

## DEBATING GANDHI

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### ABSTRACT

Step by step, Gandhi reached at the pinnacle of existence, where no one has reached before. Gandhi motivated millions of people during his life time, continues to inspiring people around the globe. Gandhi changed the course of history and created history. He was a man of principles, great convictions and always practiced what he preached. There was no dichotomy between theory and practice and between public and private life. He left an everlasting impact on the world at large because he always spoke and understood the language of the masses, socially deprived and downtrodden. Present world is passing through a critical phase of human history and is in search of an alternative.

He was at once saint and revolutionary, politicians and social reformer, economist and man of religion, educationist and satygrahi; devotee alike of faith and reason, Hindu and inter-religious, nationalist and internationalist, man of action and dreamer of dreams. He was a great reconciler of opposites and he was that without strain or artificiality. His usefulness will not end unless conflict ceases, radical discrimination ends, women are empowered and poor live with dignity.

**Key Words:** Ethics, Empowerment, harmony

Mahatma Gandhi popularly known as Bapu or Father of the Nation is tallest among the leaders of the world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ever produced. He is remembered all over the world for his love of peace, non-violence, truth, honesty, pristine purity, compassion and his success in using these instruments to bring together the entire population and helping the country to attain independence from the colonial power and show the new way to the world. Gandhi was a creative man and responding to the challenges of his time and setting example for present and future generations. Albert Einstein, the great scientist rightly said that “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth”.

Louis Fischer points out, the year in which Gandhi was born 1869, was also the year in which the “Suez canal was opened, Thomas A. Edison patented his first invention, France celebrated the hundred anniversary of the birth of Napoleon Bonaparte, and Charles W. Eliot became president of Harvard University. Karl Marx had just published Das Capital, Bismarck was about to launch the Franco- Prussia war”, and Victoria ruled over England and India.

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Gandhi changed the course of history and created history. He was a man of principles, great convictions and always practiced what he preached. There was no dichotomy between theory and practice and between public and private life. He left an everlasting impact on the world at large because he always spoke and understood the language of the masses, socially deprived and downtrodden. Even after sixty- eight years of his death Gandhi continues to attract the attention of scholars, social activists, media, policy makers and dreamers not only in India but throughout globe.

Present world is passing through a critical phase of human history and is in search of an alternative. Liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation are not only reshaping the economy of the people and nation but fundamentally reshaping culture, ideology, attitude and life style of the people across the world. Everywhere one can see the fundamental change. Small is being replaced by mega. Invisible became visible. There is a mad race for materialistic development resulting in alienation of people from society and nature and resorting to violence of different type. Everywhere structural violence has increased. Service and need is replaced by greed. Ethics and honesty is no longer pivotal in public life. There is crisis after crises, corruption after corruption and ultimately people are sufferer. Marxism provided an alternative to Capitalism. Due to inherent contradiction Marxian experiments failed. Liberalism and neo-liberalism are also not able to solve the human miseries. People hope lies in Gandhism which provide an alternative.

The Gandhian principles are capable of mitigate the greatest challenge of the modern age. The most urgent need of today is the abolition of human suffering. Gandhi's philosophy becomes pertinent in the present world due to the complexity of human behaviour. His philosophy, laying stress on the goodness of human nature, unity of mankind, service of man, application of moral principles considered valid for individuals to group life and inter-state relations, the non-violent process of change, social and economic equality, economic and political decentralization, tries to resolve the various kinds of tensions that disturb domestic and international harmony. It is capable of strengthening the forces of love, creativeness and joy of life and beauty. It takes an integrated view of man and emphasizes his spiritual nature. Gandhi provides an

answer and an alternative, which is above all, a ray of hope, a vision for future and a blue print for individual, state and society. The interpretations of Gandhian thought and perspective needs to be reiterated again and again till the masses learn to adopt and practice it in their thought and deed.

