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GANDHI JI AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

“Truth alone will endure, all the rest will be swept away before the tide of time”.

-Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

What better way to start an essay about the relevance of an evergreen ideology in today's world, and who better to say it! In an age where one changes spouses faster than one changes jobs, jobs faster than cars, and cars faster than hairstyles, there are some truths, that have stood the test of time, and will continue to do so. Foremost among these truths, is Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, Bapu to the masses, has served as a role model to four generations of Indians now, a burden few others can claim to carry. He is present in every office, in every school textbook, on every currency note. And yet, as we move forward into the 21st century, the man who led India to independence, is slowly being relegated to the background. We make movies about him, celebrate his birthday as a yearly event, even maintain 2 minutes silence on his death anniversary; but do we really remember him? Do we remember the man who was Gandhi, and his ideas that propelled India to unity and freedom from foreign rule? I think not.

The India of today is plagued by a multitude of challenges – terrorism, communal tensions, poverty, illiteracy, pollution to name just a few. Billions are spent trying to look for answers to these problems, usually to no avail. We have tried using guns from Russia, food from the US, aid from the UN. But have we really utilized our own potential? To quote Sanjay Dutt from Lage Raho Munnabhai, “Apun ke paas Bapu hai.”

It is surprising how Bapu's philosophy and teachings simplify things, when applied to today's world. It is not possible given the restriction on length of this essay to discuss all his teachings in detail, but I would like to illustrate how Bapu's teachings would enrich our lives by means of what he described as the **'seven social sins'**.

'Politics without principles' is the first of these. We are no stranger to vote-bank politics. Be it Mr. Bal Thackeray's linguistic divides, or Mr. Narayan Modi's communal demarcation, fault-lines are being drawn in the Indian consciousness, and elections are being won in the process. Ms. Mayawati has gone as far as to suggest a Brahmin-Dalit upliftment plan, abandoning every single moral premise, good or bad, in the process.

'Pleasure without conscience' comes next. Crimes of passion have increased by 700 % since the 70s. Every hour 14 people in India die in a drunk driving incident. The nation is seized by a hedonistic fever, blinded, chasing after some form of pleasure or the other. The government is no less, with billions spent on organizing

visual spectacles such as IPL while 42% of the nation still languishes below another IPL, the International Poverty Line. Would not this money be better spent creating employment for the poor?

The third sin as listed by Gandhi is '**Wealth without work**'. At this point, it seems almost as if Gandhi ji was looking into the future, and describing India. From "100 mein se 80 beimaan"(80 out of 100 dishonest) the posters on trucks have gone up to "100 mein se 99 beimaan", and we laugh it off, admiring the wit of the truck-driver. Everyone is looking to make a quick buck, and nobody cares who they screw over in the process. What is ironic, is that never when we pay or accept a bribe, do we stop to see whose face it is on that piece of paper.

The fourth, '**Knowledge without character**' sums up our educational system. Children are introduced into a rat-race even before they can spell "rat-race". The best institute, followed by the cushiest job with the fattest package, is the motivating factor behind a child's education. Who cares if he spends his formative years cooped up indoors with heavy textbooks? A far cry from Gandhiji's Tolstoy Farm in South Africa!

The next sin enumerated by Bapu is '**Commerce without morality**'. Movie stars, and cricketers, role models to millions, shamelessly endorse cigarette and alcohol brands. Entire villages have been displaced in Madhya Pradesh, in Orissa, in Bengal, to make way for industrial land, all in the name of greater good. Money, as the ultimate goal, is all-important. The path no longer seems to matter.

'**Science without humanity**' is another sin, not lacking in modern India. The first nuclear missile was tested before the first nuclear power plant. More money is still spent on military technology, than technical education. And for all its advances in technology, nearly half the country is still submerged in darkness.

'**Worship without sacrifice**' is the last of the seven social sins listed out by Gandhi, and perhaps the only one we can plead innocent to. Because we do sacrifice for worship. Not our own lives, but those of our brothers, those who happen to worship a different god, a different faith. And we claim to be children of the man who when asked whether he was a Hindu, replied, "Yes I am. I am also a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist and a Jew."

And that sums up perhaps all of contemporary Indian society's current problems. The problems are many, but the solution is simple. Underlying all of Bapu's philosophies, are the twin towers of truth and non-violence. All we need to do to walk the model path set out by the Father of our nation, is to respect humans and humanity, to conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity. If each one of us does just that, and nothing more, there is no reason why we cannot achieve the utopia envisioned by our forefathers. I began this essay with a quote, and it seems apt to end it with one.

"We need to be the change we wish to see in the world."

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

And that is all there is to it.

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Gandhi and Contemporary Society

Communal violence, on and off, has been one of the most deteriorating curses inflicted upon Indian society. As the 60 year law suit of Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi at Ayodhya awaits its judgment on 24 September, the volatility of Indian society towards religion is back in question. Even in the 21st century, more than 60years post independence; we have time and again proven that our proclivity towards religion supersedes the love for our country or even affinity for humanity. It will be interesting at this point to revisit the basic Gandhian ideology and analyze how far reaching his methods were in tolerating religious and other forms of disputes.

Post independence India has witnessed multiple communal riots periodically that have claimed millions of lives. Through the lives of its people India has paid the cost of its Secularity. India's communal diversity has always been one of the important political issues which have restricted the government in taking more discreet steps towards the development of its people. As even in the days of Gandhi, communal bifurcation of our society was its biggest drawback which had, in some sense, delayed and tainted the freedom from British Rule. However, contrary to all the leaders of the past and present, Gandhi was the single, most successful of all the leaders in understanding the needs of people and helping them renounce violence and adopt a more understanding approach.

Gandhi was not born religious, he went through various phases in his life that had a deep impact on him and as a whole affected the entire course of his life. In his autobiography, "My Experiment with Truth", Gandhi had clearly stated how through rigorous reading and experimentation with ideas over a period, he had established his beliefs and strived hard to put them into practice. Gandhi was not an orthodox; though a Hindu by birth, he was equally a Christian or a Muslim . He never tried to undermine another's faith rather tried to make them a better follower of their own beliefs.

During his life time Gandhi observed 30 fasts out of which only 5 were against the British rule; the rest were against his own people, criticizing them for their non truthful behavior. Gandhi believed that the nation was predicated upon the moral character of its people. Through penance of several years the values that Gandhi tried to infuse into the people of India seems to have eroded with time. Movements like the civil disobedience, Dandi march which were the pinnacle of non-violent successful protests have been replaced by extreme violent forms of protest. The Telangana protests, where young students have set themselves on fire, persisting conflicts between Maoist and police forces in various parts of the country, erupting violent incidents in the valley of Kashmir are all indicators of widespread unrest and the violent public response to it. It is high time; thousands and thousands of lives

have already been martyred for these causes but there is still no hope of foreseeable peace and agreement.

A Leader is vitally important to a society, he is the torchbearer under whose guidance society can nurture. Being a leader is not a volunteer's job, it's a big responsibility which covets a huge penance and self sacrifice. Modern leaders of India tend to miss out on this part and end up losing the trust of its people. Unfortunately, India which was once guided by torch of truth and non violence tends to starve for that source of light today. All politicians are invariably assumed to be corrupt and characterless; the mere word Politician engenders suspicion and hatred. As a result people stand leaderless and amazed in the shadow of darkness, vulnerable to violence and vices.

To be frank expecting people to be truthful and non-violent on their own is too much to ask; being non-violent doesn't come naturally to everyone and neither is it easy. It doesn't just require a balanced mind set but also a significant amount of self endurance and faith. However, Gandhi believed that no matter how difficult; being non-violent is inherent and deeply embedded in every human heart. Through his own high code of conduct and purity of thoughts, he gave everyone the necessary push to revive the goodness inside them. It is that momentum which is yearned today.

