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Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi in the Present Times

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Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to evaluate whether in the 21st century's globalized world the Gandhian message still has or could have any actuality in managing our century's real challenges such as violence or the lowering of moral and ethical crisis of the humanity. The paper will present, analyse and comment on the most important concepts. I consider the Gandhian thought is based on such as satya (Truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and Satyagraha (as it is loosely translated: holding on to truth, which in fact is the philosophy and practice of the non-violent resistance). In my paper I will consider Mahatma Gandhi as a philosopher or a thinker even if many did not agree or even if it were difficult to consider him a philosopher according to traditions values. Secondly, the paper will emphasize those facts and views of the Gandhian thought which could give an answer to the captioned title of the paper, trying to evaluate concepts against the changing social fabric of our times, even if at first impression all of these key concepts of the Gandhian thought seem to be a utopia and useless. It seems that Mahatma Gandhi, through his ideas and thoughts, "is still alive" and is among us after more than 70 years of his death.*

Keywords:

I. INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of the greatest and well-known personalities of the 20th century, had a very deep influence on the history, which is unquestionable and beyond any disagreement. There are also voices which proclaim that even in our globalized world the Gandhian spiritual heritage still has its actuality and relevance. What this paper attempts to give an answer regarding the relevance of the Gandhian thought in the 21st century. I wish to demonstrate that the Gandhian spiritual heritage – with accent on the concepts of Satya (Truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and Satyagraha, translated as holding on to "The power Reality and Adoration or Serenity", which in fact is the philosophy and practice of the nonviolent resistance, – should have or must have an important role in dealing with the real problems of our globalized world. In order to do this, I will have to outline the meanings of the above-mentioned categories and, after having done so, I will try to point out those aspects of the Gandhian thoughts which could be considered relevant in our times or could be useful and helpful in managing some of the real challenges of the 21st century such as the problem of violent armed clashes, globalizing terrorism or the crisis of humanity.

We undoubtedly agree that we are living in a world which is divided increasingly day by day by global unrest, fear, anger, hatred, discontent, despair, immorality etc., and the number and intensity of ethnic and religious conflicts seem to grow, gaining higher and higher intensity all around the world. In my opinion, Mahatma Gandhi's political and social philosophy in general and his approach to the concepts of Truth, non-violence, and Satyagraha, in particular, could be the starting point of the revival or rebirth of non-violent or less violent cultures and societies. The non-violent philosophy of the Mahatma, based on the two core concepts of the Gandhian principles, is not a new proposition. Mahatma Gandhi himself had accepted that "He had nothing new to teach". Truth and non-violence are as old as the mother earth. All I have done is to try experiments in both on a vast scale as I could." In other words, we can say that the Mahatma just tried to revive and to make more understandable those ageless teachings for the whole world, to make them usable in the new social and political context.

Mahatma Gandhi was a social rebellion who called for an organized movement against imperialism, exploitation, economic oppression, and slavery to immoral tendencies. The social thinkers in the domain of philosophies and social sciences are trying to take stock of the Eastern Heritage and Western Thought, Mahatma Gandhi stood as a symbol of the concurrence of the East and the West. The contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in arousing the soul of Asia and Africa is of immense importance. Ho-Chi-Minh and Nelson Mandela have testified to the inspiration of the social and political leaders and activists of the Asian and African continents, teachings of the Mahatma Gandhi. In North America, the Negro liberationists under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King II derived inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. Romain Rolland had recognized the moral significance of the work of the Mahatma Gandhi. Einstein and Tagore testified to the spiritual eminence of Mahatma Gandhi. The time when cultural norms are collapsing and structure of civilization is imperiled, the ageless spirit of Mahatma Gandhi stood as a mighty Himalayan source of strength to

those devoted to the liberation of mankind. In the twenty-first century, Mahatma Gandhi is a global phenomenon. It means as if he has been reborn. The world knows leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King II, Lech Walesa, Nelson Mandela, Ho-Chi-Minh, Yung - Su - Ky, Mr. Aryaratna, Daisaku Ikeda and other geniuses have followed the footprints of the Mahatma Gandhi. In 1981, 56 Nobel Prize winners 'men and women' of the both Hemisphere warned us of an unprecedented Holocaust, encompassing all the horrors of exterminations and extending the frontiers of barbarism and death.

Strangely enough, all global leaders across the world look to one man-Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violent action to fight the most fundamental battle of human rights - the right to life. After almost 70 years of martyrdom, Mahatma Gandhi is now more relevant on a global level than before. Especially, after 9/11 of 2001, the terroristic attacks on Twin Tower World Trade Centre and Pentagon buildings of the USA, Mahatma Gandhi are remembered more with admiration than before. Mahatma is being acknowledged as a great leader of action, a Liberator and a Prophet Martyr all over the universe. It is need of the hour to implement his thoughts into practice and thus, his unquestionable and unchallengeable relevance in different social fields. For the very survival of a person, it is imperative on our part to act upon his advice because only on his relevance, we shall survive together or if we fail in our endeavor, we are bound to perish together. He is the only hope of the future on the Horizon.

