

The Spirit of an Extraordinary Satyagrahi

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Abstract

The mind and personality of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was complex and intriguing. His indomitable spirit was impassable and so was his farsightedness. His greatest contribution was that he removed fear from Indian minds. A person who shook the Empire of Great Britain with truth and non-violent methods had won love and admiration from people all around the world. This article is about that spirit of "a frail, puny utterly unimportant man" in the words of his ardent admirer, John Haynes Holmes, who shook the British Empire with Satyagraha as his weapon and is also extremely relevant in the present times. He challenged the might of the British Empire, by re-inventing Charkha as he realized that initially the British's main purpose was to trade. He challenged the might of the British by making salt and it was he who gave the final call for the British to leave India through his Quit India Movement. The weapons of today are stronger and more severe, and thus it is easier to kill. Gandhi was apparently a very simple man but, with his strong and fearless attitude, he discovered an effective alternative to war and violence. It was his fearlessness, truthfulness, high moral ground, sacrificing zeal and indomitable spirit that made him a Mahatma.



Image 1: Mahatma Gandhi



Image 2: Gandhi spinning yarn, in the late 1920s

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, is regarded all over the world as the most inspiring and transforming person. Throughout his life in South Africa and in India, Gandhi was a fearless crusader for the rights and dignity of the people including untouchables whom he loved and called *Harijans*. His message of peace, secularism, integrity, non-violence and truthfulness won over the hearts of people; according to him, “In a gentle way you can shake the world”.

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong,” said Mahatma Gandhi. His indomitable spirit of fearlessness as well as forgiveness should not be considered as just passive resistance. With truth –force, he combated the British who could not have imagined that the peace-loving Indians would resist them with the non-violent but highly courageous and dangerous methods under the leadership of Mahatma. Undoubtedly he was the most courageous who challenged evil with a dignified spirit unseen in Indian history, and attempted a formula for freedom that was unheard of before. Napoleon had said that the nature of the weapon decides the outcome of the war, its art and organisation. Mahatma Gandhi’s weapons were his spirit of righteousness, non-violent methods and truth force.

Mahatma Gandhi was deeply spiritual and his deeply religious but secular nature dominated his life and movements as we all know. In his vow of poverty, he placed himself with the poorest and dressed like one of them, thus giving confidence to the masses who eventually got transformed into self-reliant persons - for example, the people of Champaran and eventually all Indians. Champaran and Kheda movements transformed Gandhiji and in the process transformed India’s destiny. Earlier in South Africa he had been thrown out of the first class compartment on the Pietermaritzburg platform on a winter night. Instead of taking revenge in a violent manner, he had combated the atrocities of a mighty empire where the sun never set with civil-disobedience, non-cooperation and above all by Satyagraha or the truth force. The example of this indomitable spirit is unparalleled and unprecedented in world history. No wonder that Martin Luther King Junior, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela and several others were inspired by him. He believed in walking alone on the treacherous paths singing Rabindranath Tagore’s song which was his favourite *ekla chalo re*. Both stalwarts

had deep admiration for each other, and no wonder Tagore popularized his name as Mahatma. Thus he came to be known to the world as Mahatma.



Image 3: Gandhi with the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, 1940

His spirit had resulted from his truthfulness. When he writes in his autobiography candidly about his fallacies, mistakes, errors, he realized that truth can't be defeated and also the insistence for truth in satyagraha can't be challenged or defeated. According to Sir Gilbert Murray, "He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy because his body, which you can conquer, gives you so little purchase on his soul".

Here we come across the term "Spirit". It is in his spirit that the great secret of his power lies. He had reduced the physical needs to the absolute minimum, and clings not at all to that, and has become as near as it is humanly possible, to a great soul, a Mahatma. To most people, politics and religion or spirituality are antithesis. But in his political activities, expression of religion, truth, and virtue dominated. That is the spirit of an extraordinary satyagrahi.

No wonder, according to Romain Rolland, "To understand Gandhi's activity it should be realized that his doctrine is like a huge edifice composed of two different floors and grades. Below is the solid groundwork, the basic foundation of religion. On this vast and unshakable foundation, is based the political and social campaign." But then the Mahatma cannot be easily classified as belonging to any core sector of religion. To him, God is Truth.

Gandhi is also scientific according to me in his attitude to life's problems and he has put his great doctrine of Satyagraha to the test of repeated experiment. Both in South Africa and later

in India, he applied this weapon of non-violence with immeasurable success. As a successful experiment repeated everywhere should give the same result, so he has been able to keep the violent methods out of his movements resulting in sufficient success.

Conclusion

India's Independence is synonymous with Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with truth, and his use of non-violent methods to combat evil. He hated the evil and not the evil-doer. Anatole France said, "He was a moment in the consciousness of mankind." Albert Einstein said on Gandhi's 70th birthday, "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this one ever in flesh and blood walked upon this Earth." Above all, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru resonated "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.....For the light or the spirit that Mahatma shone was no ordinary light. For that light represented the eternal truth, static values and spirit of an ever changing society and the world."

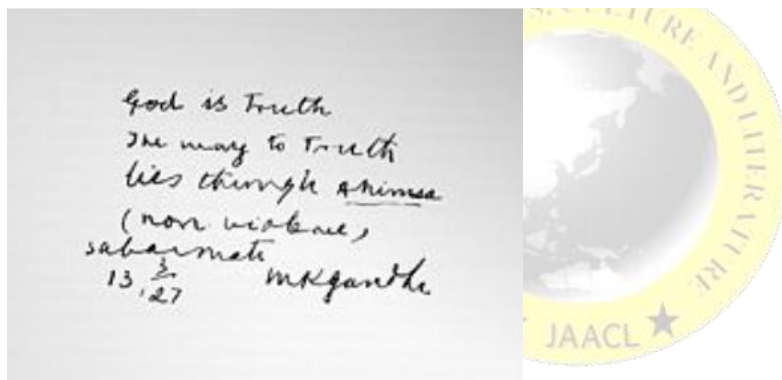


Image 4: "God is truth. The way to truth lies through ahimsa (nonviolence)" – Sabarmati, 13 March 1927

Acknowledgements

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