Amidst all the violence and discord prevailing all over the country, we once again need our Gandhi. We are falling off track, vices and violence have overtaken the virtues; and only a Gandhian figure whom everyone respects and willfully listens to, can bring all our disagreements onto the table for a peaceful solution. We need someone who can bring the Maoists at peace with the Government as Gandhi brought peace between the Ahmedabad textile mill owners and the workers. We need someone who can make the Kashmiris feel at home as Gandhi made everyone feel in Bengal. We once again need our 'father of nation' to remind us of the true values of our religious beliefs and give us the necessary push to rejuvenate the subdued humanity within us.

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Gandhiji and Contemporary Society

'The old order changeth, yielding place to the new', the famous line of Alfred Tennyson is rightly true. But, some orders can not be replaced by any other one. The teaching, 'truth and non-violence' of Gandhiji are equally relevant in present time as they were in the past and no other teaching or set of teachings can substitute their importance. Gandhian philosophy on various aspects of our life continues to be a pillar of strength and inspiration to provide guidance to generations - present as well as future. As the years pass by, the immortality of Gandhian thought is further reinforced.

Mahatma Gandhi a multi-faceted personality was born on October 2, 1869 at Porbander in Kathiawar. He was a freedom fighter, a patriot, an humanist, a philosopher and above all the spokesperson of the soul of India and her citizen. No word or group of words can describe his wide dimensions of personality. The society at that time was in the grasp of many evils. On the world front it was in the form of racism, colonialism and violence. On the national front it was untouchability, inequality, illiteracy, castism and many more social evils like dowry, plight of widowed, girl child and girls education. Due to his efforts today the evils of colonialism, racism, untouchability and widowed remarriage have been solved to sufficient extent but social, economical inequality and girls child rights are still have to be granted.

The principles on which he based his political actions as well as those in terms of which he constructed his vision of free India were universal by their very nature and Gandhiji always

made it clear that he did not regard his fundamental ideas as merely matters of policy in the Indian freedom struggle. Gandhiji's struggle and triumph in the political arena encouraged Martin Luther King to struggle for black rights in America using non-violent means. Gandhiji had served in Africa and his example gave an impetus to struggle of the blacks against apartheid which was brought to peak with the struggle of Nelson Mandela. He universalized the scope of Indian politics, emphasizing the world-historical character of the Indian struggle as representing the struggle of the oppressed and the exploited against all oppressors and exploiters.

Gandhiji's teachings are on every walk of human life and could solve many problems of present. We discuss here two major problems in front of the world today that are heavy industrialization and terrorism. A large scale industrialization has led many problems like global warming, economical inequality and mechanization of country.

Gandhiji said that our development should be related to the development of individual. He gave the message of 'swabalambi', self sufficiency with home spun 'khadi' cloths and 'sar- vodaya', a broad Gandhian term meaning 'universal upliftment' or 'progress of all' reaching the masses and the downtrodden. Gandhian economics was against concentration of wealth in the hands of few. Gandhiji advocated small scale self sufficient cottage industries. He was against large industrialization and mechanism of country. Today there is a big difference between the price of raw and reap product. The margin goes to industries and the poor farmers are becoming more poorer. Costly fertilizers, pesticides and seeds made farmers de- pendent on loans and due to the difference of expense and income they are bound to suicide. Due to heavy mechanization many traditional handicraft industries have lost there existence that made a heavy exodus of villagers to the urban areas for employment. The population of Metros like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata are increasing day by day. He envisioned an entire socio-economic structure that would make the common people, a majority of which live in the villages self-reliant and self-sufficient. Gandhiji was not against technological progress. He was against environmental degradation and ecological imbalance. He wanted technology to serve peoples needs and to be subordinated with their spiritual need. The cure for the now-rampant 'consumerist culture that throws traditional values to the winds, was in built in his simple, need-based economic concept of restricting ones needs. 'There is enough in nature for every mans need, but not for his greed', he said. Today blind exploitation of resources and industrialization on large scale has put the universe on the line of global warming, social and economical inequality. His thought of small scale industries and the value of individual is solely concern.

The central principle of non-violence or satyagraha that Gandhiji put forward contained the subordinate principles of truth, love, discipline and justice. Gandhiji taught that gun power and violence are not an individual strength but it need more strenght to control yourself contrary to some people belief that non-violence is the weapon of weak. Gandhian thought in the area of religious harmony is centrally based on tolerance and respect for all religious systems, while retaining ones own faith. Today almost all nations are in the grasp of some or other form of terrorism and violence. The reason of terrorism to some extant are mutuall intolerance, economical inequality and religious disharmony. Gandhiji's teaching of 'truth, non-violence' have become a demand of present. As Dalai Lama said, 'We have big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarism.' To fight these big wars the common ordinary people in this modern age need Gandhism.

In conclusion we would say that, Gandhiji vision, thoughts and efforts made a significant progress not only on national front but on world front also. Many laws and movement have drawn inspiration from his views. In the present scenario Gandhiji's vision of power, as a tool for the greater common good, is the only sustaining concept for the perpetuation of mankind. Love and concern, tolerance for the other,

is a must for the survival of all. His views on progress of individual, self sufficiency and need base economy could resolve the problem of global warming, social and economical inequality. If we say that the twenty-first century is the century of the common man, then we see that Gandhism has even more relevance in this age.

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Gandhiji and Contemporary Society

“I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills”: Gandhiji’s statement on the cover of ‘An autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth’ engages one’s attention the most. How extraordinary can a person be if his teachings comprise of one of the world’s most groundbreaking philosophies and yet he is humble enough to acknowledge that his teachings have nothing new at all?

In today’s age where the greed for money and a hunger for power, position and ostentation play it brutal in every sphere of life, where bread-oriented education scarcely develops true character, where violent 9/11’s cripple even the last bond of humane trust in society, where the words “religion and divinity” are travestied grotesquely and have become synonymous with fanaticism, the need for imbibing the Gandhian wisdom into humankind becomes more and more pressing. Bapu had fought against a relentless British Empire. Today, we need to use similar initiatives against the inexorable enemies that are tearing our society apart.

Gandhiji taught, above all, to examine and be true to oneself. “Be the change you want to see”. If one is internally filled with pretence, then what hope can one have in using the gospel of truth on others? He instructed the renunciation of greed in all forms. This teaching is especially pertinent in today’s hypocritical and corrupt society. This is the foremost principle that is a sure-shot tonic against corruption.

Non violence is the other major tenet of Gandhism. The Mahatma held that absolute non-violence would rid a person of fury and destructive impulses. The application of this philosophy, being easier said than done is one of Bapu’s most debated ideas. Gandhi’s contribution to humankind is great majorly because he gave the world an alternate vision to the solution of a problem: Use of non violent means, calling upon the strength of one’s internal conviction. This is very significant in today’s world where the tyrannized have very little logistics and strength against violent oppressors. This thought might seem illogical and unfounded against a merciless, callous oppressor, like Hitler. But we must realize the assumption underlying this philosophy is that the oppressor was humane enough to realize his own violence and its detrimental effect. This theory is unquestionably applicable whenever this assumption is valid. Today, most crises have the oppressor as the state, and thus Bapu’s teachings can be effectively mobilized against such tyranny, as was shown by Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s. The ideology of vegetarianism is also an extension of the non-violence principle.

The conception of universal love taught and practised by the Mahatma is a long standing solution to our religious problems. Religion, he said, was no excuse for

over-riding morality. He has taught us that we could not be incontinent in the name of religion. This idea, if brought into our lives, would end communalism once and for all. The crux of all religions lies in self purification, realization of the ultimate truth and service to society. This teaching will surely culminate the hypocrisy that is practised in the name of religion.

Bapu's idea of Khadi was an excellent measure to eradicate internal poverty, enhance village economies and promote social harmony. Gandhian economics, being based on promotion of spiritual progress is a splendid answer to the degradation of today's educated class blindly chasing materialistic pleasures and impairing themselves en-route.

