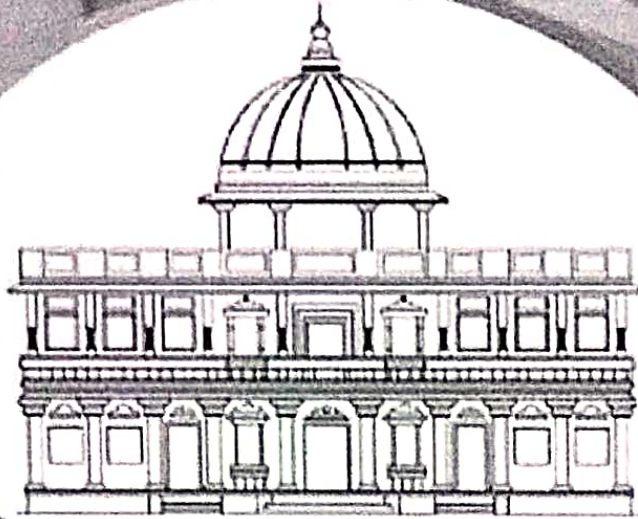




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Implications of ideology as promulgated by Mahatma Gandhi in the present social, political and democratic scenario in India

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Abstract :

Mahatma Gandhi, through his writings, speeches and discussions deals on various aspects of human life. His insights on all round development of an individual are overarching. He emphasized the growth of the human mind and body; for the ultimate cause of humanity. His views on the political ecosystem are as relevant today as they were in the then Indian society. The inferences drawn out of his deep understanding of human nature and universe are all Inclusive. In this paper; an endeavor is made to understand the relevance of Gandhian thought in the present political, social and democratic scenario prevailing in India. It reflects on how the picture would have been different, had we followed the path laid down by Mahatma Gandhi. It also focuses on how the pandemic, like Covid could be handled, if India were a self-reliant country in all respects.

Key words : overarching, social, political and democratic ideology, pandemic, self-reliant.

Introduction :

Mahatma Gandhi's 'India of my Dreams' is a book which compiles his previous works, writings and speeches, published on various forums like Young India, Navjeevan, and Harijan. The main purpose of the book is to give information on Mahatma Gandhi's social, political, economic and philosophical ideas in the context of India. In the forward of this book, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, mentioned that, it is "a book, which places before the reader not only those basic and fundamental principles, but also indicates how we can help to fulfill them through our freedom by establishing a polity and social life, and through the instrumentality of a constitution and the dedication of the human material which this vast country will now throw up to work without any external fetters

or internal inhibitions, will be welcomed by all."

Mahatma Gandhi is aptly described as "The President of the Indian National Congress (1925-34), he never held government office, but was regarded as the country's supreme political and spiritual leader and the principal force in achieving India's independence."² in the oxford reference dictionary. His political and social thoughts were revolutionary. He considered spirituality and duty to be the two aspects of the same coin. He believes "India is essentially karmabhumi (land of duty) in contradiction to bhogbhumi (Land of enjoyment)."³ (Young India 5/2/1925) He clearly stated that our way of life is completely different from that of the western countries. According to Gandhi India would not be able to achieve its true independence unless the people residing in India understood the rich culture and value system that is imbibed in our day-to-day life. Our land does not teach us selfishness but selflessness. Our forefathers taught us cooperation, fraternity and development of all. Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya covers social and political aspects of Indian society. The word Sarvodaya is taken from Sanskrit language. It is derived from two words -sarva and udaya. Sarva means 'all' which includes every kind of living being. Udaya means 'rise,' 'uplift'. Therefore Sarvodaya means 'the welfare of all' or 'the upliftment of all.' But on the contrary, today we see a wide gap between the super-rich and the poor. According to the World Inequality Report 2022, India stands out as a "poor and very unequal country, with an affluent elite", where the top 10% holds 57% of the total national income, including 22% held by the top 1%, while the bottom 50% holds just 13% in 20214. It is a very disquieting situation that; after 74 years of independence such disparity prevails.



According to Gandhi politics should prove instrumental in positive social change. But nowadays, politics and social change have become two poles apart. Politics has nothing to do with indispensable social change, whereas the society is being driven by the incompetent and fraudulent people, with their vested interest. In Indian politics; we see cut-throat competition for power and supremacy. Many political parties are trying to get power and authority by all means. But Gandhi was a strong propagator of decentralization of political power. He did not want there to be one supreme power dominating the whole state. On the contrary he pleaded for economic and social equality. Sarvodaya proclaims the universalization of self-government. It means active participation of the people for vigilance and cooperative action. He gave importance to people's sovereignty.

