



Original Article

Relevance of Gandhian Political Thought in Modern India

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Abstract

This paper examines the relevance of Gandhian political thought in contemporary India and evaluates its significance in addressing present-day political, economic, and social challenges. Gandhi's principles of swaraj, satyagraha, non-violence, decentralization, trusteeship, and ethical governance continue to influence democratic practices, rural empowerment, participatory politics, and social justice movements. The study highlights the importance of Panchayati Raj institutions, grassroots democracy, and local self-governance as practical manifestations of Gandhian ideals. It also explores Gandhi's critique of materialism, centralized capitalism, and consumerist culture in relation to modern economic inequalities and environmental degradation. Furthermore, the paper analyses the role of secularism, pluralism, civic responsibility, and peaceful conflict resolution in sustaining social cohesion within India's diverse society. Contemporary initiatives in rural development, women empowerment, sustainability, and media ethics demonstrate the continuing adaptability of Gandhian thought in the twenty-first century. Although modern political structures often diverge from Gandhi's ethical vision, his ideas remain relevant as moral and philosophical frameworks for inclusive development, participatory governance, and non-violent social transformation. The study concludes that Gandhian thought continues to offer constructive alternatives for strengthening democracy, promoting social harmony, and ensuring sustainable development in modern India.

Keywords: Gandhian Thought, Swaraj, Satyagraha, Non-violence, Panchayati Raj, Grassroots Democracy, Ethical Governance, Swadeshi, Rural Development, Social Justice, Secularism, Sustainability, Participatory Politics, Modern India.

Introduction

In modern India—and indeed, across diverse cultures—Gandhian thought continues to resonate beyond the confines of conventional political philosophy. Shared vernacular and narratives link it with pressing contemporary issues, yet the potential tensions between current circumstances and the original ideas implicit in these connections remain unexamined. Responses to shared public events illustrate prismatic interpretations of how pertinacious Gandhian ideas remain at the national core and crucial to grappling with the contemporary relevance of the India's exacting reality. Such resonance, however, does not invariably promote reconciliation; tensions cocoon the spirit of these innovative concepts, sometimes ironically reinforcing alternative responses. The diverse sentiments crystallized around a single fragment of a collective memory serve as a testament to Gandhian thought's persistent centrality; exploring how the ideas were refracted through specific events reveals their founding vitality and invites a deeper consideration of their contemporary significance (Dalton, 1970). Examining the core principles of Gandhian thought elucidates their potential relevance.

The Core Principles of Gandhian Thought

Mahatma Gandhi's thought remains a vital cultural, ethical, and political force in India. Four foundational elements carry special resonance today. Satyagraha—the means of bringing about social and political change through nonviolent noncooperation—transcends ideology and reflects a universal yearning for greater dignity and recognition. Trusteeship emphasizes a moral approach to wealth and resources amid deepening inequality and calls for a new, more humane economics. Swaraj advocates for decentralized democracy and local self-rule, providing a powerful counter to centralizing trends in governance and development. Harijan welfare speaks to the aspirations of the most oppressed groups and urges constructive action to overcome social inequities.

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Satyagraha and Nonviolence

At the heart of Gandhi's philosophy and practice is the concept of satyagraha, a term he coined to denote a uniquely Indian doctrine of nonviolent resistance to injustice rooted in the ethics of truth (Kirloskar-Steinbach, 2016). Satyagraha is driven by the belief that every human being possesses an intrinsic capacity for compassion and a basic desire for dignity. Its goal, then, is not to defeat one's opponent but to awaken that ethical dimension in him or her. Satyagraha does not spring from a particular ideology or political worldview, yet it has been invoked by leaders in many diverse movements, from India's struggle for independence to civil rights initiatives in the United States. Gandhi's legacy survives not only through the constellation of social, economic, and political distortions he opposed but also through the enduring relevance of his moral voice and methods.