Gandhi's being "one with the people" should serve as a role model for our leaders of today. Our leaders must realise the fact that the recognition of the people as one of their own is an important pre-requisite for being their leader.

The finest thing about Gandhi is his humility. He detested his being called "Mahatma", arguing he was not a perfect human being after all. By acknowledging his limitations as a human being, he achieved what very few before him have ever done: moral immaculateness. He showed the world that it is in the reach of the ordinary person to change humankind.

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Gandhiji and Contemporary Society

"I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills"- Gandhi

In the pages of world history, few chapters can be as compelling as the story of a man called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a man as susceptible to follies as you and me, a man who showed that it takes only truth and love to conquer the world. Does this story have something to offer to us today? In this era of international terrorism, ethnic cleansing and genocide, could what Mahatma said have a resonance?

The answer is simple. The enlightened wisdom which Gandhiji offered is timeless. Its interpretations can be applied across contexts if only we know how to.

In our hurry to confer sainthood on Gandhi, we often forget some of his defining qualities, that of a wilful political thinker and reformer, a leader par excellence who could inspire millions to march for him and march with him, a keen strategist who devised some of the most powerful movements of independence. Thus, for the naysayers who doubt both the legitimacy and the relevance of Gandhi's teachings, the solution lies in treating Gandhi as we would treat any other thinker of our times i.e. subject his ideas to rigorous testing, select the ones which make sense and apply them in the right context. It would be nothing less than naivety to expect Gandhian ideas to be the panacea for all our ills without making any concrete effort towards understanding and applying them.

We could now look into the so called cornerstones of Gandhi's teachings and understand how the society of today could benefit from it.

Non-violent Sathyagraha as a political tool:

The concept of civil disobedience when it was conceived was nothing short of path breaking. Its application in South Africa against apartheid and in the United States Civil Rights movement stands testimony to its universality. The argument that it would never work when ruthless dictators have to be opposed is true. In that case, civil disobedience is not the solution. However, the methods suggested by Gandhi have many more avenues where they would undeniably be effective. To dismiss them as obsolete could be our undoing. Non-Violence is truly important in this era of bloodshed manifested via (1) Global terrorism; our failure to move towards comprehensive, (2) universal nuclear disarmament and (3) violence against women & children caused by social strife and inequities spawned by economic globalization. For, through violence, we are only doomed and sowing the seeds to future violence.

“Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.”- Gandhi

The unshakable belief in secularism:

Even the most virulent critics of Gandhi could not put a label on him. As public intellectual Ramachandra Guha puts it “his personality and political beliefs transcended the divides of religion, region, gender, and languages”. It is this belief, this system of looking at things without the tainted lens of bias which could provide the much needed voice of rationality amidst all the chaos in our public debates.

“The essence of all religions is one, only their approaches are different.”- Gandhi

The power of truth:

Any endeavour to seek the truth without being blinded by the obstacles on the way is something Gandhiji emphasised. Even today, this is the starting point for anyone who wants to make a positive difference: Seek the truth. When one does not know

where to turn, truth still provides him with the strength of character, moral courage and fortitude to push ahead. Pop psychology? Maybe. Transformative? Yes. Relevant? Absolutely!

Any debate on the pertinence of Gandhi's ideas to the modern society would be incomplete and might even be perceived as biased if the question of weakening Indian economy is not addressed.

The weakening of Indian economy due to the application of Gandhian principles:

Sometimes, application is more important than the idea itself. Gandhi was not an economist. The people who brought Gandhian ideas into the economic realm lacked the ability and the foresight to determine its consequences.

In today's globalised Capitalist world, Gandhi's concept of decentralization & industries that can self sustain the needs of the country has come to the forefront again. His model of economic development which talked of developing villages as an independent production and administrative unit has become more relevant in order to save us from various economic, social, ethical and emotional hazards which are the consequence of this large scale industrialization and have become silent killers of the human race. Gandhi's concept of decentralization (wherever applicable) can help spur growth in rural areas which have till date been neglected, and thus, help reduce inequity leading to our elusive dream of Inclusive Growth in the country.

Final Word:

There is no denying the fact that Gandhi's ideas have proved self defeating at times. However the effort of trawling through all his teachings is worth the gems which are unearthed. Taking an "all or nothing" stand is moronic.

Gandhi strived to build a society without discrimination, injustice and exploitation. Maybe it is all too idealistic. But is it not something worth striving for? Yesterday, today and tomorrow? And therein lies the relevance of Gandhi to the contemporary society. He gave us a mission to work towards, something which might elude our

grasp forever, but something which feels like the right thing to do. That is both the simplicity and the challenge of Gandhian ideals.

It seems relevant to conclude with my favourite Gandhian quote:

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall -- think of it, ALWAYS.”

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GANDHIJI AND THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

“Truth quenches untruth, love quenches anger, self-suffering quenches violence. This eternal rule is a rule not for saints only but for all. ”

Mahatma Gandhi

Ask any child to list down the name of freedom fighters and the Mahatma is bound to be numero uno on the list. Gandhiji revolutionized the freedom struggle in many ways which till then could only generate sporadic support among the Indian masses. So novel and effective was his lethal weapon of non-violence, that it ensured participation of every Indian soul and was enough to send shivers down the British empire. The very simplicity of his ideas, the purity in his thoughts and his unbiased way of working made him a fatherly figure in India.

Gandhiji envisaged a world committed to truth and justice, free from all forms of violence. He believed all religions to be equal and treated everyone equally, irrespective of one's caste and dignity. But the very values he wanted to imbibe in us seem to be fading out through the generations and seem to be just confined to textbook literature. Corruption has become so rampant in the country that it has infiltrated even to the highest echelons. His portraits are hung on every government offices as a testimony to his character but it is also under his nose that bribes are being accepted. Corruption has its roots so deep that the concerned whistleblowers wake up only to find themselves in hell. From administration to educational institutions, from sports to law, the venom of corruption has spread in all walks of life.

The wait for justice seems like an eternity. Any vestiges of evidence are being manipulated and the common man's faith in justice is getting diluted day by day. One could even consider himself lucky enough to hear a judgment in his own lifetime. The concept of non-violence has too passed away with our beloved Bapu. Though worldwide appreciated, the path of non-violence has become a short term option which is usually followed by violent means of action. The Iraq war is a prime example to this which the entire world has witnessed. On the other hand, the politicians play with the minds of the gullible people to fill in their vote banks. These people are often exhorted to violence resulting in wanton killing of innocent people.

Even sixty three years after independence, caste discrimination is still prevalent in the country. People are being provoked on the basis of religious sentiments leading to communal violence. Cases of domestic violence are still emanating from the different parts of the country.

If Gandhiji were somehow to pay a surprise visit, he would certainly be dejected with the dismal state-of -affairs. The discipline he had inculcated in innumerable number of people has just perished away.

So who are we to blame for this? One could argue that it is impossible to live

an honest life in a world weighed down with such corrupted forces. The fact is that we have been digging our own grave. By obliging to their petty illicit demands, aren't we proliferating corruption? Take the example of a young student who is ready to shell out a heavy amount to grab one of those limited college seats or a person paying good enough to get his documents verified knowing that there are several discrepancies in it. The country is blessed with liberal scholars and leaders and yet they fail to convince those innocent people who are instigated in the name of religion. Surprisingly, domestic violence is not just limited to the remote villages but also in cities where supposedly the educated and the civilized people inhabit. We still haven't been able to abolish the frivolous biasing of caste.