Gandhi provides solution to the contemporary dilemmas and conflicts arising out due to failure of developmental paradigms and failure of leadership. Even the welfare state is not responding as it was expected. The tragedy of modern India is that the important aspects of the Gandhian philosophy are not given serious attention. The ruling elite never realized that Gandhi was much ahead of time. The quest of humanity for social justice and sustainability will remain a dream until and unless humanity realizes what Gandhi meant when he said, that economics is untrue which ignores and disregards moral values. Gandhi in his various speeches and in his articles written throughout the freedom struggle spoke highly of democratic decentralization and rural development. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1946 issue of Harijan, Gandhi stated that 'Independence must begin at the bottom'. He said, "the swaraj of my dreams is the poor man's swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princes and the moneyed men. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. I have not the slightest doubt that swaraj is not Poorn Swaraj until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it".

Gandhi is simple everything else is complex. He is an author, thinker, philosopher, though not in modern sense but beyond that. His writings, running into hundred volumes, known as Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, contain a wide range of views on different issues concerning humanity, spirituality and cosmology.

Like Fakir he led a simple life and committed to moral and political values. His life is symbol of pristine purity and based on highest order of transparency. He was experimenting with Truths. In fact his relentless experiment after experiment with truths and changing contexts may not have lent his writings a propositional form. However it contains deep philosophical proposition containing all aspects including man, nature and spirituality. Works on Mahatma Gandhi are both voluminous and diverse. More than 450 biographies are written by well known authors including Nobel laureates and in almost all the languages of the world.

There are works on him which present him from different perspectives such as Marxism, Liberalism, Feminism, Subaltern, Dalit or Human Rights.

There is a need to provide a platform and forum where different interpretations of Gandhi can be brought together in debate, thereby elevating the understanding of Gandhi. One must come out from the cocoon of caste, class, gender, regions, ideology and religion. There is no need of garlanding of Gandhi rather need of the hour is to follow the basic tenets of Gandhi that is love, compassion, honesty, self esteem and integrity. One must go beyond the comparative, expository, and even dialogical axes, to bring to centre stage the idea of debate.

Differences are the pre- requisite to a debate, and a living debate involves intellectual activity. Truth is not seen as given but has to be arrived at through arguments and counter arguments.

A.L. Basham, "Traditional Influences on The Thought of Mahatma Gandhi", in Ravindra Kumar [Ed], Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlett Satyagraha of 1919, Oxford: 1971 suggests that many concepts in Gandhi's thought are derived from 'Indian tradition' and were absorbed by him during his childhood and youth. The contact with the west only brought to fruition these already existing traditional aspects.

It can be seen as seriously contesting attempts like that of Richard Lannoy, who, while ignoring Gandhi's childhood attempts to locate the main influences on him in his adulthood and that too during his life outside India. He recognises no resonances of the past, as in his view Gandhi is a relentless explorer of immediacy'; the terrifying thing about him is the 'dimensionless now which he inhabits'.

In situating the influences on Gandhi outside the fold of colonial knowledge systems and influences, it thwarts those attempts. In fact Gandhi took the pearls of wisdom from every source which enlightened his thought and action. Gandhi was by product of global culture. He beautifully assimilated ancient wisdom in modern context.

Partha Chatterjee- the correct perspective for understanding the Gandhian ideology as a whole would be to study it in relation to the historical development of elite- nationalist thought in India. Shiv Visvanathan maintains that Gandhi's critique of modern science cannot be taken literally, as there are some crucial points where his views converge with modern science. Instead of taking Gandhi's view on modern science at face value, he, while alluding to the resources from the life of Gandhi.

We must carefully read the following postures in Gandhi: though he was a 'nationalist', he 'fought the nation- state'; though an 'anti- colonialist' he wished to redeem the British; a Hindu who happily bypasses the shastras; a congress leader who wanted to preside over the dismantling of the Indian national Congress. Gandhi did not deny the Nehru in him; he only wanted Nehru and his modernists to recognize the voice of Gandhi's India. Akeel Bilgrami argues that Gandhi repudiates this entire tradition, though without necessarily relapsing into social solipsism.