1. Satyagraha and Nonviolence

Gandhi's emphasis on satyagraha as truth-force and non-violence stemmed from his profound respect for human life. In contrast to the universal moral tenets of great religions, his faith in the sacredness of human life was instinctive rather than philosophical. Harm perpetrated against another being was a violation of the laws of life governing inter-relational existence. Each human being, regardless of societal station, social sense, race, or human error, deserved equality and benevolence unless stripped of the right to life by deliberate disavowal of conscience or decency. For Gandhi, the eternal soul underlying individual human constitution was sacrosanct, incapable of degradation. No regimen administered to the corporeal vessel—neither deprivation nor starvation—could harm the soul; thus, in his estimation, asceticism stood apart from moral degradation. Instrumental exercise of the corporeal vessel, be it physical force or legal constraint, proportional to individual conscience, prerequisites an affirmation of life. Connaisance of this principle persistently governed Gandhi's public interventions across a half-century, notwithstanding the unobservance thereof and innumerable others. Satyagraha as the, preferably non-violent, sit-in occupied centre-stage and addressed economic and social conditions ached by the vast majority (Adjei, 2007).

2. Trusteeship and Economic Justice

Trusteeship, in Gandhi's view, adds an ethical dimension to wealth. He believed that property should be held by the rich for the benefit of the needy and that the rich must devote their excess wealth towards humanitarian and philanthropic causes. As Gandhi would insist: "By and large, the rich are trustees for the poor, and they owe it to society to see that it shares such wealth as they do not need for their decent living." Gandhi condemned the economic system that produced millions of starving people in a country of millionaires. He wished well for the wealthy, but he was convinced that happiness comes from earning not winning, putting together not tearing apart, giving not taking, participating in life and serving, loving, and caring for other living beings. He said: "I do not see why rich people should grieve at the thought of parting with a hundred or a thousand crores of rupees and why poor people should not demand it." Gandhi dreamt of every wealthy man distributing part of his fortune to the needy and breaking the unseen barrier that divides society into two parts. He realised that wealth cannot be wished away because it was created by capitalism and that the tenants of the present system with the core idea of profitable investments must be allowed to remain but only if it is certified that such investments will not harm the society or the environment. Gandhi's concept of trusteeship offers a wider vision in the contemporary discourse that reflects an ethical approach to the development of technology and economics. In developing economies, it is usually the government that functions as the trustee, and Gandhi's concept of swadeshi posits that business houses with control over resources should also assume the responsibility of being trustees both for society and for the nation.

3. Swaraj and Decentralized Democracy

The Indian National Congress has insisted that the ultimate aim of India's political struggle is to attain 'Swaraj.' In the Congress understanding, this term meant independence for the Indian nation. Food, shelter, education, clothing, health and the rights of the underprivileged and the down trodden, freedom of thought, speech, worship, association and free participation in the governance of the country were included in the Congress definition of Swaraj. The Congress leaders and Congress manifesto related to 'Swaraj' illustrate how Gandhiji's creed of 'Swaraj' was distorted (Borah, 2012). According to Gandhiji, 'Swaraj' in its comprehensive sense also meant political independence but it included much more. This larger conception of 'Swaraj' is closely linked with the need for establishing 'Gram Swaraj' with each village governing itself under a council constituted by its adult population. 'A Gram' in Gandhiji's thinking is the ideal unit of life. An ideal Krishna Nagar village according to Gandhiji is one of self-sufficient, praiseworthy sanitation, knowledge and wisdom about effective agriculture, cooperative arrangement for cottage industries and no communal or caste tensions or exploitations. The Gram-swaraj was an essential step to 'Swaraj at the national level' (Kumar Datta, 2019). The impact of Panchayati Raj extension (73rd Amendment) on Gram Swaraj was envisaged as a political system of local self-governance in which villages or groups of villages would be empowered to manage their own affairs including economic development, justice and order. Such a system of deciding 'the who' and 'the what' through elections followed without regard for Gandhiji's 'Gram Swaraj'. The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 of the Constitution came into force with effect from April 1993 to empower the villages and to ensure civil governances. The 73rd amendment failed even in 1988 Panchayati Raj grievance was not attended to this Act was termed as 'a further wreckage of Gram Swaraj which was more or less at the imaginary stage'.

