

## GANDHIAN ETHICS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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**"Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value."**

-- Albert Einstein

Mahatma Gandhi's influence on the world and the relevance of his message to humanity are boundless. As a messenger of peace and as a revered Political Leader who fought for the Human dignity and human right, Gandhiji paved a path of Non-violence and truth the main weapons of his fight leading the country and countrymen to a peaceful, serene state and wished to build a new society full of Love, affection, liberty, brotherhood and sacrifice.

The modern science and technology have brought a new society that makes people mere machines of earning moneys and their minds always struggle hard to enjoy the mundane comforts on ignoring the moral and ethical values. People are running after the mirages of worldly pleasures that enrich the selfishness, envy, corruption, partiality and violence. The knowledge of ethical and moral values is not essential for a man who wishes to qualify himself for the placement into a corporate society. But at the reality the society should have the citizens who are good at human relations, peaceful minded, devoid of stress and strain, self restrained for the complete prosperity of the country. Here is an urgent need to the people of modern generations aware of the essentiality of Human Values and ethics.

Ethics are moral principles or values that govern the conduct of an individual or a group. It is not a burden to bear, but a prudent and effective guide which furthers life and success. Ethics are important not only in business but in academics and society as well because it is an essential part of the foundation on which a civilized society is built. In traditional Indian thinking, the terms ethics, moral, dharma and even religion are commonly used interchangeably.

Role models play a huge impact in the development of an individual's life, and the development of one's ethical thought and behaviour is no exception. If one views a very ethical individual as a role model, he or she will definitely grow up to uphold a high standard of ethics. Mahatma Gandhi's life is universally seen as representing amongst the highest standards of moral behaviour in all facets; individual, social, political, economic, moral and religious. Self-realization through selfless service of society, nation and humanity, was the key to his life and thought.

## So this Paper Highlights the Gandhian Ethics which Ensure Peaceful Coexistence

The fundamental principle of Gandhian ethics can be formulated in terms of Truth, Ahimsa and Satyagraha or in terms of Swadeshi and Swaraj. But different scholars, though unanimously agreeing on Truth and Ahimsa, have also selected some other principles of Mahatma Gandhi with varying emphasis in order to give a complete and comprehensive account of Gandhi's ethics. P.T. Raju in his article entitled "The Four Basic Principles of Gandhi's Philosophy" published in Gandhi Marg in 1957, holds the view that there are four basic postulates of Gandhian ethics: firstly, God is Truth; secondly, Satyagraha; thirdly, Finitude of man and his intellect, and fourthly, Ahimsa. Benoy Gopal Roy's Gandhian Ethics was published in 1950 by Navajivan. According to him the salient features of Gandhian Ethics or his principal vows are Truth, Ahimsa, Celibacy, Control of Palate, non-stealing and non-possession besides an added emphasis on the non-difference between Gandhi's concept of religion and morality. Navajivan published a small booklet entitled Ethical Religion in 1968 clearly describing ethics as morality and morality as a religion. Further there is no difference between social ideal and personal morality or religious morality or moral religion.

The cultivation of calmness, wildness, and tranquillity of personality; fostering of good habits; observance of chastity, altruism and righteousness etc., are the elements of moral life in Gandhian ethics. Similarly the moral law in Gandhian ethics is a pious; universal; eternal; immutable; independent of space and time; objective; self-imposed; dwells in the heart and deals with the inner being of our personalities. It is the highest; the best of all laws; supreme; divine, and unconditional imperative pregnant with its intrinsic value; and although mysterious unlocks the door to earthly necessities.

### Here are Gandhi's Ethical Concepts

- **Asceticism:** Gandhi prescribed the vows of truth, non-violence, celibacy, control of the palate, non-thieving, non-possession, fearlessness, as obligatory for the inmates of Satyagraha Ashram. Self-purification which is the keynote of Gandhian morality can be attained only through the rigid observance of the above puritan virtues. The simple term ahimsa (non-violence) implies not only non-killing or harmlessness but also uttermost selflessness, forgiveness, and conquest of anger, pride, and hatred.

He preached as well as practised the virtue of ahimsa in his life. Several times he resorted to fasting day after day, sometimes week after week with an ardent zeal to purify his inner self, sometimes to awaken conscience amongst the frenzied communal masses. In short, according to Gandhi, the realization of truth without any expectation of results, even if it costs life, should be our *summum bonum*. Indifference to pleasure and pain, natural and simple life should be cultivated.