Gandhi was a thinker and as a phenomenon need to be understood and analysed. He was travelling from one truth to another truth and experimenting on it. He believes that there is no finality in truth. Mahatma Gandhi was a creative man, concurrently writing history for himself and rest of the world to follow. Being a constructive activist throughout his life, he was continuously experimenting with his ideas and actions in the face of ever evolving contemporary challenges. He experimented with truth in plurality rather than in singularity. His concept of truth was not a static phenomenon. It varied in perspectives, person to person, and hence became a relative concept. He was most simple in thought process but adduced the complexities of thinking in a unique way by combining theory with practice, words with deed and nonviolence with action. He was greatly admired both in India and abroad but this did not leave him from being misunderstood by his own people and colleagues. Gandhi became global necessity but perhaps increasingly less followed in India including in the Gandhian Institutions and the Institutions established by Gandhi himself or in his name.

Through his creativity Gandhi became a great man in diverse sense and in many ways. It is difficult to understand a great person. Bhavbhuti, a great scholar of Sanskrit, rightly said 'who indeed can claim to know and understand the mind of the great?' This is true in case of Gandhi.

Gandhi was a man of public. His approach was humane. He inspired masses and masses inspired him. Being a leader, he used to write and reply the letters every day. These letters are treasure of information and functions like a light house in the journey of thought in the ocean of knowledge. There is a lot of misconception about Gandhi. Neither his political mentor[Guru] Gopal Krishna Gokhle, nor his political heir, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru could fully understand him. Gandhi's adherence to truth and pristine purity demonstrated by his own conduct is perhaps the most transparent way, may seem brahmanical to many. But apparently in this way, the supposedly brahmanical way led Gandhi to record every event of his life truthfully and honestly, that forms the single major source of knowledge about him. Hence, it is hardly surprising when Gandhi interacts with his followers, opponents, critics, fence sitters and detractors with equal ease.

Gandhi's relationship with whosoever came in contact with him was simple, honest and free from psychological and sociological encumbrances. He was at as much ease with the Viceroy as with other grassroots level party worker. He was as considerate to Brij Kishore Shukla, who invited him to Champaran in Bihar, as was he towards Albert Einstein or Romain Rolland, his great personal friends. There was something unique in him that enabled him to interact as confidently with Lord Irwin, as with Madeline Slade [Mira Behn] or Sarojini Naidu. However, in the pre independence era, his interaction with women was still a matter of great curiosity and enigma if not an outright stigma.

Gandhi was doing something fundamentally original and unique for aspiring women. Gandhi's relationship with women is well-known, but highly controversial and misunderstood due to various reasons. Lack of proper understanding of Gandhi and lack of knowledge of Indian culture and traditions were the main reasons for such misconception. Gandhi's understanding of women was based on Indian tradition of spirituality and concomitant four purusharthas- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Such an understanding indeed formed the world view of Gandhi. If one misses this vantage point of Gandhi, one might end up trivializing his strong sense of gender equality and holding him responsible for his undue attraction towards women. In fact everything was open and transparent in Gandhi's life, and anybody could have ever put it to public scrutiny. In this sense Gandhi epitomises finer values of truth, dignity and integrity in public and private life. Gandhi's extraordinary experiment of celibacy and non coercion towards women was misconstrued as his degeneration by both his mistaken friends and foes. However, it might be inconvenient to those women Gandhi shared his bed with. But hardly there is any evidence of such women ever raising any doubts on his intention. In fact the answer is simple and straight-Gandhi's relationship with women can be explained as one based on spiritual or platonic love where physical attraction and sex are not even a remote reference. Therefore, Gandhi's relationship with women can be easily understood by keeping the Indian tradition in mind.