4. Harijan Welfare and Social Harmony

The dignity of the many and the development of the individual were Gandhi's twin goals for the social and economic transformation of India. The most marginalized had to be protected and uplifted, because their development was a prerequisite for the country's progress. Gandhi refused to call the oppressed untouchables: the term 'Harijan', which means 'children of God', would be more respectful. The idea was to transcend the material because God, the soul, and Truth could not be fully fathomed by the intellect. Since the realms of truth and existence were inherently non-material and God was empyrean, the little that was done in large material pursuits 'to avoid utter degradation ... towards the Mahatmas'—the saints and great ones—was to be sought collectively, alleviating that material pain through harmony. The erstwhile untouchables' self-determination and dignity were essential to dismantling the social edifice of untouchability, otherwise Gandhian aspirations remained unfulfilled (Ray Mitra,

2020). Promoting the material and social development of the Harijans while casting their plight in religious and spiritual terms entailed a complementary contradiction in the pursuit of social harmony. Material aid to political untouchables did not suit a region wide-reaching schematic based on divinity, thereby jeopardizing the latter, yet it was nevertheless elevated to a supreme priority—priority itself rested on a universal perspective and through this assemblage the harmony-seeking endeavour was further pursued.

Gandhian Thought in the Contemporary Political Landscape

The attitudes of political leaders toward Gandhiji's ideas vary widely. Governments, political parties, and social movements alike frequently invoke his name. Some admire him and seek to apply the essential elements of his thought through legislation and official statements; others regard him as an obstacle to modernization and advocate strikingly different policies.

While different parties may represent different segments of the population, questions remain: To what degree does Gandhiji's thought overlap his own practice? Are political thinkers attempting to achieve his objectives in significantly different ways? How do these different institutions and movements relate to an evolving idea of the Indian polity? After his assassination, in the 1960s and 1970s, many urged a fresh examination of Gandhiji's life and ideas. Even then, they saw two distinct Gandhis. One focused on sarvodaya, non-violence, and social justice, perceived as relevant to a post-colonial country. The other, paradoxically, emphasized modernity, a fight against poverty, the rural orientation, and a critique of industrial society. Today, Gandhiji encapsulates both views.

The 21st century accentuates new forms of political awareness worldwide. Politicians on every continent, confronting vast economic and social crises, clamour for Gandhiji's guidance while adopting profoundly divergent policies. Recent efforts by Indian thinkers appear disjointed. The arrangement of previously-known positions and choices from their history fail to suggest a coherent contemporary Gandhiji. An officeholder, equally aware of competing claims, remains ignorant of popular struggles seeking a contemporary, compulsory, and comprehensive approach to Gandhiji's thought. Awareness extends to the national and global relationship between society and politics. Choices may reflect widely shared aspirations and address injustice alongside openness to dissent from prevailing views (Barua, 2017).

1. Policy-Making and Ethical Governance

In the post-independence period, the term 'governance' gained traction as a substantial discourse and practice within Indian political science and administration. The term defines the management of socio-economic and political affairs and was a direct violation of Thomas Hobbes' idea that the only function of a state is to provide security to its citizens. It was this principle that Gandhiji weakened, citing that the State is not merely an organisation for ensuring safety but also an organisation to mitigate exploitation of fellow citizens within a form of an institution. In his words, he stated "The State should be crying by way of protests against oppression and its very existence should be to discover ways and means of combating it". Further the act of governing was directed towards the running of Panchayat or The village assembly where functioning which ensured a legitimately and morally sanctioned system of arrangement was present itself. The adequate demand of the State was only to ensure that the village assemblies function contentedly. This system of Panchayati raj was denounced upon by Gandhiji as not being under the State's purview. Such an idea fundamentally ensures itself ingrained in the society through the consensus of the people. He also remarked "Governing has no functions. Prisoners have to be unchained. There cannot be any governance among free people". A country which has reached the stage of free person no longer requires governments, at one stage there were situations of the laws that were formulated never carried meaning for its freedom stage, directing once can find such a stage first such that man need not fear any governance direct from a governorship definitely cannot cope in such situation but it was from the strength of are Religious precepts even the term Religion and God became such a rotty that man cannot afford to utter the phrase and such a tragedies suddenly emerged in form of secularism and communism — a fight for seeking out what colour of a one must become. The modern thought of India describes one that needs suitable guiding as what direction search "Freedom of Thought" must be almighty and Franco—must include "Absolute". Through education this type of absolute search of freedom of thought can also be utilized. Every other helping viewpoints of any other precepts can be relayed and wandered within the thoughts such that every other helping viewpoints of any other precepts can be relayed and wandered within the thoughts such that the direction would lead towards absolute search. (Kirloskar-Steinbach, 2016)

