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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### POLITICAL IDEAS OF MAHATMA GANDHI AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE.

**Pawanpreet Singh.**

Teaches at Dept. of Political Science, D.A.V. College, Bathinda.

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#### Abstract

This paper examined the nature of Gandhian political ideas. The concept of state, politics, democracy, leadership, decentralization, freedom, rights and duties, what were these meant for Gandhi and his future vision for India. Further, the paper studied Gandhi's political contributions such as secularism, panchayats, abolition of untouchability, freedom of speech etc. in the Indian constitution and their relevance in the present age. In last, briefly, I had made some understanding of recent emerging challenges in present society and hope to resolve them in the light of Gandhian principles, so that true democracy could be prevail. Therefore, the focus of this paper was mainly on political ideas and political contributions of Gandhiji and their present relevance. His political ideas were stateless and partyless democracy, decentralization, freedom of speech, abolition of untouchability, moral politics, secularism etc. There is great relevance of Gandhian political ideas or values in the present age of increasing violence and intolerance.

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#### Introduction:-

It is generally admitted that in the sphere of politics Gandhiji, the apostle of non-violence, was a great revolutionary leader who enabled his country to win, by the use of his technique of non-violence and self-suffering, her freedom and to achieve the status of equality with the rest of the world. Mahatma Gandhi was not a political philosopher in the conventional, western sense of the term. He was not destined to propound a new political philosophy, nor did he pretend or profess to do that. He did not discard old philosophies, and, adhering to certain fundamental principles and techniques based upon truth, he led men to the realization of a better society. In India this obvious virtue, simplistic lifestyle endeared him to the people. Mahatma Gandhi was the epitome of humanism on this earth. Mahatma Gandhi had the dream of an ideal India - his dreams of India where he described India a nation, where all people irrespective of caste, creed, gender etc. will peacefully co-exist together. Gandhi never claimed finality of his opinions. He styled his activities as search for, or experiments with truth (Chatterjee, 1984).

#### Gandhi's Vision for India or Gandhian Republic:-

After independence India was constituted into a "secular, democratic republic." By the 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional amendment of 1975, India was further constituted into a sovereign, socialist secular democratic republic. But it is a matter of shame rather than fame that the thinking which was written in our preamble and the Constitution remains elusive till today.

**Corresponding Author:- Pawanpreet Singh.**

Address:- Teaches at Dept. of Political Science, D.A.V. College, Bathinda.

Mahatma Gandhi was once saying that "We should wipe away tears from every eye." We should be messengers of peace for our country and we should work and die for our country. Gandhiji's these ideas were constituted into a small idea and philosophy named "Gandhian Republic."

**Some of the objectives or approach of the Gandhian republic are listed below:-**

1. The administration of the state or nation should be decentralised and each district must have equal autonomy.
2. The elections at every step should be the sole responsibility of the Election Commission. The Vigilance should look after the legislative, executive and judiciary affairs.
3. The Election Commission, the Vigilance, the Legislative, the Executive and the Judiciary and a Free Press should be the pillars of the democracy.
4. The economic policy should be in such a way that it should support the holistic development of the people of India and should be distributed equally among the society for its upliftment.

Gandhiji dreamt of such an India where every category of people - the rich and the poor, the Brahmins and the Shudras should live life together. There should be no discrimination in any sphere. Every people of India should feel it as their country. He dreamt of an India where there should be no political instability, no gender contradiction, every woman could walk freely in the midnight, no business of intoxicating drugs and drinks etc. He was in a view of an India which would be the centre of attraction of each community on earth (Gandhi, 1947).

