

Gandhi: A Legacy of Experimentation Between Violence and Nonviolence

Mahatma Gandhi's legacy is a model of nonviolence and experimentation, offering timeless lessons on harmony, empathy, and navigating global challenges of inequality and violence.

Mahatma Gandhi did not leave a tome of theory but a model of experimentation that is available to us, thus placing this dialectical drama between violence and nonviolence beyond the realm of myth into history. The time is opportune to understand his process before he passes on to the pantheon; he still is a man with his fallacies and pitfalls trying to scale the raging tsunamis of emotions with his reason and benevolence.

He knew that 'History is a record of discord and not harmony' and that is what he was creating –harmony within and without.

He realized that confrontation between emotional urges and will is a waste of energy and the war between conscious and unconscious can be won only by incessantly modulating the latter to the tune of will.

He experimented at the micro but expanded to the macro, from an individual to the cosmic. Traditional yet radical, ascetic yet worldly, political yet saintly, Gandhi walked many such tightropes in his life simultaneously but his continuous struggle was in the duel between violence and nonviolence, even his struggle with sexuality was subsumed in it.

Mohandas Gandhi accrued labels ranging from 'stupid' to 'seditious', 'Mahatma' to 'Bapu' from his admirers and detractors. He himself could have been his best biographer even beyond his 'experiments with truth'. His life was full of focus yet inconsistent (that he himself explained and urged – his latest version on any issue should be believed), always evolving in thought – a sign of rationality, a deep believer yet not an idol worshipper, traditionalist yet ready to reject the irrelevant

from scriptures, believing in a division of labour (varna in the orthodoxy of India) yet against the hierarchy of caste and many other contradictions.

He indeed symbolized Walt Whitman's poetry lines—

*.... Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.).....*

His angst and suffering in his struggle was no less than Buddha's or Krishna's or of anyone who has ever stepped out of his/her selfish survival to change the world selflessly.

In his case it was a journey from a fearful, anxious, mediocre existence to a fearless old man, from a colonial subjugate to self-ruled man, who had defined Swarajya in modern context. He not only self-actualized but mutualized, he took along depressed masses along with him and infused self-respect and dignity, in the great experiment in South Africa and then India.

He experimented, expanded his area of concern to the last man, faltered, fell yet took each beating as a lesson to emerge as the Gandhi we know at a ripe old age of 60.

Gandhi knew the fallacy and the destructive power of violence so his choice of non-violence was a well thought of strategy but required a human effort. He knew that Indians may involve in spurt of rage and involve in violent acts but given the guilt ridden psyche of nation from ancient days, neither they will be able to tolerate emotions nor the retaliatory violence from state.

Socio-politically he was out to redeem the glory but not by a delusional extolling of past virtues but by transforming the deep psyche to what is of Universal value-sacrifice, tolerance, love and sharing, the pillars that had sustained India through centuries of domination.

But all this without hatred even towards the enemy. The world indeed was looking with wonder at India of Gandhi's time. His movements came at a gap of a decade-non-cooperation in 1920s, Salt march in 1930 and quit India in 1942. A close observation shows the behaviour of people who grew not only non-violent but more tolerant and sacrificing (satyagraha, charkha , dispossession and truth got infused into that generation) , for Gandhi was connected to all – rich and poor, elite and the rustic, Urban and the rural. His India was for all but his insistence was on sharing and forming a continuous gradient between people irrespective of caste, gender or wealth (his trusteeship may have failed but he is alive in today's philanthropy as he is in all modern non-violent struggles) .

Probably the 2-3 decades of his life in India may have been the best for mental health of the country as the energies were channelized towards freedom and constructive programme. Gandhi knew the thin line between relative and absolute truth, how. God can make people fight but each one's truth can be a God. He knew the biological rage and aggression of survival and self-centred biology but he also had realized the potential of altruism beyond those for kin , extending to the enemies (indeed his opponents too received love form him barring few like Churchill, Jinnah and later fanatics. But his first major adversary Gen Smuts even received a sandal made by him).

He was aware of spikes of rage and lust but also the structural violence in the society that never allowed people autonomy or realizing their potential. This subsequently generated further violence in minds,expressing in oneself even before it hurts the other often leading to cruelty in fight for social dominance. This is what he wished and worked to change, a model that worked for India and will work for human race ***if applied and experimented.***

He was in the lineage of great thinkers and mystics like Kabir, Nanak, Buddha and the pragmatic Krishna- utopian, idealist or idiosyncratic depends on the lens that one choose.

This is exactly the lineage Vinayak Savarkar uses in defining Hindu but WITHOUT GANDHI.

He includes Buddha but criticizes him for ahimsa and the subsequent Muslim and Mughal invasions that India could not respond to. He ignored that India survived in spite of these invasions and subjugation because of tolerance and held Gandhi responsible for emasculation. It was a delusion that Hindu Mahasabha and later RSS held and has been trying to create an alternative imagined reality of Hindu (even against their own grain from Golwalkar who explained it by an invisible feeling and thread). Militant and aggressive Hindu was an imagination derived from partial reading of elite ancient and medieval history that never talked of people.

They pointed at Gandhi's inconsistencies but forgot the relative understanding of the man who would have allowed an army without war, and violence to protect but not cruelty.

One simple question they had to answer was – Why didn't India aggressively liberate itself before Gandhi? But to find an answer one needs an intention of reconciliation, even that was Gandhian expertise. So they resorted to violence and his murder. Gandhi and

Savarkar's differences on violence and nonviolent ways had started much before he wrote Hind Swaraj. But not only Savarkar, the priestly class and the princely class who were in position of power hated Gandhi because the uprising and awareness of masses was threatening their comfort. The status quo of priest was challenged for he got the temple opened for untouchables and dissolved the princely states. Even the Muslim zamindars created Pakistan to rule over the masses. He had to die not as a man but as a symbol of what was good and inclusive in humans.

Not only right but the left also disagreed with him on issue of violence without realizing that he had experimented in communes much before revolution.

If right hated him as an elite the left did so with a different view of justice for masses. The same untouchables that he fasted for hate him because of Ambedkar's anti-Gandhi stance.

Godse shot him and then the country killed him every day. The world was expecting a different way of living but India chose the same path that never allows peace to human mind.

The opposite thoughts of Gandhi, Savarkar and socialism were the options for the country at the time of Independence. Gandhi was slowly relegated to tokenism, under the surface of socialism, militant Hindu image and Muslim hatred kept simmering, both sides refuse to reconcile and we are in the first quarter of 21st century living with divided mind full of gaps that cause violence. If partition was a hate filled spurt of violence, it is more structural now, the hearts reflecting hatred.

In a wider perspective the Gandhi' experiment of non-violence in India was unfolding while another experiment in violence was raging in world – Adolf Hitler. The world had a choice even then. But do we learn as victims become perpetrators and the infinite cycle continues in reactionary and systematized violence that threatens to pervade daily life and heighten the uncertainty. The fear gets enhanced and leads to more violence and injustice.

World-wide, the hatred seems to be taking over in spite of improved economic conditions. The gaps in minds are increasing in face of better rather over communication. These gaps are the seeds of violence.

We would not expect Gandhi the person to be alive now but Gandhi the thought, the deep spiritual philosophy is never dead. Till we are hurting each other and violence is systematized, till we wish for peace and care we need to revisit him, to train ourselves in empathy at the least.

For future may bring in more inequality.

Homo Sapiens wish to be a Homo Roboticus or Homo Empathicus is a choice.

Choice is autonomy.

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(Cover Photo: Gandhi leading the famous 1930 Salt March, a notable example of satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) from commons.wikimedia.org)

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