In fact Hind Swaraj is the Gandhianbible, it is the sacred book the Father of the Nation gave to country, truly the Gita of the nationalist era. Through Hind Swaraj Gandhi wanted to establish self esteem of individual and moral regeneration of India. In other words Gandhi through Hind Swaraj wanted to transform (a) India as a nation and polity and (b) Indians. Hind Swaraj is a source book for evaluation of India and Indians. It is a manual of action for people. Hind Swaraj is a critique of excessiveness of materialistic western society. It is a pointer to down side of modern civilization i.e. colonialism, neo-colonialism, violence, alienation etc. It is also a pointer to Political democracy because political democracy without social democracy is not a democracy at all. Criticism on Railways, Lawyer and doctors must be seen as down side of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Hind Swaraj provides an alternative how a oppressed class can fight. It provides a way to fight against oppression, injustice, extremism, violence etc. It also provide alternative to individual, society and state. One can honestly say that Indians love to talk about Hind Swaraj but not understood it properly nor transformed its idea or philosophy on ground. It is a source book for evaluation of India and Indians in the post independent India.

Among the tributes received in New Delhi within hours of Mahatma Gandh's assassination on 30 January 1948 was one from Sarojini Naidu who said: "May the soul of my master, my leader, my father, rest not in peace. Not in peace my father do not rest. Keep us to our pledge. Give us strength to fulfill our promises to our heirs, your descendants, guardians of your dreams, fulfillers of India's destiny."

The force of her words reminds us that we should not rest till we are able to internalize in ourselves the twin principles of Truth and Nonviolence in our thought and action. We should be optimistic and hope that we would be able to overcome the present crises facing the world.

According to Gandhi, real democracy should have meaning not for a few but for all including the poorest and even for the maimed, the blind, and the deaf. He did not believe in mere lip sympathy for the ideal which comes so easily to most present day politicians and leaders. The entire social order should be such that this ideal should be achieved in practice. A genuine democracy calls for a higher degree of seriousness of purpose and a sense of urgency. Gandhi realized that once people are awakened, they would become a revolutionary force. Their minimum expectations would have to be satisfied, otherwise they would explode. This explosion could take many unpleasant and ugly forms.

Of course, in order to come out of the present malaise and dilemma, the only remedy lies in adopting Gandhian path to resolve conflicts. Arnold Toynbee has rightly observed: "At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way Emperor Ashok's and Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions. Here we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family and in the Atomic Age this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves."

Indians by and large, are "low arousal" people. They tolerate injustice and unfairness with feudalistic servility and fatalistic resignation. On 15 August 1947 India achieved Independence. But Gandhi was not present in New Delhi. At that time, he was working among the poor people of Bengal. The reason for his absence was simple. He had two dreams in his life. The first dream was liberation of India from the British rule, while the second was liberation of Indians from oppression and injustice, from inequity and inequality, from discord and disharmony. To quote his own words: "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there should be no rich class and no poor class of people, and an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. This is the India of my dream."

His first dream was fulfilled but the second was not. According to the Mahatma, the true time for celebration would be when the second dream is fulfilled. Gandhi was a leader of his people, unsupported by any authority; a politician whose success rested, not upon craft or guile, but simply upon the moral grandeur of his soul; a fighter who pushed back the mightiest empire on earth without the use of force; a spirit of profound wisdom and captivating humility, armed with only an iron will and inflexible resolve; and a frail man who confronted the brutality of military strength with the dignity of a simple human being. To the Mahatma, Truth was God and non-violence was religion. At his memorable trial for sedition in 1922, he said: "Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also, the last article of my creed. In non-violence bravery consists of dying, not in killing" His compassion and humanity were as boundless as the universe. "Gather together, "he said, "under one banner all men from all religions and races of India and infuse into them the spirit of solidarity and oneness to the utter exclusion of all communal and parochial sentiments. "And again: "My Hinduism is not secularism. It includes all that I know to the best of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Truth is my religion and Ahimsa (the principle of nonviolence) is the only way of its realization." Gandhi held the view that the life of a good citizen was the life of Karma action in the service of the country. "My writings should be cremated with my body, " he said. "What I have done will endure, not what I have said or written."