We should be non-violent in thought, word and deed. Self-torture, self-suffering, receiving others' misdeeds on oneself and suffering the consequences thereof, etc., are the salient features of Gandhi's moral thought.

- **Eudamonism:** The word eudaemonism is derived from the Greek root 'Eudaemonia' which means well-being or welfare. The spirit of eudaemonism is that well-being or

welfare of the people by dint of 'well-doing' should be the end of our lives. Service to humanity is a master passion with Gandhi.

His campaign of sarvodaya (welfare of all) can be cited as an example. To him, human beings, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, are sparks of infinite Truth or God who is also the supreme Good, the almighty moral Governor. Human beings can realize Truth or God by social service, by single-hearted dedication to the service of humanity. Welfare and well-being of the people are the pivotal points of Gandhi's humanism, and thereby of his life and works. This is the eudemonistic element of Gandhian thought.

- **Altruism:** The term altruism is derived from *altrui* which means somebody else, and hence the etymological meaning of altruism is regard for others as a principle of action.

Gandhi led almost an ascetic life, and dedicated his eventful life to the cause of others. Gandhi's way of life and practice, the code of discipline, and cardinal virtues that he prescribed for the satyagrahis, although criticized as rigoristic, were purposely designed towards some teleological end, the welfare of human beings in general. He summed up this moral in a sentence, "All for each and each for all". Hence comes **Gandhi's clarion call to all**, "**Nations are sustained neither by wealth nor by armies but by righteousness alone**". It is the duty of man to bear this truth in mind and practise altruism, which is the highest form of morality. Thus altruism "is the highest form of morality" towards which he dedicated the Sarvodaya campaign, nay, the whole of his life and works.

- **Truth-The Ultimate Moral Standard:** Truth is used in Gandhian thought in various sense. It may be variously called the highest goal, highest good, absolute existent, God, ultimate moral standard, etc. R.N. Iyer aptly observes, "From first to last, Satya, or truth, was sacred to Gandhi-the supreme value in ethics, politics and religion, the ultimate source of authority and of appeal, the *raison d' etre* of all existence. Since, to Gandhi, religion and morality are identical "there is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness". Here Gandhi treats Truth as the highest righteousness from the religious standpoint. R.N. Iyer comments, "The Moral Law is the Law of Truth; satya is identical with dharma and rta (cosmic equilibrium) is the same as sat (Absolute Truth)". Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya observes, "Ethical Religion incidentally affords an indication of the meaning of Truth... When not used in a metaphysical sense it seems to mean the moral law, or set of laws.... The deduction is confirmed by his writings, in which Truth is made to cover very many principles".

Truth is like a vast tree, which yields more and more fruit, the more you nurture it. To Gandhi, truth is the highest moral standard which can be realized through service to humanity. Gandhi distinguishes between truth as the *summum bonum*, i.e., an absolute, universal, infinite truth and truth as a vow or a means, i.e., relative truth. Gandhi struggled throughout his life for the oppressed and downtrodden of humanity. In every sphere of life absolute truth, the ultimate moral standard showed him the path like the pole-star. Circumstances sometimes compelled him to take shelter in relative truth. He adopted

relative truth to solve the problems of everyday life. Truth is absolute in the abstract sense while relative in the contextual sense.

- **Self-realization or Perfection-The Summum Bonum:** The problem of the ultimate standard of morality and the ultimate end of life are interwoven into one another. In the Upanishadic ages, the saints proclaimed, Atmanam Biddhi or know thyself. William Lillie observes, perhaps aptly, "In morality, as the phrase self-realization reminds us, the perfection with which we are concerned is the perfection of the individual self, and every individual counts. Gandhi says, "I am being daily led nearer to It by constant prayer".

Of course, Gandhi is fully conscious of our inherent imperfection. But this natural limitation would not obstruct our way to perfection. By dint of ceaseless efforts men should bring out their potentiality, more precisely perfection, in its full bloom. To quote him, "Man will ever remain imperfect, and it will always be his part to try to be perfect". He says, "We shall ever fail to realize it, but shall never cease to realize it". It reminds us of the immortal lines of Tennyson, "...but strong in will/To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield".

- **Freedom of Will:** The postulate of freedom of will is the nucleus of moral science. An individual as a moral agent, as a permanent self must act freely, i.e., act without any compulsion, because he cannot be held responsible for actions performed under extraneous influence. The ethical terms-right and wrong, merit and demerit, reward and punishment, virtue and vice-all lose their significance without freedom of will. Thus freedom of will is a necessity, an indispensable postulate of moral life.