**Gandhi's Political Ideas:-**

In this part, I have been discussing, specifically, Gandhiji's view on the state, politics, leadership, liberty, rights, duties, democracy and decentralization. In his political philosophy Gandhiji is basically a philosophical anarchist and decentralist. To the Mahatma politics was not an ugly strife for power, which it unfortunately has become in the hands of those who swear by him but have abandoned him completely. Politics was to him the moral means, the ethical norms according to which lives of the people should and could be arranged. The norms according to which life in a society should be arranged were not those laid down by persons proficient in law but formed part of the eternal and unchangeable values laid down by the great religio-moral systems for the benefit of mankind. He looked for legitimacy of authority not in the laws and the constitutions, not in parliaments and courts, but in the conscience of man. So far, the world has seen only the use of physical force and the force of law but Gandhi had carved out the Third Force or the self reliant moral power of the people (Dhawan, 1948). Gandhi stands for people's politics and not Party Politics. Actually, power must pass into the hands of the people at all levels; initiatives must pass to the people. He pleads for partyless democracy. Emergence of people's democracy will herald a new era of democratic decentralization i.e. the Swaraj (Self Rule) is needed from below. In Gandhian Politics, democracy becomes the rule of the people and depends more and more upon the power of the people and not upon the power of the police or military. Thus democracy and violence cannot go together (Kumar, 2004). Hence Gandhi pleads for the "Moralisation of Wishes." and "Voluntary Action" must remain the basis of democratic life and culture. His political theory of non-violence should be studied in the context of the growth of the philosophical tradition and application of non-violence in India and abroad since the earliest times. Further it is also necessary to keep in mind the milieu in which Gandhiji grew and which influenced, though it by no means determined, his political philosophy. This milieu includes the intellectual temper and the social, economic and political conditions in India, England and South Africa where Gandhi spent the early years of his life. Gandhiji was influenced by persons and books as well as institutions. Due to lack of space, however, it is impossible to give in this paper even the briefest account of this tradition of non-violence or of his environment. His political theory of anti-statism or indifferentism to the state and his non-violent technique of revolution and resistance are a corollary, and an integral part of his philosophy of life- i.e., his metaphysical convictions, views concerning media of knowledge, psychological assumptions and ethical principles and with a brief account of his philosophy of life we may preface his political theory of anarchism. The core of his philosophy of life is the ultimacy of spirit, or Satya. Satya etymologically means 'that which is, and Gandhi identifies it with God, Soul Force, Moral Law etc. This self-acting force manifests itself in the creation, giving it a basic unity. The achievement of the greatest good of all has demands classlessness and statelessness. Gandhiji's opposition of the state is due to the compulsive and explorative nature of state authority which has never befriended the poor and is destructive of individuality and to the impossibility, historically speaking, of weaning the state from violence to which it owes its birth. The state and the class system are inseparable. Gandhi's ideal is a stateless democracy, in which there is a federation of satyagrahi village communities, functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence. The stateless democracy is the state of enlightened democracy where social life becomes so perfect as to be self-regulated. This democracy will consist of almost self-sufficient Satyagrahi village communities organised on a

voluntary basis. Gandhiji is against centralism because it implies concentration of authority with the probability of its abuse, because it increases complexity of life which is a distraction in all creative moral endeavour, and finally because it diminishes opportunities of self-government and of resisting injustice. The state should reduce its functions to the minimum and use the least amount of coercion. As a matter of fact, according to Gandhi, the more the state action, the less the democracy. Most of the state functions should be taken over by voluntary associations which should grow in numbers and importance during the course of the non-violent revolution. For during the course of this revolution the masses should acquire capacity for voluntary, co-operative action. The state should meet foreign aggression and internal disturbances as far as possible non-violently. Judicial work should be taken over by panchayats (Dhawan, 1948). Decentralisation must not be an attempt at window-dressing but must be genuine and effective to make every village, or a cluster of them, democratically organised, a nucleus of administrative, political and economic management. Ever since Gandhiji returned to India in 1915 he had been laying the greatest emphasis on the need to revitalize the village Panchayats and establish Village Swaraj in this country, for he firmly believed that the real India lives in its seven hundred thousand and odd villages and that India has no future worth the name unless these villages play their proper part in the life of the country. His scheme of such a village Swaraj comprehended very department of rural activity which went to make each village self-governing and self-contained as regards the essential needs of its inhabitants, so that on the solid foundation of a vast network of such little "republics" peacefully co-operating with one another for mutual benefit, the life of the nation as a whole could be broadbased, enabling it to progress smoothly towards its destined goal (Gandhi, 1959).