The hatred and fanaticism which consumed the body of the Mahatma did not touch his great soul. Indian systems and ideologies may be relevant at one time and irrelevant at others. But teaching of this great and benign lamp of wisdom and humanity are for endless time. He gave us the priceless gift of self-respect and the sense of dignity as a nation. The last interview which the Mahatma gave was in the early afternoon of 30 January 1948 to Margaret Bourke an American from the Life Magazine. She asked him whether he would persist in his theory of nonviolence in the event of a nuclear attack on a city. The Mahatma's reply was that if the defenseless citizens died in a spirit of nonviolence, their sacrifice would not go in vain. They might well pray for the soul of the pilot who thoughtlessly sprayed death on the city. This was his last message of compassion to mankind. He completely identified himself with the Indian masses. He observed: "We must first come in living touch with them by working with them and in their midst, we must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants. With the pariahs we must be pariahs and see how we feel to clean the closets of the upper classes and have the remains of theirs to be thrown at us. We must see how we like being in the boxes, miscalled houses, of the labourers of Bombay. We must identify with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent back and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash their clothes and pots, and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call."

The Indian masses responded to the Mahatma's call in a spirit of total surrender. He said to them that "real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." He repeatedly used to mention that through realization of freedom for India, we would try to carry on and fulfill the mission of the universal brotherhood. He was really involved in achieving the broadest good of humanity at large.

Gandhi shows the way to harmonize the values of artha and moksha, secularism and spirituality, power and justice. Purusharthas, as interpreted by Gandhi, provide a set of values and ideals within which public discourse in India can (and should) be conducted. He presents a balanced view of life. Wealth, power, pleasure, aesthetic beauty, ethical integrity and freedom of the spirit, the purusharthas, are goals that all Indians seek. Gandhi explains how and why that seeking should be the basis of modern India's public philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of purushartha has three related meanings. First, it means any human striving, secondly, it refers to human striving directed towards overcoming fate and karma. And thirdly, it refers to any one of the four canonically recognized aims of life, viz., dharma (ethics and religion), artha (wealth and power), karma (pleasure) and moksha (liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi himself beautifully sum up, he alone is religious, he alone is happy and he alone is wealthy, who is sincere in himself, bears no malice, exploits no one and always acts with a pure mind. Such men alone can serve mankind.

The moral authority of most of the politicians has almost disappeared, since they are seen as opportunists, in league with criminals and crooked businessmen. It is, therefore, not possible for politicians to impose discipline in a society which sees them as examples of indiscipline. The common man is alarmed at the moral sickness that is enveloping the world and lowering our ethical standards. Money power seems to have an all pervasive effect. One hopes that we do not reach a level where indifference by contagion or where lassitude slowly engulfs the nation and after a certain point of conditioning violence becomes acceptable, scandal becomes routine, and militant resistance turns into a film script. Education must be shaped as a potent weapon to reverse the process from seeking pleasure, acquisition, and violence to self-control, sharing, and compassion. We Indians must first integrate ourselves to achieve our ultimate motto of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakarn (the world is one family).

Political parties ought to work for the unity and integrity of India. Unfortunately, all parties with rare exception have used caste, religion and language, to their electoral advantage. Unfortunately, during the last five years or more, situation has emerged, particularly in India, wherein it is difficult to say whether a particular offence of misdemeanour is opposed or tolerated. The space economic offenders and scamsters opposed now, but the very fact that they had been allowed to accumulate over the years proves that they were not only tolerated but perhaps encouraged as well.

India's success will be measured not by homogenizing a heterogeneous situation, but by the success with which diverse societies can be harmonized and co-exist and become mutually reinforcing and supportive; where traditions and modernity are appropriately blended, and where man- made capital does not become destructive of the natural capital. Both models have their specific constituencies in India.

