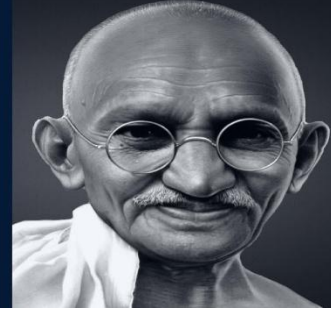




NEWSLETTER

October 2018

MAHATMA
GANDHI
AND HIS
PHILOSOPHY
STILL RELEVANT?



The Five Values of Gandhiji that Still Shape India

By Shri Bharat Wakhlu, General Secretary, FRNV

There is something about five “universal and classical” values that Gandhiji espoused and spoke extensively about during his time, that still appeal to us. That is because these five specific values he lived by are as crucial today as they were during his time. In fact, while much economic and technological progress has been made within the nation since Gandhiji’s time, and we have also advanced on many of the indices of Human Development, the problems that we are tackling today, and which need resolution are still amenable to Gandhiji’s values-based approach. It is this alone that makes Mohandas Gandhi ji a symbol of universal values, and someone who remains pertinent and relevant to politics and to social change, even in this day and age.

The five specific Values that I think Gandhiji stood for most vigorously are briefly explained below. It is these values that are also the most pertinent to India today. It would stand us all in good stead, therefore if, in the course of our work, we keep these five values in mind and endeavour to propagate them; even as we ensure that we live by them, and strengthen India and empower all citizens.

1. Non-Violence

Gandhiji was a man of the masses. He was aware that if the people of the sub-continent had to collectively fight the injustice, the abuse and discrimination that the British colonial masters were meting out, there was only one way to do so: use the vast numbers of

On the 2nd of October 2019, India and the rest of the world will be celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of one of the greatest sons of India, Mohandas K. Gandhi. As a public figure, and a leader of extraordinary eminence, whose entire life was a shining example of a Values-based life, FRNV pays tribute to the Mahatma. We explore the relevance of his values to present-day India, and how each one of us can play a role in further strengthening our nation.

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the people for non-violent, passive resistance. Gandhiji termed the use of this passive yet powerful, “inner force” of people, the “Soul-force, or the power of love and truth”. He also looked at the resistive power of common people as a contribution from them to secure their legitimate rights. He was emphatic that passive resistance was appropriate when prejudiced, wrongful laws were being used against people. While it seemed easy on the outside, it required enormous inner will to effect. As India approaches its seventh decade of Independence from the British, it needs to learn to resolve all differences through dialogue and active, non-violent engagement in Parliament. In this day, as in the early part of the 20th century, non-violence is fundamental to development and prosperity for all.

2. Abiding by Truth

Being truthful and honest has always been considered a virtue. Gandhiji emphasized this and used facts to determine the way he would respond to situations, including difficult ones. Because he spoke from a place of truth, he spoke fearlessly and with conviction. In

this age, as new ways of sharing information around the world abound, it is all the more essential that those responsible for sharing and spreading information, do so truthfully. Not doing so would make them partisan, and tendentious.

3. Social Justice and Equity

Mahatma Gandhi worked tirelessly for the removal of untouchability and for treating all people alike. He was unhappy at the racial apartheid in South Africa, and was equally appalled at the manner in which Indians treated the poorest and the most underprivileged in society. In this effort, the criticism of Gandhiji by the lawyer and activist, Babasaheb Ramji Ambedkar, served as a spur to his actions and he redoubled his efforts to bring greater social justice and equity in society. As India's population has now thundered into the billions now, many of the age-old prejudices still persist. The value of social justice and equity – sans-discrimination – is as relevant then, as it is now.

4. Interfaith Unity

Gandhiji was clear that Indians of all religious denominations had to stand united and work cohesively for his vision of self-rule in an Independent India. He spoke and wrote extensively about this, knowing well that the British were continually exploiting the fault-lines between the Hindus, Muslims and Christians – not just in India but even in the other British colonies – to create animosity and mutual hatred, which they could exploit for political gain. Gandhiji, in fact was a little extreme in explaining his concept of brotherhood between people, mentioning, “...*that [brotherhood] does not mean loving or sympathizing with those extending the hand of fellowship to those who will return love to you. That is a bargain. Brotherhood is not a mercantile affair*”¹. Not everyone agreed with this idealistic perspective, but it still held sway then. In today's day, as a free nation, India needs to work for Interfaith Unity and the Rule of Law, since together they contribute to a harmonious, just and peaceful society.

5. Empowerment of Women

Mahatma Gandhi was an active supporter of women's rights and despite being seen – in today's context – as not having been *fully* empowering of women, he remained a strong champion of what he thought were their best interests. He was emphatic that sons and daughters were to be treated on an equal footing everywhere, and spoke vehemently

against atrocities that were committed against women by insensitive and abusive men. He wanted legal provisions to be instituted for enhancing their opportunities for education, property rights, involvement in social causes, and the removal of the *pardah*. As India grapples with many issues pertaining to gender rights, the abuse of power against women, and the opening up of greater opportunities for dignified work for women, Gandhiji's ideals need to be revisited for inspiration guidance and action on all fronts.

1. *From Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 15, 1925, based on a speech delivered to a gathering of Christians in Calcutta*

The Relevance of Gandhian Values in the 21st Century

By Dr. Seema Pawar, Project Director-VBE, FRNV

Gandhiji's message to the younger generation – during his time - was built around two fundamental values. These are, *Truth* and *Non-violence*.