One must remember that Gandhiji's path is laden with thorns. His mettle was equally tested and endured by himself to keep his principles alive. Though the common objective of gaining freedom led the people to embrace his principles, they are equally pragmatic in this modern world. With the objective being accomplished, people seem to have become oblivious to these values. They are resorting to immoral and unethical ways of settling things down. Such actions are only emboldening people to replicate the same. The bigger picture is that we are ourselves choking the progress of our nation and busy blaming others little knowing that we are equally instrumental for it.

By adopting the values of truth and non-violence, one can see a marked difference in their own life. They add a tinge of discipline in our lives. The drive down this road won't be necessarily smooth but one can guarantee a respectable image for himself. As was said in the concluding part of the very famous movie 'Lage Raho Munnabhai', the three bullets definitely pierced Gandhiji but certainly not his values. It's never too late to adopt these very values which is dormant within each one of us and put them to effective use.

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Gandhiji and Contemporary Society

On picking up any newspaper, we are faced by a familiar sight. Almost invariably, the front page describes a scandal, a scam, a crime, or a tragedy. On the one hand, it exposes the unknowing public to the various problems present in our society. However, the flip side of this is that it is one of the biggest indicators of the state of the modern day society. One could argue that the newspaper itself might be hyping up its stories to ensure that it sells. Again, this fact would only serve to prove the point. Anyone with even a passing awareness of Mahatma Gandhi would immediately be able to see how Gandhi's principles might be relevant in today's world.

Gandhi's most famous principle was undoubtedly that of non-violence, embodied best by his concept of Satyagraha, or non-violent resistance. This concept helped India to gain independence from the British and inspired similar movements for civil rights and freedom across the world, Dr. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement in the United States being one of the best examples of this. Gandhi felt that the objective in a conflict should not be to destroy the enemy, but to win over it without resorting to violence. This applies even to this day, in spite of the absence of a tangible universal enemy on the lines of the British in pre-independence India. Whether it is the corruption of the government and bureaucracy, or a clash between two religious groups, or even one country invading another in the name of democracy, possibilities of effective non-violent resistance abound. A philosophy of non-violence would be applicable even at a personal level, where in almost every situation, it wins out over the violent solution to a conflict. This is especially so in the long run, where history shows us that personal crimes involving violence are invariably accompanied later by a deep regret for the suffering caused.

One of Gandhi's most admirable qualities was that he stood up to issues in his own community, Indians, and more specifically, Hindus, even while simultaneously fighting against the British. He denounced practices like untouchability and the caste system, and the disadvantaged position of women. He tried to bridge differences between the various hostile religious communities by trying to reason with them, and in extreme cases, by undergoing fasts till the conflict was resolved. In today's society, where the problems in a society are mostly internal, this is one of the most important pillars for progress. It is only when one looks within oneself and one's immediate surroundings that self-correction, and in turn, co-operation, is facilitated.

The modern world is faced with the alarming problems of over-population, over-consumption, and the resultant environmental degradation. In truth, it is one of the most universal problems throughout the world today. In such a scenario, Gandhi's motto of simple living is, without doubt, the most effective solution. Modern writers

like Thomas Friedman have repeatedly emphasized this in many places. A possible positive side effect of adopting this as a part of one's philosophy would be the curtailment of individual greed to a significant extent, as a simple lifestyle would imply excessive personal wealth as unimportant.

Gandhi strongly emphasized the value of truth and the importance of practicing what one preached. He himself lived life strictly by his principles, and encouraged others to do the same. Today, as conspiracy after conspiracy and scam after scam is unearthed in all walks of life ranging from politics to the corporate world, we see the importance of transparency and truth, especially in any large-scale endeavor affecting a large number of people.

Another notable characteristic of Gandhi was his attitude towards faith and religion. He believed in the equality of all religions and studied many of them extensively, all the while remaining a devout Hindu. While he was a proponent of Hinduism, he admired various aspects of different religions, and even fought against malpractices prevalent in the Hindu society. In modern times, there have been many instances where masses were swayed by narrow-minded and bigoted political opportunists. Here, if the tolerance and open-mindedness that Gandhi showed is adopted by the general public, this would ensure that the wrong kind of people are not brought to power, and would thus, lead to overall development. However, possibly the strongest application of this ideology would be in attempting to prevent the present-day threat of terrorism. By educating the youth in such ideals as those of Gandhi, they become less vulnerable of being brainwashed by extremist groups.

The importance of Gandhi in today's setting has been well recognized in the contemporary media. A good example of this would be the recent movie, 'Lage Raho Munnabhai', which, while somewhat exaggerated, shows how various day-to-day situations are resolved successfully and peacefully by sticking to "Gandhigiri", or the principles of Mahatma Gandhi.

We have seen the various ways by which even today, the ideals of a visionary like Gandhi are still effective. He was the greatest of the leaders of pre-independent India, and is rightly honored by Indians today as the Father of the Nation. However, one of the biggest tributes and points in favor of the enduring relevance of Gandhian values would be number of leaders, Indian and non-Indian, that were inspired by Gandhi and spawned various movements with similar ideals and practices in their own countries and localities, at various times over the past 70 years, both during his lifetime and since his death.

Gandhiji and the contemporary society

Gandhiji, the Father of our nation will be the most promising example ever to counter the phrase “An individual can never make a difference”. He not only disproved that, but did that in a style that was never done before and had shown the world that war cannot be the only means of winning over people. Gandhiji and his principles of Ahimsa and Satya are more effective as a thought rather as a person. As mentioned by Stephen Murphy, the words Ahimsa and Satya differ in their meaning when translated into pure English as Non-violence and Truth. Satya means not only the truth, the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed and the ultimate truth that is God and morality which got their root from moral laws and codes. Ahimsa is far from its translation as Non-violence. It stems from the point that for Divine reality all life is one, then violence committed against another is violence towards oneself towards the collective whole self and is self destructive in nature. It is against the Universal law of life that is Love. It is with these principles that he led the people and masses of India against the colonial rule and hoped the same factors to be driving factors for India to go forward. But in the current materialistic age the use of these principles is limited for the purpose of study and discussion rather than for implementation and spreading the message of Universal Love and Peace.

Gandhiji's dream for an Independent India in 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 shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony.”

But even after 63 years of Democratic rule the divide between the rich and the poor is wide spread and is being concealed or hidden from the facts by focussing the attention on the overall growth rather than the inclusive growth. A very few hands

benefitting from the efforts of all the people of the country is definitely not what Gandhiji has thought of. He dreamt of an Indian community where caste, creed, regional and political factors should not be an issue of concern for any individual in his life. But on contrary these are the potential factors that are running the society today and vital for the survival of the political parties in the country. Corruption and influence were two major factors which were responsible for widening the differences in the society much against the wishes of the great soul. But the younger generations who will be driving the country into the future brings out a ray of hope. There is a growing percentage of people against the corruption and influence and many are putting a serious thought on whether the results of their actions will be beneficial for the country or not. Even though the growing interest in politics and public affairs seem like a distant reality to materialize, it has all the potential and will to bring radical changes to the society and to the community.

Another bright ray from the thoughts of Gandhiji is the importance of culture and values in one's own life who is an integral part of the society that we all live in and the effects of such values and culture on the whole society. Gandhiji's great fight against the society is with the menace of untouchability. His dream in eradicating this evil is still remaining as a dream. We have eradicated untouchability in writing and in policy but still in some parts of the country this evil is prevailing and is increasing the divide between the people. Even though we ruled our country for more than 60 years we are yet unable to change the perception of the people towards this. The other contemporary aspect is the growing interest and imitation of western culture among the country's youth. He is definitely not against the culture of the other countries and at the same time will not allow any comment on India's culture. This is a culture that played an instrumental part in the survival of the country and its people for thousands of years from the historic age. As far as historians can quote Indian culture had been placed at a high esteem throughout its existence. We have to agree that there are some short comings in our culture, but are we bold enough to act against such ones? Are we successful in completely removing the untouchability from the minds of the people? Undermining the importance our culture and traditions while trying to imitate the western culture is another serious concern that all of us should have to accept as a bitter truth. For surely, there is nothing wrong in following the other cultures that seem possible under the new globalized economy but does it

mean to neglect our owns? The answer is a definite No, which can be difficult for us to swallow. A quote from Gandhiji aptly fits the situation:

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blow about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

In fact he is not against adapting the western culture. He says

"There is nothing to prevent us from profiting by the light that may come from the West. Only we must take care that we are not overpowered by the glamour of the West. We must not mistake the glamour for true light."