Gandhi was a simple a person and whatever he has written can be understood by the illiterates and literates alike. Yet his was a complex personality. Behind the veneer of simplicity, there was a complex Gandhi, a Gandhi who can be understood only if we tune our life to that of Gandhi. His mind, methods and mission were old, nay ancient indeed, but they went against the main currents of his times. They made history, and set the agenda for generations to come. He could interact with kings and prime ministers with the same ease as he could with peasants and artisans. He was not an academic in the ordinary sense of the word but he has become one of the major subjects of academic discourse. He was a practical philosopher, an applied social scientist, a grassroots social worker, a political mobilizer, a revered national leader, a scientist and a saint, all at the same time. His was a simple but complex personality. No matter how deep we penetrate his writings and life, we fail to understand him for we can neither relive his times nor can we disentangle ourselves from the myths, experiences, and prejudices of the past. To understand him, we have to read and re-read Gandhi, meditate over what he said and did and why and above all experiment with truth and nonviolence to resolve the problems we face with similar, if not the same, resolve, dedication, and mission. Gandhi changed the world he lived in and gave new direction to what is now known as development. This series is being published to enable the reader to know Gandhi first hand, in his own words.

To understand Gandhi we have to be objective and analytical but at the same time synergic, interdisciplinary, and holistic. Unfortunately, we are trained to be specialists; we see the parts but not the whole. But if everything is related to everything else, and nothing stands apart, knowing the part alone would lead to knowing the whole. Universe is a system of which the solar system is a subsystem; in the solar system, the earth is sub-system; in the earth as a system, lithosphere, hydrosphere, ionosphere, atmosphere and biosphere are sub-systems; in the biosphere, human species form a sub-system; in the human species each family and individual forms a subsystem. This being the case, to understand even an individual in full, we have to treat his as a part of the whole universe. True he is more closely related to the systems nearer him but he is influenced and he influences by his thoughts and deeds not only his fellow human beings, but also all that surrounds him, nature included. All that we do has its implication far wider than we realize. This is how the problem of global warming and climate change has emerged. Real Gandhi is a systems man and unless we see him that way, we cannot understand him.

Further, Gandhi is so much an inseparable part of our modern history that we tend to be emotional about him and refuse to hear anything critical of him although those who see nothing great in him are not few. On the one hand, he is treated as the father of Indian Nationhood, on the other there are many who think that he wanted to take India to primitive days; who consider him an impractical man, and a man who mixed up religion, politics, and economics. We can understand Gandhi only if we distance ourselves, both physically and intellectually from dogmatism, fanaticism, and barren logic; if we see life in its all manifestation, and as a part and parcel of other life forms in general and human beings in particular.

Gandhi worked all through his life to liberate India from British colonialism; but this mission of his was only a part of a larger and more encompassing mission of liberating humanity from the mythos that grip its soul, mind, and body. He lived so simply not only because he wanted to identify himself with the poorest of the poor, but also because he followed the dictum of simple living and high thinking. Gandhi saw unity in diversity; unity of souls and diversity of bodies with oscillating minds in between. Gandhi had no enemies: he had no hatred for anyone. He accepted differences of opinions, perceptions, thoughts, and approaches natural for each individual saw the truth differently. These and other differences can be transcended and ironed out when the contenders are overflowing with love for each other and talk to each other as brothers and sisters.

He was at once saint and revolutionary, politicians and social reformer, economist and man of religion, educationist and satygrahi; devotee alike of faith and reason, Hindu and inter-religious, nationalist and internationalist, man of action and dreamer of dreams. He was a great reconciler of opposites and he was that without strain or artificiality. Rabindranath Tagore called him Mahatma, Subash Chandra Bose 'Father of the Nation'; Lord Mountbatten, 'One Man Boundary Force'; Hindu fundamentalists – 'Pro Muslim, Jinah 'Pro-Hindu', and Western Churchill called him 'naked fakir'. Whenever he went wrong, he stopped, looked around, retraced his steps and then moved again. What Gandhi did was to all around him. Each of us has the potential to become something like him by experimenting with Truth as we move forward on the road to higher levels of consciousness.