Mahatma Gandhi portrayed how an ideal society, based on love, truth, and nonviolence must look and remain function, and he tried to realize it as much as possible by practicing. His attempts and results in making non-violence operable have had resonance and followers all around the world. For example, Edward Thompson wrote in his paper, Mahatma Gandhi: A Character Study: "he will be remembered as one of the very few who have set the stamps of an idea on an epoch. The idea of 'non-violence' has drawn powerful sympathy of other lands." As I said before, one of the most important fundamental concepts of the Gandhian thought considered is concept of Satya or Truth. The importance of Satya is underlined, by the fact that the Mahatma's Autobiography was entitled "The story of my experiments with Truth", which let us presume the importance of Truth in his everyday life. As a self-statement of the Mahatma regarding the importance of the Truth in his life, I will quote from one of his letters addressed to Narandas Gandhi. "Generally understanding of truth is merely a means to speak the truth, but there should be Truth in thought, speech and action. We can conclude from this, that for Mahatma Gandhi, the concept of Truth has a much deeper sense than it is understood by the majority in their daily life. Over and above of truth-saying or refraining from lies, for Mahatma Gandhi, the term of Satya has extensions on all levels of the everyday life, such as the thinking, talking and even the action, which indicates that Truth is the characteristics which has to be permanently present in our life and, at the same time, it is the measure of our thought, speech, and acts. I think it is not necessary to make a presentation regarding the role and the importance of the Satya in the major Indian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism. I consider that it is enough to state that the above-mentioned term – just like another core concept, the ahimsa – has a central role in every Indian religion which influenced the thought of the Mahatma. We have to remember the "Satyannasti Paro dharma" or "there is no Dharma higher than Truth" maxim, which is well known in India and which propagates the superiority of the Truth above all also known as "Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah" or the "Non-violence is the supreme religion". These terms can be easily found in the religious texts of Hinduism (such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata, The Laws of Manu, etc.) and, at the same time, it could be considered basic concepts both in Jainism and Buddhism. Mahatma Gandhi pictured to himself how an ideal society, based on love, truth and Between 2000 and 1000 B.C., the oldest religious writings in history appeared in India. They were the Vedas, described as "the first expression of the human mind, the glow of poetry, the heaven of nature's loveliness and mystery".

Wilhelm von Humboldt referred the two great popular epics, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and, the former - the Bhagavad Gita "the most beautiful, the only original philosophical text existing in any known language". Religiously from the ancient times, amidst prayers, philosophical speculation, commandments, poetry and epics the idea of nonviolence was present. In the Bhagavad-Gita, ahimsa or nonviolence is a superior ethical virtue: I foresee no good can come back from killing my very own associated in war. Even though they hit me, I wish not to strike them. How can we be happy, having slain our own kindness, though they, with hearts deadened with avarice, see not the evil. The Laws of Manu prescribe that he who would teach others for their well-being must be guided by Ahimsa and use sweet and gentle speech towards them. The epic Mahabharata comes the saying that nonviolence is the greatest religion or duty.

The significance of a man or his message can be said to have many aspects. It can be immediate or secluded; it can be local, regional or general; it can be personally relevant to some or universally for all. In the case of Mahatma Gandhi the varied aspects of his relevance can be studied with reward.

It is impossible to cover all the aspects of Mahatma Gandhi's life and teaching which are of relevance to our own times and environment in few words and sentences. I shall merely draw the attention of the reader to three major aspects of his life which are of the highest importance.

Mahatma Gandhi left several valuable sayings for the modern man to fight for righteousness in society in a non-violent way. Mahatma Gandhi also said “travels at a snail’s pace” and “Non-violence is a tree of slow growth. It grows unnoticeably but surely.” and then “Mere goodness is not of much use.” Mahatma Gandhi declared. “Morality and truthfulness must be joined with knowledge, audacity and persuasion. One should cultivate the fine discerning quality which goes with spiritual courage and character.” the modern man can also take great wisdom from what Mahatma Gandhi said the seven social sins: Politics without values; Wealth without effort; Commerce without ethics; Education without charisma; Pleasure without sense of right and wrong; Science without civilization; Worship without detriment.

The life-story of Mahatma Gandhi as a man is of the greatest relevance to every human being who aspires to rise above the standard and lead a meaningful life, with the watchword, “From good to better daily self-surpassed”. Mahatma Gandhi was not only a moralist but one who believed that man has a great future and that he is evolving towards a higher and nobler future. If we say that the twenty-first century is of the public, masses, then we see that Gandhi’s thoughts have even more relevance in this century, and Mahatma Gandhi will inspire generations of individuals fighting for justice of the society. If today we find that Gandhism is in ruthless test in countries like India, it is not because there is certain innate weakness in Gandhism, but it is because we have not seen in India strong leaders with the required audacity and confidence to fight the evils in society. We may borrow Mahatma Gandhi’s own words on Ahimsa, and say that Gandhism is only for the brave, daring and gutsy people.

I would like to conclude with a mark of respect that Albert Einstein gave To Mahatma Gandhi: “Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a person as this ever lived in flesh and blood upon this earth”.

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