2. Grassroots Democracy and Participatory Politics

Democratic decentralization through the three-tiered Panchayati Raj system is a post-Independence institutional manifestation of swaraj as envisaged by Gandhi. Article 40 of the Constitution enshrines the establishment of the Panchayati Raj system as a directive principle of state policy. Emphasizing the need for alternatives to centralised decision-making and for participatory governance, the Gram Nyayalaya Act (2008) rewrites procedures to aid the poor and demands the integration of a rural court system within the broader framework of rural justice (Venu Menon, 2007). Even where mechanisms for participatory democracy have been instituted, and the concept of democracy has been transposed from the urban to the rural space, participatory processes have seldom encouraged people to engage with the politics and governance of their villages in ways that transcend the dichotomies of governmental — or party-led — versus people-led. (Borah, 2012) Disproportionate emphasis on official institutions and procedures inherent in the structures for participatory governance at the local level risks reproducing rather than transforming the nature of politics that perpetuates inequalities and the disengagement of the poor and marginalized.

3. Economic Models: Swadeshi vs Global Capitalism

Mahatma Gandhi, a colossal figure of the twentieth century and one of the architects of modern India, contributed numerous insightful concepts to the world of political thought. His political thought was rich and matured through his own experiences and observation both at national and international levels. He was critical of the so-called modern civilization, which was based on consumerist culture, and he pointed out that these could not fulfil man's social demands. Further, he stressed that competition,

materialism, replacement of human values, and inequitable distribution of wealth could not attain true progress. Rather, his idea was clear; the status of economic equality and social justice should prevail. Gandhi reflected these concerns through his concept of trusteeship and emphasized the importance of swadeshi in state finance, clothes, and in social structure. These constructs are deeply rooted in the Indian tradition and cater to the local-level independence, necessary for a self-sufficient society accessible by all. The real progress would be reached only after complete independence with the spiritual satisfaction and freedom of each person guaranteed throughout both political and economic structures. Instead of following the idea of free competition and capitalist approach, the tradition-oriented Indian economy should receive proper attention and strength to avoid slavery, concentration of wealth into limited hands, to ensure social and economic good, and to create an egalitarian and harmonious society.

The economic condition of India post-1991 liberalization is often interpreted as a progressive step toward modern capitalism and yet macro-economic indicators reveal constrained situations of a vast majority. India would rank among 'sub-Saharan' capitalistic block. Political instability and labyrinthine administration produce irregularities in domestic manufacturing and stultify self-sufficiency. In price setting and market functioning for goods and services of quotidian necessity, the core of economy still reflects pre-liberalization commodity-marketing interactions. Aspiration among a fraction of population for goods and articles affluent societies has risen, which attracts sprawling attention. Maintaining culinary requirements from Indian, dhobi and barber services is still draining monthly revenue of consumers. A simultaneous socio-political cooperation is, therefore, required to keep the aspirations to produce goods and articles obtainable with moderate revenue.

4. **Civil Society and Civic Responsibility**

Mahatma Gandhi, like Josiah Strong of an earlier generation, offered a world-historical perspective. He worried about two "apparent questions" at a New York press conference in 1936. First, "the tremendous spread of a materialistic culture which has led to a large-scale destruction of human values." Second, "the indifference of many of those who observe this phenomenon." He regarded these international trends through the lens of two national developments: "Poverty amidst plenty" in the United States and "the gradual destruction of the villages" in India. These problems exhibited far-reaching interdependence (Sherraden, 2001).

In America, Gandhi saw that markets had created "unprecedented material wealth," with "hardly a town nor a village . . . free from a cinema, and . . . cheap literature and easily obtainable cigarettes" propagating a "religion of the flesh." Through "advertisement and inducement" millions rushed toward a modernization he classified as "imperialism . . . in its final stage". The West's capitalist civilization "is in constant search of fresh market[s] abroad." Where imperialistic extensions of colonial rule had been simplified, an "exceedingly fertile genius" found an alternative in "and through economic relations."