Gandhi attached far greater importance to duties than to rights. Rights are the opportunities for self-realization. The way to self realization is the realization of one's spiritual unity with others by serving them and doing one's duty by them. Thus every right is the right to do one's duty. Gandhi pointed out that in swaraj based on Ahimsa, people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties. Because there cannot be any duty that cannot create a corresponding right. Rights of true citizenship accrue only to those who serve the state to which they belong. Swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of their duty as citizens (Chatterjee, 1984).

#### **Gandhi's Political Contributions:-**

The Gandhian principles were working behind the directive principles of the Indian constitution. The ideals contained in these provisions resemble to certain extent the ideals of a Gandhian state. Some of these provisions aim at establishing socio-economic justice in general which was the lifelong dream of Gandhi and the other provisions deal with individual issues like prohibition, cottage industry, decentralization, ban on cow slaughter, etc. Under Article 40 of the Indian constitution there is provision that "the State will strive to organize Panchayats in villages and will endow them with such powers which enable them to act as units of self government". Article 43: To promote cottage industry. Article 46: To promote educational and economic interests of the SCs, the STs and the other weaker sections of the society. Article 47: To bring about the prohibition of intoxicating drinks. Article 48: Organization of agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines to prohibit the slaughter of cows, calves and other milch and draught animals (Chatterjee, 1984).

Professor P.K. Tripathy rightly mentioned in his work, *Spotlights on Constitutional Interpretation* published in 1972, that Gandhi made a huge influence in placing the right to freedom of speech and expression in the Indian Constitution. There is no doubt that this freedom would have made its place in the Constitution anyway. But Gandhi's contribution is significant. Gandhi's principle of non-violence extended to words and thoughts. And these words and thoughts were expected to be adorned with truth. Gandhi encouraged people to be non-violent with their words and thoughts as well. His endeavour of building tolerance through free speech is reflected brightly in his statement which appears in selected writings of Mahatma Gandhi, "*In spite, however of such single-minded devotion (to Truth) what may appear as truth to one person well often appear as untruth to another person But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths, are like apparently different countless leaves of the same tree. Does not god appear in different individuals in different aspects? Still we know that He is one. ...Here there is nothing wrong in every one following Truth according to one's lights. Indeed it is one's duty to do so*". To Gandhi, the restoration of free speech, free association and free press was equivalent to whole Swaraj. Gandhi's values taught Indians to resist invasion on free speech, free assembly and free association and any other process of opinion building. Without resorting to violence, force or ill-will, Gandhi's values taught people to assert them individually and collectively through tolerance and democratic self expression (Chatterjee, 1984).

Article 17 abolishes the untouchability and its practice in any form is made punishable under the law. This was the article which was adopted with the cries of “Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai”. Though, this article does not create a right, yet it is a lease of rescue to the 1/6th of Indian population from perpetual subjugation, humiliation & disgrace of centuries. To incorporate the article in the constitution as one of the most unambiguous articles of the constitution was the best way to eradicate this evil (Chatterjee, 1984).

The concept of secularism was an essential aspect of the “non-violent state,” of Gandhi found expression in the Advisory Committee’s Report on Fundamental Rights. For Gandhi, religion has no place in politics. There is clear demarcation between religion and politics.

I do not expect India of my dreams to develop one religion that is to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another. (M.K. Gandhi 1947: 257)

I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it. The State would look after your secular welfare, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern. (M.K. Gandhi 1947: 278)

The concept of secularism evolved in and through the national struggle for political independence and it was ultimately incorporated and embodied in the Constitution of the sovereign republic of India. It is clear that Indian secularism grew not in the process of direct encounter and clash with religion as in the West. Secularism in India grew as an integrative concept, transcending religions on the one hand and tapping the unifying forces promoted by the secularisation process within the religions of India themselves on the other. Indian secularism is the fruit jointly of Religious Reformation and Modern Enlightenment in the Indian context (Vijayam, 2004).

#### **Contemporary Relevance of Gandhi’s Political Ideas:-**

In the light of above mentioned political ideas and contributions of Gandhi, now we will study to what extent that are relevant in contemporary period. Is governments and society in cotemporary times leading towards gandhian footsteps?