We Indians have the largest democracy in the world. Democracy should give freedom and equality to the people; no doubt it is given to the people of India. But the masses are always driven by ideology pre-arranged by different political parties. We are free and equal before law, but our thinking capabilities are locked in imposed ideology, which is not good for democracy. Gandhi, in the then political scenario, alarmed people that the power given by democracy should not fall in the wrong hand. He said, "The democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists."⁵ (Harijan, 27-5-'39) He also emphasized the inculcation of democratic values by every individual. Moreover it should not be levied, but self-respected. Gandhi wanted Swarajya to be based on the moral sovereignty of the people. For this he gave the characteristics of a true democrat, "A born democrat is a born disciplinarian. Democracy comes naturally to him who is habituated normally to yield willing obedience to all laws, human or divine... Let those who are ambitious to serve

democracy qualify themselves by satisfying first this acid test of democracy. Moreover, a democrat must be utterly selfless."⁶ (Harijan, 27-5-'39) He envisioned a society in which everyone can enjoy the fruits of democracy; that is liberty, equality and fraternity.

He wished for social justice through social equality. All citizens of India are equal before law. Every religion has its own value system and should be respected by all other religions. He believed that socialism had been handed down to us by our ancestors. He mentioned, "All land belongs to Gopal; where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that line and he can, therefore, unmake it." Gopal literally means shepherd; it also means God."⁷ (Harijan, 2-1-'37)

According to Gandhi social justice cannot be brought by force, but by non-violence means. For that, education has an important role to play. He categorizes society in two sections- one is "haves" and the other is "have-not". His views on socialism are based on the concept of communism. Because of education, people who have wealth will not be forced by anybody and the people who do not have wealth; if educated, will not allow anybody to exploit them. According to Gandhi, education is the realization of the best in man - body, soul and spirit. His concept of 'Basic Education' was deeply rooted in Indian culture. He emphasized on activity centered education. His views were different from colonial education policy. One of the Indian scholars has pointed out that "no one rejected colonial education as sharply and as completely as Gandhi did, nor did anyone else put forward an alternative as radical as the one he proposed."⁸

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, we could realize the importance of India's independence in all respects. It is because of our dependence on other countries, we are unable to take radical decisions with respect to our foreign policy. Had we followed the path laid down by Gandhi to make our villages self-reliant; the picture would have been different. It was his agenda to make every village in India



independent and self-sufficient in all respects. He was a strong propagator of 'village republic'. He firmly believed that India is located in its villages and not in cities. If we analyze today's situation, we can find it is contradictory to Mahatma Gandhi's vision. Our cities are swelling tremendously, whereas our villages are being forsaken. It proves the fact that the due importance was not given to farming and business related to it. In Harijan he had clearly stated that, "To produce enough vegetables, fruits and milk in the villages, is an essential part of the nature cure scheme. Time spent on this should not be considered a waste. It is bound to benefit all the villages and ultimately the whole of India." (Harijan, 2-6-'46) He was a true visionary. Further he said, "We must have the ability and courage to subsist on what our soil can give us rather than depend on foreign charity. Otherwise we shall not deserve to exist as an independent country." (Harijan, 6-10-'46)¹⁰

Conclusion :

After exploring the relevance of Gandhian ideology on social, political and democratic issues in today's India, it becomes clear that we need to rethink our conceptions of the same. We are not supposed to follow the views expressed by Mahatma Gandhi as it is, but as per the present scenario and need of time. It is high time to introspect on the current social, political and democratic situation in India. It posed many questions before us- Are the institutions created by us in the name of modernity and advancement competent and relevant? Are we not deviating from the path of humanity? Are we heading in the right direction? Are our approaches and methods to deal with the problems in India appropriate? So all these questions can find some sort of solution if we reconsider the views

sermonized by the father of our nation- Mahatma Gandhi. Let us hope to enjoy the true spirit of freedom and democracy as advocated by Dr Rajendra Prasad; in his forward to 'India of my dreams' as, "Freedom is only the means to a greater and nobler end, and the achievement of India of Mahatma Gandhi's dreams will be the fitting consummation of all that he has worked for and stands for."¹¹

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