In Gandhi's view, a reliance on materialistic culture had eroded both "mutual intercourse and personal relationship" and the social bases of familial life, paralyzing societal evolution. Including Gandhi's pacifism and emphasis on simple living, these processes underscore additional connections to community resilience.

In India, Gandhi expressed alarm that countless villages were being crushed by institutions for promoting large-scale production, consolidated ownership, and the mechanical transformation of localized handicrafts into mass industry. Economic decisions about these transitions, he believed, must operate strictly on the basis of local availability. According the Relevance of Gandhian Political Thought in Modern India work guidance, such locally attainable systems naturally yielded connections to strategies for sustaining and revitalizing "grassroots" direct democracy. The 1860s witnessed a dramatic drop in legislative initiatives with significant rural insight in the United States, average per congressional district residents shot up through 1960, and "virtually all decision-making regarding rural quality of life became centralized and bureaucratic". Urbanization took on continued, compelling relevance, reflected in county rather than town-village governance model, consolidation among major newspapers emphasized extensive metropolitan coverage and discouragement of "outstate" inquiries, investment bias persisted favoring the 72 cities with populations 200,000 or more, clear rural initiatives remained scant, and a "rural telecommunication infrastructure malady" came into view.

Challenges and Adaptations

Contemporary political thought leans towards the idea of a state as a neutral arbiter, directing a mostly conflict-free society. In such a framework of understanding, there is little dialogue between moral philosophy and empirical political science. Yet this understanding of politics begs the question: How does a state based on this framework fit into a society where at least some of its actual members are communal, nationalist, ethnic, and class-identified? For Gandhi, secularism is like a three-wheeled bicycle. If any of the three wheels, the three sets of constituents—ideational, material, and cultural—fall short, the journey ends. In the burning furnace of diversity, terrorism, South Asian religious practice, caste, religion, language, customary law, and gender cannot be met with even the slipperiest secular rhetoric. Such contexts, more than others, demand political practice emphasized by, and derived from, the foundational elements of Gandhian political thought: sectarianism, pluralism, and social cohesion. In a heterogeneous public sphere where any one community can claim to be wronged by the practices of another, constitutional safeguarding of the rights of minorities cannot substitute for broad-based communal harmony fostered through interactional politics, in which people surrender their deepest fears and prejudices in order to achieve a constantly negotiated middle ground. Achieving this end without violence, by means of public consciousness, is the heart of the alternative design of political action. Peaceful communication requires accepting others not as enemies whose opinions may be wrong, but as friends whose experience is different. Without peace in everyday interaction, large-scale preparations for future violence, even by the "righteous," deny the ethical roots of human courage.

1. **Secularism, Pluralism, and Social Cohesion**

Secularism is not simply connected to the separation of State and religion; it conveys a pragmatic interpretation of religion, permitting freedom of practice whilst imposing restrictions on its conversion, form and spread. It permits all religions, even

atheism. Pluralism is close to Indian roots ; the rejection of the Western model “is the mitigation of ethno-cultural reductionism.” (Singh, 2018) Secularism, Polyethnicism and Pluralism emerged in response to the challenge of communalism, enclosed in the idea of national unity articulated by the Gandhi. With the adoption of the Constitution, pluralistic secularism became the basic structure and founding principles of the Republic. National unity would embrace regional distinctiveness still rooted in the larger cultural and moral universe comprised of civilizations, cultures, languages and religions.

2. Nonviolence in a Heterogeneous Public Sphere

Gandhi's technique of Satyagraha involved civil disobedience based exclusively on ahimsa (non-violence). The neologism, meaning “truth-force,” referred to the forcefulness or assertiveness of truth. The philosophy of Satyagraha remained central to Gandhi's political beliefs throughout his life, greatly influencing contemporary reformist movements like Dalit emancipation (Barua, 2017). Satyagraha provided India with a method for conducting its freedom struggle peaceably. Although the national movement was based on a commitment to non-violence in speech and deed, Satyagraha allowed dissent and disagreement so long as adherents remained committed to resolving public disagreements in a manner that respected the humanity of others. Empowered with an explicit Gandhian framework, contemporary civil society groups counter the nation-state's hegemonic and authoritarian impulses.