Gandhiji taught us the value of compassion and the need for a willingness to sacrifice for the well-being of others. Gandhiji understood the importance of young people in bringing about social change, and he successfully used their enormous reserves of energy during the freedom movement. His keen devotion to the practice of non-violence and humanism made him an icon even when he was alive. His work – in South Africa and India – and his quest for the application of Universal Human Values, as the basis for the resolution of political problems, has resonated with nations and amongst people, across the world.

Gandhiji's approach to leadership and ethical behaviour are therefore still relevant in this day and age. Many believe that there is a conscious need to spread and disseminate his ideas with reinforced vigor, mainly amongst the youth.

Even 150 years after his birth, the name of Gandhiji serves as a mnemonic to rise above the limitations of race, region and religion, and embrace a humanitarian approach to the resolution of issues. His ideas – to this day – are embraced around the world, and despite the rising tendencies of many nations to “look inwards” and strengthen their borders to keep “others” out, there are many more people eager to make Gandhiji's message the foundation of their polity.

While India attained Independence during Gandhiji's lifetime, he could play an active role in free India since he was assassinated in January 1948. However, the framers of the Indian Constitution made sure that Gandhiji's values of truth, harmony, and unity found a place in the documents that guides the nation to this day.

Nowadays, with all the technological and social changes taking place around us, we are having to live our lives with frequent adjustments to the changing situations. Yet if we wish to live productive and fruitful lives, and strengthen the democratic values of our nation, Gandhiji's values and his emphasis on each one of us being an exemplary citizen, will stand us all in good stead. The time-tested values of unity, harmony and pursuing the truth, need to be applied at all times, even as we ensure that we deal with the continuing issues of social justice and gender equality. If we are able to work on these principles, we shall be helping in realizing Gandhiji's dream of a great India.

Gandhiji's work is therefore our biggest challenge and opportunity before us. He had confidence in his ability to remedy social weaknesses, because he had great trust in every individual's ability to change. He strongly believed that human nature allowed us to adapt to new situations. It only required a strong will to explore one's own true self. This is why Gandhiji, through much of his life, was determined to take humanity on to the pathway of spiritual and moral growth.

So are Gandhian principles relevant even today? The answer is an emphatic "yes!" His values and principles are pertinent to this day, which is why they continue to be followed - not just in India but across the world. The anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, benefitted from Gandhiji's approach. Nelson Mandela too was inspired by the Satyagraha campaign led by Mahatma Gandhi. Mandela learned from him, and was inspired by the vital virtues of forgiveness and compassion. These were the values that took South Africa on the path of forgiveness, reconciliation and harmony, rather than revenge and violence.

If we look at India's foreign policy, it is also based on the Gandhian values of peaceful co-existence. So while we believe in protecting ourselves against aggressive inimical forces, indulging in aggression against other nations is not a part of our polity. India's fundamental convictions – democracy with

rule of law, tolerance and secularism as also pluralism and inclusive development – owe much to Mahatma Gandhi and his Dharma-based world-view.

Gandhiji's thoughts need to be disseminated. It is these thoughts and ideas which have an impressive role in taking human societies forward towards the goal of enlightened governance.

Today, when there seems to be a deep erosion of moral values in our public life and when ethical principles have virtually disappeared from politics, Gandhian values appear as a whiff of fresh air. In his time Gandhi provided not only political but also moral leadership to the country. More of this is needed in the world, today. However, the desire to raise the standards of governance in public life remains acute in the minds of most leaders; and as long as that drive exists, Gandhiji and his values can never become irrelevant.

The pathways followed by Gandhiji during his time still offer good direction and guidance, if we choose to tread on them. In today's situation as well, vengeful and violent thinking is not the solution to problems. Peaceful coexistence, economic independence, respect for women, child-centered education and delivering basic education for everyone, all these principles should serve as a beacon of light to guide humanity to a better world. Gandhiji was the leader of the past whose ideas run into the present, and are likely to remain relevant in the future as well.

NEWS & EVENTS

□ On August 30, 2018, the FRNV President, Dr. E. Sreedharan addressed the Officer-Trainees (IAS Officers/Probationers) at the LBSNAA Academy in Mussoorie sharing his perspectives with and provided them insights into Ethical Leadership and Governance, that would strengthen and enhance their capabilities as potential public servants.



❑ The 10th AGM of FRNV was held on September 1, 2018. President Dr. E. Sreedharan, General Secretary Sri Bharat Wakhlu, Treasurer Sri Prem Arora, and others were present on the occasion. General Secretary Sri Bharat Wakhlu gave an overview of major activities that happened in the last financial year. The general body approved major decisions taken during the last one year by the governing body. The treasurer presented the financial report on the occasion.



❑ On September 7, 2018, an activity was conducted with Grade IV students of Raja Ram Mohan Roy Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Hauz Rani, Malviya Nagar to promote values like kindness and graciousness in the children through story-telling followed by a discussion. The children really enjoyed the story and actively participated in the discussion thereafter.



❑ An activity on September 10, 2018 was conducted with Grade V students of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Malviya Nagar to promote values like kindness and graciousness in the children through story-telling followed by a discussion. The children really enjoyed the story and actively participated in the discussion thereafter. It was heartening to listen to the experiences of some of the children and how they are trying to implement values they had learnt through VBE activities in their day to day life.



❑ A teachers' workshop with primary class teachers was conducted on September 20, 2018 at SKV Malviya Nagar by Dr. Seema Pawar, Project Director – VBE. All the participating teachers very actively participated in the workshop. The teachers shared many issues they are facing with the children like use of abusive language by children, stealing, fighting/violence, many children come late to the school, parents don't cooperate and support their children and teachers, etc. The teachers suggested to conduct a workshop with the parents to create awareness about importance of education and also their role in their ward's education.



Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.