Gandhi was not a theorist or model builder. He was a *Karma Yogi* seeking knowledge and wisdom through action. When people asked him to put his experiments in writing, he replied: "I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain." (Harijan, 3-3-1946, p 28). Yet he wrote copiously. As we scan through the 100 volumes of his Collected Works, we are struck by the depth and breadth of his reach. We wonder how this man of action wrote so much in so short a time. Even a four line letter he wrote contains pearls of wisdom. Yet, he was so humble as to say "There is no such thing as 'Gandhism' and I do not want to leave any sect after me, I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems... Well, all my philosophy, if it may be called by that pretentious name, is contained in what I have said. You will not call it 'Gandhism': there is no 'ism' about it" (Harijan, 28-3-1936, p 49). He climbed step by step to transcend all isms and proclaimed Truth is God.

Gandhi tried to solve problems as they arose, following the law of Truth (morality), keeping in view the cultural background of the people, and good of the society at large. He was often accused of being inconsistent, which he indeed was because "At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth; I have saved my memory an undue strain; and what is more, whenever I have been obliged to compare my writing even of fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency between the two. But friends who observe inconsistency will do well to take the meaning that my latest writing may yield unless, of course, they prefer the old. But before making the choice they should try to see if there is not an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies" (30-9-1939, p. 228).

Not many have been able fathom his depth. Gandhi believed in the unity of human life, which is a synthetic whole. It cannot be divided into separate, watertight compartments – religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. Gandhi said "Drops in separation could only fade away, drops in cooperation made the ocean which carried on its broad bosom ocean greyhounds. [CWMG: 89: 97] A drop torn from the ocean perished without doing any good. If it remained a part of the ocean, it shared the glory of carrying on its bosom a fleet of mighty steps. [CWMG: 87: 23]

Gandhi changed his approaches to conflict resolution depending on the nature of problem, people involved, and the circumstances surround it; certain timeless laws he followed and adhered to ever remained his guiding stars. *One*, he firmly believed that the process of evolution Darwin unraveled did not stop with the chimpanzees turning into *Homo sapiens*. Once the physical evolution was over, the evolution of the inner self began and it would continue until the humans evolve into super-conscious beings. Anything that took man backward to his animal past was regressive, and that which took him to the next milestone of consciousness was progressive. *Two*, Truth and nonviolence were the driving forces of this evolutionary journey to higher consciousness. *Three*, everything was related to everything else, and hence nothing stands independent and isolated. All that we feel, think, and act upon, has wider implications. Those nearer us are affected more than those at distant places. *Four*, since the journey of life adds new experiences, truth is not absolute; it is relative. As such all of us can be victims of truth or untruth depending on our perception of the reality. One should therefore change one's views as new truths come to light. One should not be dogmatic. *Five*, all life is a united whole; humans have to love not only their fellow human beings but also the nature - the plants, insects, and animals, and all that is created by

cosmic force otherwise known as God. And *six*, there is enough on this earth to satisfy everyone's need but not everyone's greed" and hence follow the dictum of simple living and high thinking.

Gandhi lived in a world of wars, colonialism, survival of the fittest, and eye for eye, Gandhi's truth and nonviolence appeared to many, as weapons of the weak. They gathered around him as co-workers and followers only when it appeared to work as a potent force against violence appearing in different garbs: injustice, exploitation, colonialism, and wars, to mention a few. Gandhi's weapons proved more powerful but least destructive *vis-a-vis* the conventional weapons of war. His satyagraha evoked world wide attention and crossed the borders of India to reach many other countries, the USA, Russia, China, EU, and South Africa included. It proved beyond doubt that his means of fighting injustice ennobled both sides and left them in win-win situation. Globalization of Gandhian praxis did not go far enough to usher in a civilization of peace and harmony. It remained a movement which petered off when war mongering returned with a big bang in the form of modernization and globalization. Modernization means westernization and globalization means deprivation of the rights of the people to fully participate in production and consumption of the goods and services they need and use. It converts people from being prosumers to consumers.