3. Technology, Media, and Gandhian Methods

Today, when political rhetoric polarizes opinion among different segments of the public, the state of public discourse often lends support to the Gandhian principle of truthfulness. An inclination towards personal politics that breeds polarisation can sometimes weaken the mandate to truthful governance, spreading the falsehoods that garner the most political support for a time. Yet, intimate settings do remain conducive to the honing of precise and truthful articulation on public questions. The well-regulated reciprocal discourse that ensues through such models of news governance exhibits congruence with the lettered dissemination of information to which Gandhi devoted his energies when freedom of expression had to contend with the cold brutality of authoritarian rule. In contemporary democracies, transactional arrangements gathering a collective of similarly aggrieved individuals or organisations offer one form of legitimacy for groups that record statements of concern for various forms of public governance to articulate, circulate and defend in public space. Through models of newspaper publication continually expanding into evolving formats, a reciprocal gathering of statements from those corresponding to such a well-defined collective now proceeds consistently within distinct boundaries of public economic record and political economy. To find and join such a collectivity is to perceive governance in an increasingly broad and systematic assembly. An even broader definition of Gandhian arguments about governance at a distance connected to local agricultural and economic models of these circulating statements remains underway. Such models encountering wealth concentration proffer fresh forms of arithmetic connected to Gandhian calculations of land-cultivation ratios underlying economic policy actively supported since the turn of the century. Information circulated according to correspondence reflective of these statement-collectives still seeks accession to arrangements connecting public discourse directly with the fundamental spatiality of Gandhian outreach and agrarian observation. Unforeseen reactivity introduces emerging media forms into circulation on the topic, offering opportunities for productive and systematized governance to underpin the gradual whittling away of unreconciled structures of administration lining the privileged and the poor without obscuring or forfeiting the equation to neighbouring field-crops within the final voicing of the firm statements precise to what remains on behalf of local agricultural interview (Dhital, 2019).

Case Studies of Gandhian Influence in Modern Initiatives

Evidently, many political leaders and parties today invoke Gandhijee's name and philosophy even as much of politics takes place in a system of unprincipled, corrupt, authoritarian and privileged governmental structures that continue to deepen economic inequality and spiritual degradation throughout society. However, many public leaders and citizens actively try and change those conditions on the ground, by working directly for a truly participatory, virtually non-violent democracy in a nation comprised of many relatively small detribalized societies—this goal is directly related to, and in fact supported by, Gandhijee's ideas and certain aspects of his legacy. Grassroots rural development efforts persist in a society where poor standards of living remain the condition of the overwhelming majority of people outside of more privileged urban centers.

Many micro-level activities remain clearly influenced by Gandhijee's thoughts and actions. The Inclusive and Sustainable Development Agenda of the Government of India links the vision of the 5th century B.C. philosopher-king Ashoka and Gandhiji for rural empowerment through the process of Gram Swaraj with the notion of rural development as a right embedded in the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Specific Provisions, including physical infrastructure, such as all weather roads, water supply, sanitation, lighting, waste management, skill development, etc., enunciated through the 'Gram Panchayat Development Plan' stipulates that the vision can be pursued without compromising upon the right to live in the village. Through a collaborative process, the means and models have been and are being formulated using participatory techniques to pursue Gram Swaraj. Gandhiji's practice and advocacy of decentralisation through the project of 'Naya Bharat' and the bulky book on the same subject, written over 70 years ago, continue to offer direction. The philosophy carried forward through Satya Prakash Community Consciousness Group of Activists, based in two villages of Barakharda and Raheja for more than three decades in the Establishment Survey of Middle Class Illegally Occupied Land, provides another instance. The initiative focuses on pacifying conflicts through crowd sensing, crowd control and grievance resolution, without dominating through force, compulsion or authoritative power. The extension of Indian Railways from state capital to the chosen Gram Panchayat, constituting the local Governance, triggers a re-emergence of Gandhian vision, as endorsed in the Freedom Movement and now enshrined in the country Constitution. Gandhiji's modes of life, living and environment under the header Jan Dhan (people, money, and spirituality), continues to stimulate the search for Gram Swaraj by interpreting the references to Khadi in the Constitution of India. Gandhiji once remarked, “If I were to be reborn again as a man instead of a woman at the coast of my native place, I would prefer to be born the son of a potter.” Empowering women and girls assumes a priority among the last generation. A state-