I don't want to preach anything on this avenue, but just taking this as my responsibility to throw light on the situation, hoping for a better tomorrow.

GANDHIJI AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

“Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood.” said Albert Einstein paying tribute to Gandhiji.

Within the little scope of the essay, I can barely describe Gandhi’s greatness or his achievements. By his philosophy of action he has become **the greatest prophet of the twenty-first century**. But, sadly, today his ideals are being limited to books and speeches, his principles are being considered old-fashioned and inapplicable for survival in the modern society.

Then how is he relevant to today’s society? Can the application of his principles provide solution to the mounting challenges of violence and communal bitterness faced by contemporary society? In this essay I would like to provide answers to these questions through the discussion of the following topics.

- Problems faced by contemporary society
- Gandhian principles of non violence and truth
- Application of his theory to contemporary society to create a better world

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

“An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind”. Here indeed is not merely the voice of Gandhi but **the voice of humanity craving for peace amidst a world stricken with madness of violence**. Instances like Mumbai terror attacks, Babri massacre, naxalite problem and the recent Kashmir unrest remain as stains on humanity in the history of India. No country seems to have been left untouched by the phenomenon of violence. People are getting more and more divided into national, religious and ethnic compartments. Terrorism and religious strife are posing the greatest threats to world peace.

The present society is wishing for peace, tolerance among nations, religions and people. Gandhiji shaped these urges towards the reconstruction of man and society. **Although a nationalist par excellence, he was also, in the true sense of the term, a Universalist.**

NONVIOLENCE AND TRUTH, MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

Nonviolence is an expression of the inner truth. Gandhi always emphasized the **essential synonymy of non-violence and truth**.

In the sphere of human relationship, violence arises only when there is a failure of rational communication. Without exception, in such situations, Gandhi recommended to resort to nonviolence. What does nonviolence mean? It means this:

When parties in a situation do not see the relevant reality in a mutually acceptable way, the believer in non-violence will voluntarily undertake to suffer for his vision of reality. This will bring about a change of heart and mind in the other party, or in the sufferer, or in both and thus a common vision of reality will emerge eliminating any imposition of a supervening reality by the use of superior physical force.

If the unity of truth and non-violence is disrupted and a choice is to be made between the two, we should go for the truth. **Ahimsa becomes the most important Gandhian principle relevant to today's society afflicted by violence.**

When Gandhi, in his childhood, confessed his theft in a letter to his father, he did not punish but pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks. In Gandhi's words "**Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away.** A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance." This is an object-lesson for us in Ahimsa.

AHIMSA PARAMO DHARMA

For Gandhiji, peace was paramount and indivisible. He did not even care for freedom if it had to be wrested by violent means. He did not think any freedom to be worth keeping which had to be kept at the point of bayonet. Peaceful techniques of action he evolved like Satyagraha, civil disobedience and Ahimsa are relevant beyond time and space. "**First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.**" said Gandhi describing the winning strategy of these techniques.

GANDHIJI'S ASHRAM, A MODEL OF IDEAL SOCIETY

Gandhi's Ashram is a perfect reflection of his ideals. Simple living and dignity of labour were greatly emphasized. *Satya* (Truth), *Ahimsa* (Nonviolence), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), *Asteya* (Non-covetousness) and Conquer of fear served as its principles. He, thus, depicted a model of community he dreamt of.

GANDHIJI'S VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT

The relationship between the State and the People in a democratic system ought not to be that of guardian and ward. "**Good government is no substitute for self-government.**" Hence, government organization should be decentralized. An ideal government should minimize the exploitation as well as should not undo the teachings of self-help.

GANDHIJI'S THEORY OF SOCIETY

Though he never stated formally, in a nutshell, the following is a society what Gandhiji dreamt of.

The productive system should be based on the principle of optimal minimization of needs (and not on that of multiplication of wants). Consequently, it has to be a non-exploitative economy.

Social and economic organization should be decentralized based on the principle of **optimum autonomy**.

Truth and non-violence should form the foundation of the political order.

Satyagraha (the determined pursuit of truth or the right path) should be the chief form of political vigilance and protest.

Both social and economic systems should be hierarchical, non-competitive and non-acquisitive, based on the principle of **trusteeship**. Ideally it should be a **stateless society**.

CONCLUSION

Gandhism calls for a radical revolution, for a complete transformation of man's thinking and way of life, social as well as individual. His precepts of ethical, political, economic and social behaviour, his irrepressible optimism, apart from his respect for all life and pursuit of truth and non-violence provide a broad framework for the present society. Mahatma's philosophy of peace, tolerance and the interdependence of human kind is surely more relevant today than a hundred years ago. As today's children make tomorrow's society, his principles should be taught and demonstrated to them aiming at spiritual renewal of man. Only then can the world hope to make it a century of peace. Finally I sign off with the Mahatma's words

“We must be the change we wish to see.”

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Gandhi

When Albert Einstein at the time of Gandhi's death wrote, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.", he had certainly spoken for generations to come. However, another truth we must all acknowledge is that Gandhi, even in his day and age, was unique in his ideology, his path and his goals. Gandhi's goals were not that of freedom from the British, but for freedom from mass poverty and under-development, and because the road to that freedom meant we had to have self-rule, so it was that Gandhi fought for freedom.

More than 60 years after the independence of India, is there still an influence of this great man in our policy's as a nation, in the ways we fight, in our tolerance to religion, caste and all else that Gandhi wisely preached about. Does his face on the back of every rupee note, in every government building, remind us all about what he fought and asked us to fight for? In many ways, Gandhi was a beacon of light, in a dark nation, a nation who wanted to resist but didn't know how to, a nation who had warriors but no leaders, and his demise left us with a nation free but with no light to guide us, we were prisoners who had spent so much time behind the bars, that they had forgotten how it was like to be free, and once given the freedom, confused. The path to our freedom, has been radically different from our path since it. We as a nation have staggered in our policy's trying to imitate the world around in their policies, choosing what we think would suit us, rather than re-think the course we as a sovereign nation should take up. And the free nation without Gandhi became as enslaved as our colonised land.

For the nation reborn without its beacon of light, we treaded the path all nations reborn take up. We tried the same things, and we did progress, but the ideals of the great Gandhi were compromised. We doled out money to the poor, instead of making them work for it, we allowed too much power in the hands of too few people, thus breeding the same form of colonialism that existed in the times before our independence, in short, we made the same mistakes. And this time, we had no one to blame except ourselves. We live in a democracy, and yet we are fighting for power on the same basis of divide and rule. In our foreign relations, we have stopped caring about the benefits of the poorest of the poor, and have started focusing on what would showcase our 'image' better on the global front. As far as India as a country is concerned, the Gandhi in it has been long gone. Whether this is a good thing or not, is not something for me to comment on.

However, in the Indian common man, the Gandhi in him lives on, the quest to find a better future for himself through selfless toil when all is deserted. For the Hindu and Muslim neighbours in most parts of our country, they live on in spite of it, and sometimes even choosing to love it. In almost every street of every village, town and city in our country, the 'untouchable' beggar and the educated Brahmin walk on the same pavement, minding their own business, with their head held up high. In our

everyday affairs, for most of us, there is a slight inclination to do what is right inspite of not being watched. In our deepest roots, in the way we live of lives, we have changed and this is where the Mahatma lives on in India !

