

My Realization About Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, known all over the world as the Mahatma or the Great soul, was done to death by an assassin's bullets in the evening of the 30th January, 1948. A shocked, but prophetic voice of the great Indian Savant Sri Aurobindo came over the Radio the same night "I would have preferred silence in the face of these circumstance that surround us. For any word we can find will fall flat on such happenings. This much, however, I shall say that the light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn till it conquers....."

Much early, on the 1st December, 1930, the Indian Poet Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, describing Mahatma Gandhi as 'Superman' wrote "Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. When the time comes Gandhi will be known to the world for the world needs him and his Message of Love, Liberty and Brotherhood. (*Mahatma Gandhi, Viswabharati, pages. - 14, 62, 63*).

Writing about Gandhiji, as such, is a tall order lest you miss a finer point of this multi - dimensional personality or his definite contributions to human civilization the philosophy of Sarvodaya or welfare of all and 'Satyagraha' insistence on Truth and eagerness to establish it through non-violence and self-suffering or Methodology to establish 'Sarvodaya'. George Bernard Shaw, the great English Intellectual and Literary Personality, described Gandhiji as 'The Himalayas' (after an interview with the Mahatma in London on the 6th November, 1931) and Gunnar Myrdal, the famous Swedish Social Scientist, observed that Gandhiji was like a many-edge Gem and it would be difficult for even the greatest scholar to apprehend or realise the full import and significance of the total Gandhiji (*Asian Drama*).

On the 2nd October 1944, Gandhiji turned seventy five and his great contemporaries throughout the world brought out a compilation of essays in appreciation and as world tribute. The first article was by the eminent Scientist Albert Einstein wherein he wrote - "A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority; a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people....; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being and thus all the times risen superior.

"Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth". (*Gandhiji - His Life and Work*).

Naturally putting the Mahatma in a straight jacket could also be a difficult proposition. He also gave new meaning and dimensions to known terms. Interestingly by conjoining two terms or concepts he altogether gave these a different identity with much wider connotations - like Satya+Agraha = Satyagraha.

What was then his true identity:

An altruist, a Social Scientist, Protest and Courage Personified, a Problem-Sensitiser, only Complete Revolutionary in history who not only theorised, but applied in ground situations and undertook destruction and construction together, a perpetual fighter for establishment of equality, justice, love, harmony and dignity in place of deprivation, exploitation and non-co-operation among people, a peaceless society. A true lover of Freedom in all senses of the term he was not burdened by any earthly considerations, attachment or prejudice, there was nothing ambiguous in him and was above contradictions, dichotomy or hypocrisy.

What was 'FREEDOM' to him - a comprehensive conception - the freedom of man in all his majesty, a process of growth in quest of coherent moral purposes and actions and not freedom as arbitrariness or license and as such 'Self Rule' (Swasashan) or voluntary acceptance of social and political discipline. Individual integrity based on truth and non-violence was his supreme consideration, the natural corollary being emphasis on MEANS rather than ends.

In fact, Truth, NON-VIOLENCE and SWARAJ were the main motive force behind Gandhiji. But did he limit himself to the usual meaning of these terms or concepts or themes? Once he was reporting to his nephew Maganlal that for 15 minutes he and Kasturba tried to straighten a contorted waste-paper for re-use. However only the time was wasted which was both untruth and violent! (Gandhiji did not throw away even a small portion of unused paper and daily such unused papers were torn off or collected and kept tidily for re-use. Many eminent personalities, even at the international level, were recipients of Gandhiji's letters in such small, re-used sheets and envelopes).

What were truth and non-violence to him? Gandhiji started with a disposition that God was everything and hence he was the Truth. Later on truth became everything and hence truth was God. This revolutionised the whole concept of truth and meant the social reality also - where the minimum necessities of life are not available it is a truth less society. So was with violence, not what ordinarily meant by it. To him violence was exploitation, centralization (of power and concomitants) and dominance (all that retards free expression) and Non-violence is the antonym of all these - non-exploitation, non-organization (tantra-mukti), decentralization (in all spheres and aspects of living, social, political and economic) and non-dominance (a co-operative rather than a competitive society).

Did Gandhiji eschew physical violence? He said. "I prefer violence to cowardice". On the 31st August 1947, when there was a fresh flare up of communal frenzy in Calcutta a group of young people informed Gandhiji that they would protect the affected, but if necessary might use arms. He appreciated their gesture and assured them help in case of police-interference. Explained to Professor Nirmal Kumar Basu, an eminent Anthropologist and then his Secretary, on

this liberty to his hitherto declared stand Gandhiji's point of argument was that these people had come forward for a good cause but since they were unaware of the efficacy of non-violent method they adopted the violent one of whose effectiveness they were definite. History records that from the midnight of 31st August - 1st September, 1947 Gandhiji plunged into a 'fast unto death' till Calcutta came back to normalcy. After 3 days normalcy was restored, Gandhiji broke his fast and those young people came to him and paid their respects. In fact to the riot-affected people of Noakhali Gandhiji's advice was "Be brave, men and women".

What held true for truth and non-violence the same could be marked regarding SWARAJ - typical Gandhian connotation and dimensions. Gandhiji called it self-rule 'Swa-sashan' incorporating 'Atma Swamjam', "a state of being of individuals and nations".