sponsored gender initiative promotes in-situ and out-situ architecting training to women, advocating Ganharji's philosophy of folk art training to the doors of each house. Gandhiji further inspired the Craft Establishment groups working for ornamentation as a means of supplementing and supporting the family. A 'Dugha Patan Ground Water Refining' technique active in 15 villages of central India engages people in crafting their own safe drinking water programme to suit the natural hydro-geography of their respective villages, passed through a rigorous verification by the scientific community and subsequently incorporated with a special category of the 'Bharat Ratna' fellowship. Furthermore, with respect to Climate Change and Sustainability, a Gram Swaraj 2.0 with Life Style for Environment (Provano) promotes the notion of necessary governance at the global level. Gandhiji's emphasis on constructive action, rural development and local self-governance through the writing of book 'Hind Swaraj' and other public discourses ever enriches debates in academic, governmental and social sectors.

1. **Rural Empowerment and Local Governance**

The past decade has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the Gandhian ideal of Gram Swaraj, or village self-governance, as political North Stars for both thinkers and practitioners of folk empowerment. Empowered Associations in Bihar were founded in 2007 to work toward Constitution Article 40, and various organizations have helped Antyodaya groups. Lively discussions about endorsing grama sabhas—people's assemblies in each gram panchayat—have swept across the whole of Karnataka, especially during elections. In Maharashtra, the GRAM VIKAS Movement deployed the Gandhian principle of local governance to strengthen PRIs involving every citizen group at the gram panchayat level. The requests for Gandhian economic alternatives and Gram Swaraj principles can be observed in the emergence of swaraj mandals, village development committees, and grama sabhas, such as the UNOHCO-mandated Swaraj Abhiyan by Karnataka B.P.A. The 73rd Constitution Amendment incorporated the development of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) as entry 17 in the Eleventh Schedule, allowing for deliberative and direct participation of citizens residents within the rural local self-government, a key policy for empowering the rural poor. At the national level, Gandhi consistently reiterated the importance of empowering local self-governance. "True freedom," he wrote, "is not merely a matter of getting political independence. Freedom is a state of mind. The structure of government may remain unchanged, and even the administration may be unchanged, but we are free if the least of our villages has its own independent local self government" (Venu Menon, 2007). Much effort has been spent in evolving a stable, accountable, and performance-oriented three-tier system of PRIs in the country "from the village panchayat at the grassroots level to the zila parishad at the district level." Economic development, Women Empowerment, SCs-STs, Education, health, and Skill Development are identified as thrust areas of the R.G.C. scheme. The introduction of PRIs represents an honest effort to energize democracy and revitalize the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj wherein the very essence of democracy dwells (Borah, 2012).

2. **Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation Efforts**

The study of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence reveals that people often define violence in different ways and that reliance on physical force to promote change has gained prominence. Nevertheless, one still finds Gandhian ideas in approaches designed to use peaceful means to build bridges within Indian society. A recent initiative in Assam aims to promote harmony among various groups, including different ethnicities, and between Hindus and Muslims, who are considered two of the most significant communities in contemporary India. During an ongoing conflict, an urgent need developed to break the cycle of violence that one side inflicted upon the other. To achieve reconciliation, the idea emerged to form a multi-religious delegation of varied social agents to visit both sides with the aim of creating a common commitment to "no violence." The delegation gave rise to the "No Action, No Reaction" Campaign. The No Action, No Reaction Campaign needed this backdrop to devise a practical program of action. One of the steps taken was for members of the group to sign a statement pledging that they would not commit acts of violence nor would they retaliate against other violent acts. This undertaking inspired discussion about not only the meaning of violence but also the orientation of Gandhian ethical discourse, which often emphasizes the negative rather than the positive. This form of articulation may nevertheless be productive, for instance, by reaching audiences on college campuses that may feel discouraged about making positive moral commitments such as love, trust, and compassion. Such negative formulations, however, eventually spawn the need to identify appropriate positive commitments, and genuine enquiry is crucial in searching for positions that will resonate with the spirit and intentions of Gandhi while also adapting to contemporary realities and perspectives (Barua, 2017).