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Gandhi and the contemporary society

Right from the times of Lord Buddha, we as Indians have the spirit of “Ahimsa” ingrained into our culture. But through all these times, we have also been witness to countless wars and struggles for power. But the dawn of the 20th century brought with it a Mahatma, a saint disguised as a politician. He taught to us the spirit in which the teachings of our ancestors have to be applied for removing evil from society. He showed us the wrongs committed by us in isolating the unfortunate. He showed an empire, the power of human spirit. His name is well-known to all of us, to all those who recognize human goodness. His role in rebuilding a nation cannot be described in words nor can it be measured. But in the present society, “*Baapu*” has been relegated to just another name in our history textbooks. Why has he lost prominence in the eyes of the present generation? Though Mahatma Gandhi's stature may have been lowered in the minds of the people, his teachings will always be remembered and its relevance will never fade.

Gandhi's life work was always meant for the advancement of the masses. His interpretation of non-violence enlightened the world about the fine line between non-violence and violence and how we must tread this line. For him, non-violence meant abstinence from physical as well as mental violence. He always strove for inclusion of the backward and tribal people of our society into the mainstream. The Right to Information Act and Right to Education, in spirit, reflect his ideals of transparency in governance and education for all. RTI has shown us how to uncover the corruption of government officials, a dream harbored by Gandhi. Contemporary society has been unaware of various ways in which Mahatma Gandhi's teachings have been involved in their lives. The right to move, right to freedom of religion were ideas envisioned by Gandhi without which our lives would be in shambles. Yet as a society we have not been able to find ways to solve our problems through his teachings.

India has been involved in a struggle with the Naxals and insurgents in north-east for the past many decades. These problems can ideally be resolved by Gandhian approaches. Such conflicts are basically a clash between two groups, locals and the government, for the cause of development. But instead of addressing the root cause, we fight them with guns and grenades. Unless we win their hearts and solve their problems of developments, all our victories in battles are just a temporary relief.

Coming to the micro level, the daily life of a common man provides numerous opportunities for him to solve issues the Gandhian way. Disputes with colleagues, family members or with any random person are best dealt non-violently. Society has now become far more responsible and has doled out a lot of opportunities for the downtrodden. Large corporations have come out with “Corporate Social Responsibility” initiatives, a move largely inspired by Gandhi's activities for the poor.

This helps the firm in not only winning people's hearts but also wins the trust of the people, a far more crucial aspect for a firm. The most important thing Gandhi taught to the society is capturing the trust and hearts of people for an eventual victory.

His teachings have made a difference in countries all across the world. Revolutionaries have used his methods to vanquish tyrants who knew no boundaries in torturing the innocent. The recent struggle in Myanmar for freedom from Military rule has been an example of this fact. US and South Africa , which had been afflicted by Apartheid, saw the rise of activists who adopted the Gandhian approach in achieving their goals.

The beauty of Mahatma's teachings is its universal nature which transcends the boundaries of time, nations and people. He has inspired millions of people across the world from Aung San Suu Kyi to Barack Obama. Contemporary Society and future generations will always remember and cherish his memories for how his work has stood the test of time. Einstein had once rightly said about Gandhi,

“Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

Mahatma Gandhi – The messiah of contemporary society

In the modern day context, perhaps very few figures command as much reverence and respect of the masses as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, more popularly known as 'Mahatma' Gandhi or 'Bapu', does. After all, we are a nation of forgetful people- It hasn't taken any effort for most of us to forget our former sense of culture and values, and it surely hasn't been difficult to cultivate our 'holier than thou art' attitude towards the rest of society. In light of such an attitude, the very fact that we still remember the Mahatma bears ample testimony to our perception of his immense contribution to our country. But perhaps, he's done more than just that... He has subtly shaped our lives.

Contemporary society is a melange of parsimony, acrimony, harmony, irony and a host of other such eclectic values and sentiments which have been aptly understood by most sociologists in great detail. However, a study of contemporary society will always remain incomplete without the deeper understanding of one concept- Gandhianism. Indeed; the powerful impact of Gandhian ideology on the formative development of our present-day society and, in turn, the influence of a rapidly metamorphosing society on the Gandhian approach is a link that has been the matter of intense focus of many sociologists for a very long time. It is only befitting, hence, that we try to analyse this link in a way that will help us realize the impact of Gandhian philosophy on our very lives.

Let us begin by trying to understand what Gandhiji wanted. Did he want independence or was it equality or non-violence or non-cooperation or self-reliance? Such a question is difficult to answer. Perhaps, our best attempt at comprehending the Mahatma can stem from this quote by Dr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of our nation-

"Bapu had a curious knack of doing the right thing at the psychological moment, and it might be that his action - impossible as it was from my point of view - would lead to great results not only in the narrow field in which it was confined, but in the wider aspects of our national struggle.... Then came the news of the tremendous upheaval all over the country...What a magician, I thought, was this little man sitting in Yeravda Prison, and how well he knew how to pull the strings that move people's hearts. "

This is all that Gandhiji wanted. In his own typical fashion, he wanted to reach out to the millions of our countrymen and spur them on into a life of devoted service to others and the nation at large. And that is precisely what he managed to do. In all the admonitions or praises heaped on Mahatma Gandhi, the single most important thing to grasp is the depth to which his words have struck a chord in the minds of those

that seek to glorify or critique him. After all, only the deepest of wounds bleed profusely.

Most of us are familiar with Gandhiji's ideals of *Ahimsa*, *Satyagraha*, self-sufficiency, humanism and ethicality. Let us now try to look at these with an aim to understand their relevance in contemporary society.

At a time when this country was bleeding under the brutal assault of British guns and *lathis*, Gandhiji embarked upon the path of non-violence. None had dared try such an extreme form of tolerance before him. And yet, he went on with his simple method of making people realize their guilt. The rousing success of *ahimsa* affected the social thinking process. What was formerly looked down upon as cowardice now became synonymous with the highest form of bravery. The Gandhian model of non-violent protest is deeply ingrained in our social fabric even today in the form of hunger strikes and peaceful *bandhs*.

Gandhiji epitomised humanism and ethicality. From the very outset, his goal was to uplift the downtrodden and create an equal society. It was he who gave the lower castes a distinct sense of identity by calling them 'Harijans' which literally means 'children of god'. If the lower castes are being given due recognition today, it has much to do with the extensive groundwork and influence of Gandhiji. If it were not for him, our society would still be plagued by the menace of untouchability and casteism in a very big way. Apart from trying to rationalize and sensitize us to the problems of the country, he also made it a point to focus on self development. Not only was he a proponent of spiritual upliftment, but he also rigorously advocated the concept of 'work is worship'.

In today's day and age, when society is being shred to fragments due to terrorism, corruption and poverty, the Mahatma's ideals and teachings still are the beacons of guidance for millions of our countrymen. The concept of social responsibility is also an offshoot of his ideal of 'service of others'. His teachings of unity and brotherhood still keep the societal fabric well knit even at a time when religious fundamentalism threatens the very core of our nation's existence. He is the role model for many a youth aspiring unto greatness. There indeed cannot be a more immense contribution to society by any man.

Critics call Bapu a 'softie'. Admittedly, he was of mild disposition and looked at the world through the lens of idealism- something that is looked down upon in today's materialistic world, where ideals are regularly butchered at the altar of pragmatism. But that sense of idealism is precisely what made him the great man he was. Yes, he did make some mistakes along the way. But nothing can mitigate his immense contribution to our nation. Contemporary society owes him a lot. Truly, he was the change that society needed. Undoubtedly, he is the Father of our Nation. In Bapu's own words-

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others...Be the change you want to see in the world...”