Anthony J. Parel, in his discourse on 'Gandhian Freedoms and Self-Rule', has observed that Gandhiji used the concept of Swaraj in different senses and in different contexts. Swaraj is equated with freedom also. In fact freedom in all its grandeurs is the precondition - "we believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom". Key to freedom is self-reliance. However, a pragmatic person as he was Gandhiji hastened to add - "this does not exclude dependence on, and willing help from neighbours from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces". Hence Swaraj to be real is a state of self-dependence also. Henry David Thoreau, the American Activist and Thinker, best demonstrated this in 'life on the Walden pond' - and also the tremendous power it could generate that holds true of Gandhiji also. Sir Winston Churchill could be disgruntled, but "the half-naked Fakir" strided the steps of the Viceregal lodge to parley with the representative of the king - Emperor on 'Equal Terms'.

But how to achieve 'the state of being' in Gandhiji's concept? What did the Master strive for or what were his endeavours aimed at?

Gandhiji's focus obviously was on the individual. However he believed that "by nature man is a social being" - "Man is not born to live in isolation but is essentially a social animal independent and interdependent". Furthermore his analysis of man that he was not a mere physicochemical aggregate but body-soul composites that had distinguished him from other animate beings, strengthened Gandhiji's concept of healthy individual - society relationship.

Did Gandhiji have a blueprint of his society? It is interesting to note that during the French Students' Revolution in the year 1968, when General de Gaulle was President of France, the students raised certain slogans that eminently fitted with the fundamentals of Gandhiji's social, political and economic thoughts like 'anti-megalopolis' or decentralized society, an economy preferring small units as against large ones and polity participatory democracy which had been incorporated in, what can be called Gandhiji's manifesto 'Hind Swaraj' written by him in the year 1909. Hind Swaraj, which contained the basic ideas on which Gandhiji's society, was to be built and excepting changing a term and that too to placate the sentiment of an English lady friend Gandhiji stuck to it till his death. It signifies

that even before he became the Mahatma in the year 1915 or the legendary leader of Indian independent movement, he had conceived his society. In fact he had empirically evolved this as a result of interaction with the national milieu, British Rule in India, South African experience, Raichand Bhai, well-directed studies and obviously human nature and their necessities and nature itself in general. Thus he was the only Philosopher in history who first conceived his society and then directed his whole endeavours to achieve it.

Gandhiji's society can be variously described - Truth Society, Swaraj Society, Sarvodaya Society, Non-Violent Society, even a moral society or obviously a true civil society.

How did he proceed? He first offered a critique of the existing society, found out the areas of change, spelt out the basic elements of his society and then provided the 'Methodology' for ushering his society.

Gandhiji was aware that ushering a counter culture, from a dysfunctional social process and resultant social order, however necessary and urgent was a very difficult proposition and there could not be a short cut. For history provides that short cut could be the quickest cut unless a battle could be waged in the mental level. He developed what he called the Truth force of Love force or Soul force - integrating the material and spiritual sciences - to bring up his society where all the positive human values cherished by man - truth, love, justice, tolerance, brotherhood, co-operation and above all freedom - could have full play.

What would be the essential features of Gandhi's society? A people - oriented micro society, a participatory democracy where power moves in an oceanic circle, ever widening, never directed towards concentration anywhere, consensus not majority rules the day, production follows the minimum necessary consumption - level or need, not greed - oriented, particular consumption basket is the admitted norm, co-sharing should be the order of the day since affluence cannot be guaranteed to all (it is said that a highly developed, industrialized country consumes almost 63% of world resources although it contains only 8% of the world population), wages and prices do not chase each other, centralized, large-scale monoliths, urban-oriented, elitist and macro-social order collapse in the milieu and a new education - Basic Education, that teaches to accept realities with a new curriculum conforming to the needs of the emerging society, should be cultivated and pursued all over the globe. Involvement of all everywhere should be the pre-condition. To Gandhiji India was his laboratory, but he always had a global overview. This actually happened and the American Gandhi Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the African Gandhi Albert Swaitzer, the South African Gandhi Nelson Mandela, the Mexican Gandhi Caesar Chavez, the Italian Gandhi Lanza del Vesto, the Lebanese Gandhi Kamal Jumlat, Dr. Korazene Acquino of Philippines etc., do hold witness to this.

Unlike other theoreticians Gandhiji did not rest content with spelling his society only that emerged through inter-actions with forces of their times, but indicated and also showed the efficacy of his methods of change in his lifetime itself and also in different fields of human activity and interest - be it political, economic, social, moral and even religious matters. And the methods

commensurate with the type of society he wanted to establish. His emphasis on Means rather than End also determined the methods he would recommend and adopt. As such if the aim was to establish a Truth Society SATYAGRAHA, the non-violent struggle for establishment of truth and justice, should carry on and out the movement till the goal, establishment of a non-domineering, non-exploitative, decentralized, egalitarian social order for WELFARE OF ALL is achieved. Naturally it envisages a permanent revolution also.

The next was the activation of various Constructive Programmes, a unique package of true social development and nation-building endeavour that would build the Swaraj Society from below. Since the Mahatma was not satisfied with structural change only he advocated and practiced in his own life 'Eleven Vows' - Truth, Non-Violence, Charity, Non-Possession, Non-Stealing, Fearlessness, Body Labour, Equality of all Religions, Swadeshi or using of local productions etc. - for a qualitative change. This is the Mahatma's unique contribution, for we moved from ideology to ideology but never touched the inner material - human beings - and as such the situation usually remained unchanged.

Thus a new man helps to remove the last vestiges of violence from its roots bringing in the process peace and tangible prosperity for all.