Human beings, although hedged by an infinite variety of circumstances, may steer the course of life so as to mould their destiny by dint of efficiency and endeavour. He believed in the unlimited potentiality of human efforts or endeavour (purusakara). Bhima, the great hero of the Mahabharata, declares in Santiparva, "I consider personal effort to be above all; belief in fate makes man dull. (purusam hi param manye; daivam nischitya muhyate)".

In Yajnavalkya-Dmrsti (1.351) describes personal endeavour as the matrix of all success. It says, "Just as a chariot cannot move on one wheel, so fate (daiva) without personal endeavour (purusakara) cannot lead to success. In The Gita,(18.14) we are told that five factors, prescribed by both Sankhya and Vedanta, collectively lead to success of all actions. Of them cesta (personal endeavour) plays the pivotal role. He laid much emphasis on personal endeavour although the inexorable law of karma played a key role in his life. To quote him, "Although I believe in the inexorable law of Karma I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more Karma to undo the past and add to the present". It is by dint of purusakara or personal endeavour that an individual can come out of the karmic maze, can undo the obstructions of the past, steer out future course of life, and thereby become the architect of his fate.

Gandhian ethics may be summed up under the title "Seven Social Sins" which Gandhi published in Young India of 22.10.1925:

## Politics without Principles

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce without morality
- Science without humanity
- Worship without sacrifice.

Mahatma Gandhi is universally accepted as an exemplary model of ethical and moral life with a rare combination between the personal and the public life, the individual and the social, the theory and the practice, thought and action, the eternal and the immediate. He was truly a 'karamyogi' in Gita's terminology. He considered life to be an integrated whole, to be lived as a series of "experiments with truth" thus growing in ethics and ethical conducts (moral status) each day. He took the existing religious and social precepts, fought to remove the 'excrescence', and worked incessantly, he died, through selfless service as the way to God and to self-realization. Towards the end Gandhi could truly say, "my life is my message". To Mahatma Gandhi, one's moral or ethical code must not follow from a self-righteous or self-centred attitude but from a concern to be humble, right, just and true towards others. His over 78 years of life included over 54 years of public life which he lived as an open book and never deviated from dharma, righteousness is the King of Kings-Dharmaman Kshatrasaya Kshatram.

The quality of our lives is not determined by the happenstance of genetics or by the influence of environment; it is not measured in material possessions or in the trappings of youth; it is not dependent on personality or social acclaim. On the contrary, the intrinsic value of the lives we lead reflects the strength of a single trait: our personal character.

With ethics determining an individual's sense of right or wrong, an erosion of ethics in society means that members of society are no longer, or less and less willing, to make decision that are socially acceptable, because the only motive seems to be self- advancement without caring about other people's pain and suffering.

There are very serious impacts to the society if the erosion of ethics is not kept in check. The public, whether it is business, friendship or any kind of interaction, functions because humans rely on a varying level of trust, respect for others, and cooperation. If erosion of ethics continues to worsen, nobody will have any trust in others, at all. In the end, society will cease to function like it presently does and everyone will either lock themselves at home, or walk around heavily armed.

The course of one's adult life depends upon what they learn in their childhood. Thus, the standards that are inculcated in young ones, determine what they will grow up to become. In this world, full of crime and dishonesty, it is imperative to instil the Gandhian ethics very particularly the ultimate moral standard **the Truth** in children, to help them grow into better human beings which ensure a peaceful coexistence.

## Let me conclude with the message of Gandhi to the Students

### Gandhiji told

The end of all knowledge must be building up of character.

"As father of, you might say, many boys and girls, you might almost say of thousands of boys and girls, I want to tell you, boys, that after all you hold your destiny in your own hands. I do not care what you learn or what you do not learn in your school, if you will observe two conditions. One condition is that you must be fearlessly truthful against the heaviest odds under every Circumstance imaginable. A truthful boy, a brave boy will, never thinks of hurting even a fly. He will defend all the weak boys in his school or outside, all those who need his help. A boy who does not observe personal purity of mind and body and action is a boy who should be driven out of any school. A chivalrous boy would always keep his mind pure, his eyes straight and his hands unpolluted. You do not need to go to any school to learn these fundamental maxims of life, and if you will have this triple character with you, you will build on a solid foundation."

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