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The Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Hind Swaraj in the 21st Century

Gandhiji was returning from London to South Africa on the ship 'Kildonan Castle' in November 1909. During this voyage between 13-30 November, he wrote the book 'Hind Swaraj' of 276 hand-written pages in Gujarati. It is the declaration of non-violent culture against the violent culture. 'Hind Swaraj' was first published serially in the columns of the 'Indian Opinion', the journal edited by Gandhiji and published from South Africa. Soon it was brought out in a book form, to be banned by the Bombay Government! *Hind Swaraj* contains seminal ideas which Gandhiji went on expanding and implementing throughout his life. *Hind Swaraj* was Gandhiji's manifesto for India. He encouraged others to first start the process of emancipation within themselves. In his letter (2 April 1910) to his nephew Maganlal, he said, "*Please do not carry unnecessarily on your head the burden of emancipating India. Emancipate your own self. Even that burden is very great. Apply everything to yourself. Nobility of soul consists in realizing that you are yourself India. In your emancipation is the emancipation of India. All else is make believe.*"

Gandhiji's views on *Hind Swaraj* seem so relevant in the 21st century that they can be applied to solve various problems like naxalism, unemployment, corruption, terrorism etc. In this essay we will particularly focus on two main themes from Hind Swaraj i.e. Gandhian Theory of Decentralization and Gandhian thoughts on Participatory Democracy, for together they provide concrete answers to the most pressing problems of naxalism and unemployment, faced by Indian Democracy. The acid test of relevance of works and views of this great man is definitely the application of them in prevailing conditions of time and space. His views and works are still worth giving a thought, and if they are applied, no doubt, they are fully capable of bringing sound and beautiful results beyond expectations.

1) Gandhian Theory of Decentralization:

Gandhian model of decentralization is based on his knowledge of the defects of the British Parliamentary system of government. In Gandhian model, the village would occupy, what is

known as the pivotal position , which in simple language means crucial position , in the ultimate social order which Gandhiji had visualized. It should not be assumed that Gandhi advocated a return to medieval techniques. On the contrary, his technique was to make judicious use of science with a view to achieving enough production to meet the needs of the villagers. He was opposed to such an economy of scale in which masses figured nowhere. Gandhiji stood for the idea of “Production by masses” as opposed to “Mass Production”. He posited a new technology which may involve the masses into decisions meant to shape their life. In such a scheme of development, all technological researches will be village oriented, aiming at perfecting the cottage and village industries. If therefore, technology, as visualized by Gandhi is decentralized, and every village is able to own such a technology (appropriate technology, the technology would be called “appropriate” if it economizes on the relatively scarce factors of production and maximizes the use of abundant factors in a given economy), the economic power will be diffused in villages. The village will emerge in the Gandhian Scheme as the nucleus of social life.

The natural result of such a decentralization of economic power will be the decentralization of political power. Once such a consummation is reached, that is, economic and political power is decentralized, the whole problem of concentration of power is solved. In short, decentralized social order requires decentralized technology, decentralized modes of production, decentralized ownership of technology, decentralized organization of production and decentralized allocation of technology in the local areas. Tiny Tech Plants, headquartered in Rajkot, Gujarat, founded by visionary Mr. V. K. Desai (a profound Gandhian) is practicing decentralization of technology thereby ensuring employment & local wealth production. To Gandhiji, the underlying solution of concentration of power lies in small scale manageable techniques capable of being worked upon by individual producers, the co-operatives in the village or region. If such a technique could be evolved and put in the hands of the village, the problem of concentration could be easily solved. Tiny Tech Plants is one such example where more and more wealth, jobs and employment has been created locally leading to real homogenous industrialization which alone has the potential to replace the big centralized factories.

2) Gandhian Theory of Participatory Democracy

In his book Hind Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi sought self-rule over any other form of governance for India. Many criticized the idea of entrusting power to a majority who was illiterate and a population which was divided and ultimately India adopted the parliamentary

form. Today, one hundred years later, a few communities are proving just how practical the idea of self-rule can be. Designing their own patterns of self-sustenance even outside what the political structure provides for, these communities have brought about a swaraj of their own. Gandhiji said, "Parliamentary democracy is a prostitute which is infertile," because it goes to the powerful and seeks status quo. It is only participatory democracy which can redeem the status of the citizens of our country." The foremost example of self-governance comes from a village in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, Mendha (Lekha). Mendha, small village of Gond Tribals in central India, is a perfect example of what a socially unprivileged but strongly united, and motivated community can achieve following the path of non violence (ahimsa), learning to be informed (adhyayan), and self-rule (swaraj). Mendha is surrounded by the state violence and naxalite violence. However, Gandhian thinking has made a mark in convincing the masses about the power & efficacy of non-violence. Unselfish and inspirational leadership by Devaji Tofa & Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, strong believers in Gandhian thought, has been instrumental in increasing the awareness of villagers about various government policies, development programmes and forest acts and most importantly reviving the tribal tradition of collective action. "Mawa Mate, Mawa Raj", which means "**in our village we are the Government**" is Mendha's philosophy, based on which the people of this village decided to have Gram Swaraj (village democracy) based on Gram Sabha (village assembly).

The Gond tribes made it amply clear that representative democracy handed over to them by a political structure would not decide for them. The concept of study circles, also called Abhyas Gats, is unique to Mendha. These study circles have helped the villagers develop their conversation skills, increase their awareness of the outside world, learn about their rights and responsibilities, and obtain important inputs and information which help them take informed decisions at Gram Sabha meetings. Mendha abides by the Gandhian belief in the organization of the society in the form of an 'oceanic circle'. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening but never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. Instead will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outmost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. In Mendha Lekha all power resides in the people and also originates from the people. Without debate one can

conclude that the steering force behind's Mendha's success story is the "People Power" in action strongly backed by Gandhian thoughts and principles.

Conclusion:

Today most the counties of the world are facing various kinds of internal and external crisis. Unprecedented changes in social, political, economic and cultural spheres, has lead to increased unrest in the masses, which has rendered even the authorities helpless. In such a state of affairs, can the way shown by Gandhiji be relevant? Yes it Can be and It Is !! Gandhiji is alive today wherever conflicts are being resolved—peacefully. Satyagraha – non – violent direct action of soul force-was Gandhiji's great contribution to humanity. Gandhiji is alive today also wherever people want to live simpler, healthier lives and more intentional ones. Gandhiji remains relevant for the growing Green movements throughout the world, for ecological awareness, for healthful foods (as well as vegetarianism).Gandhiji is also alive today where great world religions try to heal and not divide, where Hindus meet Muslims, where Christians dialogue with Jews. Gandhiji's prayer meetings have become a model for multi-religious meditation today. Also such international groups as the World Conference on Religion and Peace owe their origin, at least in part, to Gandhiji's concept of religious dialogue as well as to his inspiration. Gandhiji is alive in every deliberation or negotiation for disarmament and peace. Wherever war and violence is abhorred and questioned, Gandhiji is present. Till today his inspiration aides the great peace marches and demonstrations of our time, east and west. His insights are alive in the hearts of countless persons of all ages, in all walks of life, in all climes and countries, perhaps as much outside India as in India itself. Moreover, initiatives like Tiny Tech make us believe and hope that a day will come when one can actually see shutting down of giant, large scale factory units only because of widespread use of small & decentralized technology working everywhere. The small tribal village of Mendha is defying all odds with tenacity and self respect. It is going from strength to strength despite occasional reversals. If every Indian village follows Mendha form of governance then Gandhi's and Vinoba's dream of an ecologically rich and democratic society can easily be realized.

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GANDHI : The Inescapable

The name of Mahatma Gandhi transcends the bounds of caste, creed, religion and nation-states border, and has emerged as the prophetic voice of the 21st century. Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi is remembered for his passionate adherence to Truth and Non-violence as the basis of social order and the instruments of socio-political dynamics in every nook and cranny of the world.