3. **Environmental Sustainability and Simple Living**

Gandhi viewed simplicity as a means of both development and as an essential quality of life. According to (Phillips, 2009), the spiritual man appreciates nature, captures the beauty of virtuousness, and absorbs knowledge through the reading of books. Development brings worldly goods, the consumption of which increases quarrels and reduces the time for self-development. Worldly possessions create attachment, the cause of suffering for Jainism. Marsden (No date) emphasizes that developing people socially, mentally, and underground via education is far more desirable than westernization. Nakamura (1992) states that a nation putting high priority on an economic development policy and allowing mass production system directed toward the accumulation of commodity, even if such a practice is still regarded the sole way to improve the living standard, society and people will not lead to real development. In Gandhi's viewpoint, development in its real sense is the continuous expansion of knowledge, all-round unlimited developments of physical, social, economic, spiritual, and aesthetic are left unnoticed; Nakamura, 1992.

Reimagining Gandhian Thought for 21st Century India

Gandhian thought, in its original formulation, had unique resonances with the political struggles and aspirations of both India and India's citizens in 1947. Over the decades since independence, those resonances have been subjected to multiple contractions and expansions, productive reconstructions and unproductive distortions—yet Gandhian ideas have continued to attract large-scale support and critical attention. At the same time, the nation's postcolonial evolution has produced new conceptions of economic, political, social, and cultural reality, disturbances that have altered the original connections between

Gandhian political thought and contemporary Indian political life. Today, a modern polity still reverberates with the fascination of Gandhian politics, yet interpretation is a matter of cultural choice. Different remembrances may well yield decidedly different outlines of Gandhian relevance to today's India. In order to track the tension between centers of resonance and contractions of significance, one may find it useful to abstract a few core priorities of the early Gandhian project and call attention to a spectrum of forms these priorities have taken in subsequent reinterpretations, underscoring both the endurance and the ongoing transformative potential of Gandhian thought (Kirloskar-Steinbach, 2016). Gandhian thinking continues to exalt the search for what one may call higher forms of democracy. As a practical matter, mainstream political thought even today has trouble taking the major Gandhian preferences seriously. Gandhian constructs of satyagraha, trusteeship, swaraj, and—within the broader domain of social roles—harijan welfare, retain the capacity to invoke still-living ambitions that resonate deeply with both the public discourse and major political movements of modern India (Barua, 2017). Tracing the larger outline free of any well-defined developmental sequence highlights the pluralism within Gandhian politics and illuminates interactions with contemporary concern to a much greater extent than where attention focuses exclusively on either the original formulation or a specific remapping.

Conclusion

The practical relevance of Gandhian ideals in contemporary India is increasingly becoming a point of debate among those who claim fidelity to Mahatma Gandhi's teachings. With the decline of mass movements, Gandhi's direct influence on major political activities has also declined. Nevertheless, one can find threads of Gandhian thought within various strands of contemporary politics, social movements, and institutional reform, suggesting that a retrieval of Gandhi's thoughts, if not necessarily a revival of his methods, may still be a politically relevant and ethically important course of action. At an abstract level, contemporary India is wrestling with critical themes that were foundational to Gandhi's thought, including the diversity of the polity, universal access to basic rights, and the intelligibility of morality in the realm of politics. Political parties, movements, and individuals can be found advocating for political arrangements that resonate with Gandhian principles, even as the context of governance evolves. A careful understanding of Gandhi's ideas reveals significant tensions and disjunctions with existing political thought and practice. Yet, on the whole, Gandhi's perspective retains a remarkable and gently persuasive power. The original inspiration for the title of this chapter came not from Gandhi, but from an article published by Nehru in 1939, entitled "The Spirit of India". Within that essay, Nehru identifies four qualities of the Indian character and temperament: an incessant quest for freedom and independence, a sense of the play of cosmic events and the transitory nature of human concerns, an inwardness and the urge towards the spirit, and diversity tempered by unity. In Gandhi, the search for social and political freedom is matched by a quest for individual liberation, convergence and universal citizenship are accompanied by the natural evolution of distinct identities, and unity and multiplicity resonate through measures of balancing power in favour of the mass of common humanity (Dalton, 1970).

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