experience, pure and disciplined lived holy life and by the persistent endeavour to concretize the norm of. Hence we find a synthesis of Vedantic spiritual metaphysics and Jain-Buddhistic-Vaishnava ethics of Ahimsa in Gandhi. Although the concept of Ahimsa is inculcated in the Upanishads, the Yoga philosophy and in the Gita, still Jainism and Buddhism have put enormous emphasis upon it. Experience is the starting-point of any philosophy and Gandhi claimed that the more disciplined he became the more he did he approximate to the realization of truth. There is a note of radical individualism in Gandhian thought because great stress has been laid on the sanctity of personal experience of truth. The greatest mystics and religious teachers of humanity have always testified to the inward experience of some eternal values and real existence. But Gandhi did not negate rational argument and particle observation. He claimed to be a true scientist in the sense that he constantly experimented with truth and tried to make his proposition sounder by repeated observations. But this scientific and rational process of enquiry was only applicable to the world of social and political existence. His faith in a fundamental truth was not born out of arguments and external observations but out of spiritual apprehension and intuition. Prayer was the essence of Gandhi's personality. He said that he could live without food but not without prayer. Prayer was the expression of the longing of the soul. The act of prayer was a daily homage to the supreme spirit. Faith in the omnipotent majesty and kindness of God was essential for the Satyagrahi. This faith imparted titanic strength before great concentrations of earthly power. "The only weapon of the Satyagrahi is God" (Varma Vishwanath Prasad 1961: 275). A living faith in God as the unfailing protector makes one fearless. Gandhi was not a philosopher of history. But if we reconstruct his scattered ideas into a philosophy of history, we find that he accepts theological determinism. He said "Nothing can happen but by His will expressed in His eternal changeless law which is He God signifies an unchanging and living law (Mukti H.R. (1996:445). The great prophets through their austerities provide to mankind a faint glimpse of the law. He said that the literally believed that not a leaf moves without sanction from the divine. Carried to its extreme limits a theological determinism can lead to the philosophy of occasionalism. Gandhi believed that in the ultimate sense, God or truth being the final reality and the competent being, was the supreme determinant of things and movement in the world. But determinism in Gandhi applied only to the final explanation of things. It never degenerated into fatalism because he was a strong advocate of the strenuous activism and energism of the Gita. His whole life was full of ceaseless actions, all inspired by the vision of a spiritual whole which imparted a higher meaning to his diverse actions as a social worker, a journalist, a political leader and a moral prophet. Thus Gandhi combined a faith in the supremacy of God with the insistence on constant actions.

(c) Ethical absolutism:

Gandhi accepted metaphysical idealism and hence he believed in the supremacy of ethical values and sarvodaya. The philosophy of sarvodaya is based on the concept of the unity of existence. It implies a perpetual fight against cruelty to human beings and animals. It has its roots in the famous Mantra of the Yajurveda- "Isavasyamidam Sarvam"-the entire universe is permeated by the supreme God. According to Gandhi, socialism, even communism, is implicit in the Mantra." This idealistic philosophy necessarily inculcates the values of eternal truth and justice. It teaches universal love as the only law of life. It refuses to be satisfied with the progress and well-being of a class or a nation but advocates the emancipation and realization of the good of all living beings. The Gandhian theory of ethical absolutism can be traced to the Vedic concept of the Rita-the doctrine that there are all encompassing, cosmic and moral ordinances which govern both men and gods. Buddha also had faith in the existence of a moral order. The great Hindu philosopher Patanjali also accepted that the cardinal concepts of ethics (the five Yama and the five Niyama) were beyond the relativism of space and time. Gandhi accepts these insights. His own experience in life completely convinced him of the superior efficacy of the moral norm. He interpreted history in the terms of the progressive vindication of the Superiority of Ahimsa. "It is my firm faith that man is by nature going higher" he wrote. Ahimsa was the farthest removed from acquiescence in evil or from a false masquerade for one's weakness (Gandhi M.K. 2011:395). It was demonstration of the resolute strength of the heroic soul which refuses to hurt anybody because every living creature is essentially spirit and fundamentally one with himself. It is the symbol of supreme moral and spiritual strength. "Meticulous care for the right of the least among us is the sine qua non of non-violence" (Varma Vishwanath Prasad 1961:335). The aspirant after the realization of truth undergoes all types of suffering for its sake. Ahimsa means infinite love and this in its turn means infinite capacity for suffering. Gandhi considered truth and non-violence to be absolutely binding. "Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last

article of my creed.” It was the imperative duty of the satyagrahi to make endless endeavors for the realization of truth through non-violence. Jesus Christ and Raja Harishchandra are examples of the practice of this law of pure suffering. Prahlad is another great example of a perfect satyagrahi. The ideal of non-violence would not be lowered as a concession to one’s weakness. Non-violence is called the strongest force. It is a force of the subtlest kind. Real non-violence is mighty force and can be used against the most powerful government.

Conclusion:

Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest messenger and apostle of peace the world after lord Budha and Christ. His philosophy of peace is centered on truth, non-violence, gender equality, social justice, sustainable development and so on. World peace is defined as an ideal of freedom, peace and happiness among us and within all the nations or people. To be frank Gandhi was essentially a peace loving man so that he emphasized the philosophy of non-violence as the means and truth is the ends in order to achieve world's peace whereas the ends and means are related to each other which is one of the basic tenets of Gandhian philosophy. He further expressed that philosophy of peace and non-violence are the two pillars of any peace process that upholds the human race of every livelihood. These two are inseparable because peace must be the fruit in any action of non-violence or protest to settle a dispute which again further created full of peace and social harmony etc throughout the world. Truly speaking the most important contribution of M.K. Gandhi to the contemporary world is the message of global peace along with non-violence. In conclusion Gandhian philosophy is still relevant and important in the minds and hearts of the people of the globe.

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