The century has witnessed many places being drastically maimed through the use of brute force. In dealing with its neighbours, be it Pakistan, Bangladesh (East Pakistan) or China; or with its numerous insurgencies in Kashmir, Punjab, most recently in the West Bengal, North Eastern states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland or Mizoram, India had had many painful violent communal riots' experiences.

The world is weary with wars.

Eventually the power of guns will have to be overpowered by the will of the common people. As Dalai Lama asserted, "We have big war going on today between world peace and world war, between the force of mind and force of materialism, between democracy and totalitarianism." To fight these big wars the common ordinary people need to be armed with Gandhism.

Today, economic growth has become the standard measure of power, strength and virtue at all levels i.e., individual, national and international. The IMF and World Bank and their multi-faceted arms working in forums like WTO etc. are trying to indent nations that they should accelerate their growth rate in order to integrate themselves into the process of globalization, despite the fact that it has brought forth ecological imbalances, environmental problems and increasing disparity of economic well-being among nations. Mahatma Gandhi had severely criticized in particular such western model of development and its resultant civilization. He labelled it as "Satanic", calling it a product of dark age, "Kaliyuga" of Indian mythology. Gandhiji cautioned that this civilization is enslaving men by offering temptation of money and the luxuries as its fruit. Alternatively, Gandhiji, 'The Father of the Nation' propounded the model of "Sarvodaya"—the good for all. Economics he advised, has to create social prosperity in terms of cordial relationship, among different layers of society rather than accumulation of sheer material wealth in certain pockets.

A realization has dawned in the new-age generation that even the so-called 'affluent' societies created by the growth based economic model are experiencing alienation, hollowness and are losing their own perspectives. At the personal level, it is causing acute stress, depression and friction in the society. Gandhiji is here with the solved equation; an economy based purely on material considerations and totally devoid of any value base would not bring happiness to mankind. Only that economic system where the voice and perspective of everyone can be articulated, tested and transformed can cultivate vision of a sustainable world. This indeed is a vision of modernity, offering fruitful insights that would help us to confront the dilemmas of this century.

In his words, "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standards, just as all true ethics to be worth its name, must also be good economics".

Mahatma Gandhi thus offers us an integrated solution to the calls and cries of the contemporary society. Human life, he believed follows an epitome of unity in all its aspects and hence it could not be addressed in demarcated stratum like social, religious, political, economic and so on. According to Him, all life sustaining values converge into an integrated pattern.

Gandhiji is a veteran and the vogue of contemporary society. Precisely the greatness of 'Bapuji' in itself is the message of Gandhi to the modern world. Right from the interdisciplinary exchange of nations to the solution of social vices of the age, Gandhiji had had got some or the other aid in every spectra of the society. And so Gandhism is the live wire of the era. He has emulated and will continue to do so many political, social and religious leaders of the world. Whether it is Joan Baez , the Czech human rights activist, or Cesar Chavez, Joanna Macy , the social activists in California or Mubarak Awad, the non violent Palestine leader and many others whom Gandhi inspired.

"Gandhi's significance is universal. Countless people around the world have been touched by his spirit and example - his victory in turn inspired a generation of young Americans to peacefully wipe out a system of overt oppression that had endured for a century, and more recently led to velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe and extinguished apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of their great debt to Gandhi. His portrait hangs in my office to remind me that real change will not come from Washington - it will come when the people, united, bring it to Washington." Mr. Barack Obama, the US President's stated on Mahatma Gandhi Service Day on October 2.

Gandhi left many valuable sayings for the modern man to fight for goodness in society in a non violent way. "Good" Gandhi inferred, "travels at a snails pace." "Non violence" Gandhi deduced, 'is a tree of slow growth. It grows imperceptibly but surely." And then "Mere goodness is not of much use." Gandhi stated. "Goodness must be joined with knowledge, courage and conviction. One must cultivate the fine discriminating quality which goes with spiritual courage and character." The modern man can also take great wisdom from what Gandhi reckoned the seven social sins: Politics without principles; Wealth without work; Commerce without morality; Education without character; Pleasure without conscience; Science without humanity; Worship without sacrifice.

He was a 'common man' in the contemporary world in the footsteps of Mohammed , Buddha and Jesus.

"If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought, acted and inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony."

Vishal Meghani

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Gandhiji & Contemporary Society

Today we are talking of the Great Mahatma of 20th century and the present day world. But the truth is that, this contemporary society has forgotten Gandhiji, his preaching's, his thinking. Even some don't care to know who he was and what he did. As the years have gone by and generations have changed, doubts have begun to creep in — Is October 2 still relevant and does non-violence still have meaning in a world deeply divided by conflicting ideologies and religious fundamentalism? In fact the question that world is asking, not just asking, shouting in our ears that, "Is Mahatma Gandhi relevant today?" Then I want to ask to each and every of them - Is truth relevant? Is nonviolence relevant? Is peace relevant? Is belief in a higher level of humanity relevant? Is love for the other relevant? If any of them is relevant then Gandhiji and his ideology is relevant today and will remain forever.

These eternal values of peace, non-violence, truth and humanity ran like a fine chain through all Gandhi's ideas, actions, experiments and ideals. Looking back over the 62 years since his death, one is astounded that any man could aspire to such a high level of ideals, not just for himself but for a whole country. Gandhiji made the impossible possible.

Non-violence now is not a moral ideal. In a terrorist-stricken world where bombs can be manufactured in a garage & carried in a suitcase – it has become a survival imperative. September 11 has brought back into sharp focus, the relevance of non-violence to a world in which United States of America, the only "super power", found itself vulnerable for the first time in its history. The beauty of Gandhiji is that if you look at his ideals and his philosophy behind each of his preaching's, they can be relevant in any age and time.

The fundamental Gandhian truth is that the answer to violence does not lie in violence; that hatred should not be countered by hatred; that right ends can be obtained only by right means; that militarisation is not the need of the hour; that eradication of poverty and service of the poor through education and effective empowerment ought to be the priority goals of economic policy.

One may ask that will it not be the duty of a state to construct, strengthen and constantly nurture its police, paramilitary and military forces to maintain law and order within its borders and to meet any challenge of external aggression. While Gandhiji did agree that yielding to external threats would be tantamount to compromising with cowardice, his commitment to non-violence was not a mere policy formulation for a country that struggled to free itself from the British yoke. His idea of non-violence was a philosophy that would serve the purpose of all countries, all men and women, under all circumstances. In the last six decades, he has been proven right, in different parts of the world under different circumstances.

Today we ask how we can be non-violent in the face of terrorism. But the war on terrorism is not making us any safer. Virtues of non-violence as preached and practised by the Mahatma, are relevant even today and can be used as a potent weapon against terrorism. You can kill terrorists with bullets, but nobody has succeeded in finishing terrorism that way.

India is an IT power and there is an economy boom. If on one hand we have the Bombay Stock Exchange crossing 20,000 points, there are tribals in Thane, living 150 km away who are dying of malnutrition. Today, people are leaving their villages & coming to cities. Khadi today is a parasite that thrives on subsidies. It was meant to be a vibrant industry that would rejuvenate the villages. In present-day world Gandhian philosophy is the need of the hour.

Gandhiji was an extremely practical man. He lived in poverty so that others may not. As he famously remarked once: "**There is enough in this world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed.**"

Gandhiji would have been more pleased if the leaders of the present-day India stuck to the dictates of their conscience and exhibited some integrity. That would have been a legacy he would have been proud of.

Gandhiji was never against the development of science and technology. He always encouraged people to be curious and inquisitive, experimenting on new things for the betterment of mankind. He was also not against machine but was against machine controlling man.

I think today in this contemporary world, Gandhian philosophy is of more relevance and Gandhian values and principles for human development are to be actively promoted among the present generations to help them lay the right foundation for happy tomorrow. In fact, as long as there is Indo-Pak conflict, Hindu-Muslim distrust and caste hatred, we Indians can never ever forget Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy.