RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S AHIMSA IN MODERN WORLD: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

The world is facing rapid multidimensional crisis today. Gandhi's philosophy is mainly aimed to bring world peace against the countless problems related with warfare, battles, violence, terrorism, over militarisation, depleted resources, degradation of nature, ecological crisis, corruption etc. The root cause of all these crises is mainly due to human actions, their roles, their unlimited needs and greeds that often implied the usage of science and technology. Gandhi criticized modern civilization in 'Hind Swaraj', and said that it is a threat for human's future. In the wake of modernization, there arise the problem of cultural identity crisis. Through his doctrine of Sarvodaya and trusteeship he advocated social responsibility i.e., welfare of all. Gandhi drew his ideal inspiration from Bhagavadgītā such as concept of non-violence, welfare of all, selfless action and so on. His notion of peace is centered on the concept of 'Ahimsa' (Non-Violence), 'Satyagraha' (truth), 'Sarvodaya' (welfare of all) and 'Trusteeship'; his view is towards humane and nature friendly environment (Swadeshi).

KEYWORDS: *Ahimsa, Antodaya, Cultural Identity, Dharma, Modernity, Niśkāmakarma, Sarvodaya, Satyagraha, Social Responsibility, Swadeshi, Trusteeship, World Peace*

INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's Notion of Ahimsa

Ahimsa is a Sanskrit word that means non-injury and is often translated in English as non-violence (Ramchiary67). According to Gandhi the word *ahimsa* denotes fearless action. The word *ahimsa* does not have only negative meaning that is, abstention from harm or injury but positive as well. In a positive sense, ahimsa or non-violence means love towards all beings. For Gandhi truth is god and *ahimsa* or non-violence is a means to attain it (Saha and Bhuimali2).

Non-violence is abstention from violence as a matter of principle (Merriam Webster). Total Non-Violence consists in not hurting some other one's intellect, speech or action per own thought, utterance or deeds and not deprive some of his own life (Brahmananda Satapathy5).

Gandhi's *ahimsa* is based on:

- The concept of self and human nature; all beings are part of one divine and so are interdependent and interrelated

- Deep trust

- It is not weapon of expediency, it is a spiritual weapon

- It is not the weapon of the weak and the coward, as it required courage and moral strength

- It is the cardinal principle for human relations

- It has a universal application and can be employed in one's own family, society and the world at the larger level (Biplob Gogoi111-112).

Ahimsa is closely related with *satyagraha*, i.e. they are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them; they are like the two sides of the same coin. Truth is fundamental for one's life, and the search for truth should be based on *ahimsa*. Gandhi suggested 'truth and non-violence' as a substitute for the violent, armed warfare of the world. His idea of *satyagraha* is based on the principles of 'truth and non-violence, with an element of spiritual qualification. If one develops *satyagraha*, then it would remove the root cause of all conflicts, i.e. evils of the world, and replace it with the true weapons of peace. *Ahimsa* will lead to cooperation and progress in society. *Ahimsa* has a virtue of respect for every life.

GANDHI'S VIEWS ON MODERNITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Gandhi in his book, *Hind Swaraj* has brought out his views and criticisms about the disastrous notion of modern civilization. It is in his view that modern civilization has two sided natures- one that aimed at bringing comfortable lives to people and at the same time making lives of people miserable. Modern civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably in doing so. This civilization is irreligion (*adharma*, contrary to *dharma*), and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad (Anthony J. Parel 36).

Modern civilization forms the broad historical context of Hind Swaraj. His criticisms of modern civilization made a distinction between ancient British civilization and Indian civilization. Gandhi's understanding of modern civilization is that there is no scope for religion and so is morality.

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi criticized railways, lawyers and doctors by saying that they empowered the continuance of British rule in India. 1) Railways are the medium of spreading diseases, which were earlier confined to one place. People began to make holy pilgrimage unclean as journeys are made easier for many people to travel to far flung areas. The notion of distinctions in society began with the advent of railways. 2) Lawyers- tightened the control of British over the Indians as they employed Indian lawyers who help them rule the country. The role of lawyers is that they advanced quarrels instead of repressing them, and they thrived on disputes leading to communal feuds between Hindus and Muslims. 3) Doctors- they are responsible for breeding immortality and they played with the religious sentiments of people. Gandhi stated an instance- if one got a disease then a doctor will cure it; so the problem here is that one shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened then nature would have done its work, and that one would have acquired mastery over oneself, would have been freed from vice and would have become happy.

According to Gandhi, there are three chief ingredients of true civilization based on truth and non-violence. First, there is a quest for truth and non-violent way of living and thinking. The goal of true civilization is spiritual longing and moral upliftment of man and not the satisfaction of or obsession with external riches and fascinations. The second ingredient of true civilization is simplicity which naturally follows from the first ingredient and is regarded as the essence

of civilization. The true mark of an ideal civilization is not the multiplication but the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. Third ingredient of true civilization is the principle of synthesis which has been one of the chief characteristics of the Indian culture and which Gandhi so well articulates in his idea of 'cultural rootednesses or the principle of Swadeshi. 'No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive' (Dham Raj Yadav 231).

His main criticism of the western civilization can be summed up that it produces polarization of the rich and the poor, creates misery, starvation for the large number of people, degrades and dehumanizes human being and transforms him into a machine (Dham Raj Yadav 229).Colonialism is something which imposed an alien mode of life on Indians.Gandhi's main objective of criticizing modern civilization is to warn Indians the evils of it, and he wants to lay down the blueprint of recognizing Indians as they were, rather than blindly adopt modern civilization.

ISSUE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the wake of modernization, many rich cultures of Indians are lost. It is the case with many marginalized sections as well. With the British colonialism, many Western cultures penetrated Indian society and had dominion over some of it.

An example of indigenous tribe of North East India may be taken here; called the Zeliangrong people. They are ancient Naga marginalized tribes residing in the three North Eastern states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. The term, "*Zeliangrong*", (comprises of '*Zeme*', '*Liangmei'* and '*Rongmei'*), denotes a tribal community that are mixed of Tibeto-Burmans, originally of the southern Mongoloid race. They have common ancestral origin and socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious belief systems.

With the coming of the British colonialism, Western education had been imparted and had reached the lands of the *Zeliangrong*. They feared that the rich cultural heritage, history, and identity might be loss with the onslaught of Westernization; this led to the crisis of identity. The younger generations are now given education which is based on the advancement of science and technology, and therefore, do not know their own culture anymore. They often look down on their culture and consider it as uncivilized and primitive. The need for preservation and revival of the *Zeliangrong* culture was first felt and led by its leader named Rani Gaidinliu (who followed Jadonang), who fought against the British and was considered as India's freedom fighter. Her socio-religious movement, called '*Heraka*' has some similarity with Gandhi's ideals: a) S*wara*j, i.e. she laid the seed of 'self-reliance' (not to depend on others especially on the western ideologies), self rule and self dependence, and b) the idea of harmonious living. Idea of nationalism according to her should come from love of one's culture. Genuine cultural identity of any society should be comprised of indigenous religion, native culture, language, along with their past glorious ancestral histories.

Gandhi worked for the welfare of all people, especially for the tribals of India who were mostly exploited by the British colonial rulers. He is of the view that *ahimsa* along with principles of democracy and equality should be the measures for the uplifment of the tribes of India, who form the majority of India's population. There should be no more social domination and political imposition on them and welfare measures based on their society and culture should be taken up.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Gandhi's Philosophy of *Sarvodaya*, Trusteeship and *Niśkāmakarma*

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 2010 published an international standard to address social responsibility. It holds that social responsibility is the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behavior. Therefore it aims to:

- Contribute to sustainable development such as health and the welfare of society.

- Consider the expectations of Stakeholders.

- Comply with applicable laws and consistent with international norms of behavior.

- Be unified throughout the organization and practiced in its relationships.

According to ISO, organizations can achieve sustainability by paying careful attention to their impact on society and the environment. Transparent and ethical mode guarantees the long-term success of society and the environment. The "people, planet, and profit" is the triple bottom line principle of social Responsibility. It holds that achieving profit does not require harm to the planet or the exploitation of people. Organizations can profit while also taking care of the planet and people. Davidson and Griffin defined social responsibility as "The set of obligations and organization to protect and enhance the society in which it functions" (Josie Fisher 394).

The term *sarvodaya* is one of the pillars among main pillars of Gandhi to achieve Hind Swaraj. *Sarvodaya* is a Sanskrit word derived from two words "*Sarva*" which means all and "*Udaya"* means welfare and uplifment. It means progress or welfare of all and it aims to ensure self-determination and equality for all. The underlying principle of *sarvodaya* includes social, political, and economic welfare for all (Shubangi Rathi). *Antodaya* is another term often associated with *sarvodaya* which means 'Rise to the last man'. It focuses on the deprived section of society. Gandhi through ashrams wanted to promote human values and goodness in the society (Kakali Chakrabarty1).Thus, ideologies of *Sarvodaya* includes achieving universal good, impartiality, respect for all beings, *satya,ahimsa*, *self-sacrifice*, *spiritual tolerance,* and *satyagraha* as a weapon of social change (Parathara561).

Gandhi's doctrine of trusteeship holds that there is a reciprocal relationship between individual and society. Therefore it is the duty of each individual to share part of his acquired wealth with the society. On this context Gandhi wrote in issues of young India:

My idea of society is that while we are born equal, meaning thereby that we all have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is in the nature of things impossible. For instance, all cannot have same height, cooler or degree of intelligence. Therefore, in nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and other less. Normally, people with talents will have more. Such people should be viewed to exist as trustees and in no other terms. (Social Responsibility of business Gandhi's concept of trusteeship)

Further Gandhi advocated that one should not possess wealth more than one needs. Surplus wealth belongs to community and should be used for the welfare of society. According to Gandhi *ahimsa* is a venture if men recognize himself as the servant of the society, he earns for it, spends for it (Sifat Khan and Rajkumari Jain 153).He attested that individual freedom is essential for his complete and voluntary service to the society (Joan V. Bondurant 30).

Gandhi was deeply influenced by *Bhagavadgītā* and its philosophical concept of desireless action or selfless action *(niśkāmakarma)*. The concept of *niśkāmakarma* confers that our action should be aimed at the well- being of others rather than for oneself (Indian Ethics: Individual and Society).He stated that by walking the path of *niśkāmakarma*one is bound to follow truth and *ahimsa.* If we work selflessly with no desire for fruit, then there will be no temptation for untruth or himsa (Joan V. Bondurant115).

CONCLUSION

Ahimsa is a paradigm of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi's concept of ahimsa is crucial for both political and social welfare. The Ultimate goal of Gandhian philosophy is to achieve peace and harmony globally. Nevertheless, Gandhi's principles or doctrines are often criticized as an idealistic approach and not practical. Probably to consider a world with infinite peace and harmony may be impossible but it should not halt us from working towards it.

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