Rejection of Gandhian ways began soon after India became independent. It proved too difficult for the leaders of the time, even though they followed Gandhi during the freedom struggle, to carry forward his legacy of truth and nonviolence. Gandhi was soon enshrined in museums spread over different parts of the country, and Gandhi Bhawans of select universities. He became a research topic and a name to be prefixed with institutions, organizations and individuals to acquire prestige. Many development schemes sponsored by the central and state governments are being named after Gandhi. But in all these cases it is name, not the spirit of Gandhi that pervades.

A number of approaches to study of Gandhi's thought are in practice today – the Nationalist, the Marxist, the Oriental, the Post-colonial and the Subaltern, etc. To understand Gandhiji amidst his conflicting statements, one has perhaps to go into the meaning of meaning. To know their deeper significance, going by the literal meaning of the words would be futile and burdensome (CWMG: 93: 153). Even VinobaBhave, the spiritual heir of Gandhi failed to comprehend his guru. "Gandhiji . . . laid bare his mind in its fullness before the world. For his part, he had permitted no secrecy. Even so, I must confess, the last chapter of his life, which I have called the 'SwargarohanParva', or the chapter of the 'Ascent to Heaven', remains a mystery to me. Indeed, in my eyes, it stands equal to the last phase of Lord Krishna's Leela. To unravel its mystery, it may become necessary for Gandhiji himself to be born again".[CWMG: 86: IX-X]

## **SUMMING UP**

We must go back to the spirit and ideals of those halcyon days when we practiced the philosophy of nation first and foremost; when we spoke the language of the heart; when we breathed the air of idealism; when we walked hand in hand on the path of selfless service and sacrifice; when all sons and daughters of the motherland prided themselves in being "Indian first, Indians last and Indians always." The need of the hour is that leaders and people of the country be inspired by the ideals and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. We need a man of values at the head of a government. We need a philosopher king, whose head is clear and whose heart is in the right place. If this be true, then Gandhi is of relevance. If the policies of tomorrow are to be freed from the corrosiveness of purely personal ambition and raised to the level of serving great causes – such as liberating men from poverty, disease and hunger, both of body and mind - then Nehru is of relevance. If kindness, magnanimity, gentleness, and concern for others are the virtues which should inform public life, then Gandhi is of relevance. With the passage of time, Gandhi will be of greater relevance, and not merely to my country, but to the world at large. I have no doubt that so far as my own countrymen are concerned, more especially the younger generation to whom Gandhi is a mere name, they will, in the fullness of time and in the measure they address themselves to the real problems of India's historic transformation. The relevance of Gandhi remains undiminished today. In fact, his ideas and approach to political, economic and social issues are more relevant now than even in his life-time. The policy makers, politicians, intellectuals and scientists must remember in thought and action the Talisman of Mahatma Gandhi:

"I will give you a Talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test.

Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him? Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away."

We shall like to conclude that Gandhi's spoken words, writings, and work done by him will resonate for centuries to come. At the same time we must remember the seven social sins which Gandhi wrote in Young India of 22.X.1925.

Politics without principles  
Wealth without work  
Pleasure without consciences  
Knowledge without character  
Commerce without morality  
Science without humanity  
Worship without sacrifice.

What breath is to life, Gandhi is to humanity and civilization. As long as there is strife, hostilities, ethnic cleansing, religious unrest, internal conflicts and threats of military occupation, people will turn to Gandhi. His usefulness will not end unless conflict ceases, radical discrimination ends, women are empowered and poor live with dignity.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. CWMG: 89: 97
2. CWMG: 87: 23
3. WMG: 86: IX-X
4. Young India of 22.X.1925