India follows the democratic type of Government. India is a big country and hence needs to be governed in a proper and an effective way. Mahatma Gandhi’s imagination of the democracy-fully encircled with non-violence -exists in no nation of the world as up to now. His ideal is a stateless democracy, in which there is a federation of satyagrahi village communities, functioning on the basis of voluntary cooperation and dignified and peaceful co-existence are relevance in the context of Indian democracy. In the words of G. N. Dhawan: “The ideal non-violent society of Gandhiji, unattainable due to human imperfection, indicates the direction rather than the destination, the process rather than the consummation.” The ultimate ideal of Stateless society being unrealizable, Gandhi’s thought was moving in the direction of the evolution of a predominantly non- violent state. He was no mere visionary. Being a practical idealist, Gandhi believed that the ideal society of his conception could never be established in actual life immediately, it was, therefore, necessary to continue with the existing state, but modifying and purifying it with nobler and virtuous ideals of Sarvodaya till the people were ready and worthy to be free of the state and government (Chatterjee, 1984). Thus, gandhiji was not talking about non-existence of state in all forms rather he was of the view of non-violent state (Srivastava, 1968).

In Modern times, we see that politics is rooted in deceit and dishonesty and is bound to create greater deceit and greater dishonesty. Hate must generate hate and violence greater violence. Thus the need of the hour is to “moralise politics.” “Unless the moral and spiritual qualities of the people are appropriate, the best of political system and constitutions will not work.” “Morals serve the cause of progress. Morality serves the great task of the social revolutions of our times” Gandhi’s prophetic emphasis is “there is no politics devoid of religion.” All through the Indian Freedom Movement, it was Gandhi and Gandhi alone who, in reality, practiced politics on religious foundations as he always used to put emphasis on his often repeated saying i.e. “Politics bereft of religion is a death trap” (Das, 2012). But the thing to remember is that for Gandhi, “religion is nothing than universal religion of toleration, Politics without morality is a thing to avoid.” So far, the world has seen only the use of physical force and the force of law but Gandhi had carved out the Third Force or the self reliant moral power of the people. Gandhi stands for people’s politics and not Party Politics. Actually, power must pass into the hands of the people at all levels; initiatives must pass to the people. He pleads for partyless democracy. Emergence of people’s democracy

will herald a new era of democratic decentralization i.e. the Swaraj (Self Rule) is needed from below. In Gandhian Politics, democracy becomes the rule of the people and depends more and more upon the power of the people and not upon the power of the police or military. Thus democracy and violence cannot go together. Hence Gandhi pleads for the “Moralisation of Wishes.” and “Voluntary Action must remain the basis of democratic life and culture. Through Satyagrah (Non-Violent Resistance), Gandhi resists injustice and exploitation and thus purifies the politics. Thus Gandhian Politics has a dominant and constructive role to play. He was against narrow nationalism. His concept of politics was for higher values (Gandhi, 1928).

Mahatma Gandhi also expressed his view on rights of citizens. These are- Right to Speech, Right to Press, Right to form Association, Right to Conscience, Right to Religion, Right to Cultural and Language, Right to Equality, Right to Public Service, Right to Profession, Right to use Public Road, Educational Institutions and other Public Institutions Rights. These all rights Gandhiji mentioned before the preparation of Indian Constitution. But ultimately these rights have been incorporated in the Indian Constitution. No doubt, there are some restrictions on these rights but that could not take us away from Gandhian path. Gandhiji himself accepted these restrictions in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of the country. From that point of view it is clear that rights which Gandhiji mentioned many years ago still relevant in contemporary India (Das, 2012).

His critiques of modern science and his idea of an alternative living on the pattern of the traditional Indian village communities have all along been popular with a good number of environmentalists, in and outside India, and with many of the action groups, the nongovernmental voluntary organizations (the NGOs) (Jodhka, 2002). Gandhi did not yield to the attraction of modern civilizations claim of progress. Gandhi idea of civilization was characterized by the ‘good conduct’ that makes it possible to attain mastery over mind and our passion”. In recent years it becomes urgent need that limiting growth has become a condition for global survival, like more production of goods and services results in emerging patterns of global warming. (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2015).

Gandhian democracy is still relevant in India. It is clear from the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of Indian constitution. That amendment is related only with rural administration of India. One significant provision of that amendment is decentralization of power up to the rural level. That amendment has already been implemented in India. But in the contents and functions the Panchayati Raj, as it exists today, appears very different both from the traditional and from the Gandhian points of view. This Panchayati Raj will not perhaps lead us to the Gandhian path. It is mainly used as a political device or as a mechanism through which developmental activities would be implemented. The government has found Panchayati Raj a convenient machinery through which it can endeavour to get the ideas transmitted to the villagers to get the plans, drawn up for them, properly executed. In a Gandhian system, Panchayati Raj would have been used probably in the opposite direction of politics which they ought to follow, or to inform them of the real requirements and priorities of the village population so that national assessment of real resources and consequent planning could be done from below rather than imposing them from above, which is the practice of present time (Chatterjee, 1984).

Gandhi showed Indians and the world that the ultimate legitimacy in politics comes not from brute force, not from the state apparatus, and not even from mechanisms of political participation, electoral choice and representative self-government. All of these are limited, and all of them are fallible. The popular mandate of Hitler did not make Nazi rule legitimate. The benign despotism of the British in India did not make colonial rule legitimate. Totalitarianism that enters riding on the coat-tails of democracy, or imperialism that seems bent over with the self-inflicted burden of delivering benighted natives from their ignorance and backwardness — neither of these forms attains legitimacy merely because it is successful in capturing power on the basis of professed good intentions. True political legitimacy has to be premised on popular will, on the desire for self-determination, and on the capacities and capabilities of a government, for sure. But in the end it exceeds and transcends all of these factors, and resides elsewhere, in a more subtle quality that has to do with the inherent morality of any structure of power that purports to rule a people in their name and for their own good (The Hindu, 2014).

Gandhi's emphasis on the Constructive Programme along with the movemental approach brought a sea change in Indian politics. The constructive programme is positive and creative and brought to the fore the innate capacities of the people. It built leadership, which was issue based, was selfless and service-oriented. In the Gandhian era the Congress became a movement and caught the imagination of the people. In contrast, in the post-Independent period, the emergence of political parties in India and in many other countries brought narrow mind and partisan approach. Political parties try to cash on the weaknesses of their opponents rather than by providing a credible alternative with

imagination and creativity. In any movement the issue is important in the political parties capturing power at any cost becomes the priority. The power hungry political parties vitiate the whole political atmosphere and reduce politics into a game of required numbers, rather than with any ideological basis. With the result that in politics morality is discounted. It degenerates into a game of deception and delusion. Politics has become a game of capturing power and to cling to it at any cost. No holds bar. Instead of politics for the eradication of poverty, poverty of politics comes to the fore (Vijayam, 2004).

As we earlier mentioned, Gandhian principles were working behind the fundamental rights given to the Indian citizens. In which, Article 19 guaranteed six fundamental freedoms to the citizens with some reasonable restrictions. These freedoms are freedom of speech and expression, peaceful assembly, freedom to form associations etc. (Chatterjee, 1984). On the contrary, the main cause of worry today is intolerance and hatred leading to violence and it is here the values of Gandhi need to be adhered to with more passion discussed in this paper. His ideas are relevant not yesterday or today but forever. Because Gandhi's ideas touched upon on many important issues such as freedom of speech and expression, tolerance etc, which are still contend in cotemporary India.

### Conclusion:-

Mahatma Gandhi is not merely a political philosopher; he is a message and philosophy of life. His political ideas are stateless and partyless democracy, decentralization, freedom of speech, abolition of untouchability, moral politics, secularism etc. There is great relevance of Gandhian political ideas or values in the present age of increasing violence and intolerance. Gandhi was a practical thinker. Gandhi was one of those philosophers who believe in self sacrifice, *Satyagraha* or *Non-cooperation*. He believes that violence brought with it hatred and feelings of revenge where as in non-violence there is no such danger. Gandhian philosophy is so comprehensive that it has left no aspect of human life untouched. In the field of politics he understands the issues with special consideration based on Indian nature of socio-economic and politics. Thus he defines politics as the best means to regulate the national life and also he concluded that its power should decentralize in equitable manner. He thinks that the state in concentrated form of power structure is more coercive than individual. So he suggests the political power decentralization in the democratic form of governance. Because decentralized democracy gives the scope to the public participation and representation. It ensures the liberty and autonomy to the individual, village and nation in its extensive application of the welfare world will be attainable.

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