

## Gandhi as a Historical Relic or Motivator for Sustainable Future

### OBSERVATIONS FROM INDIA

- Gandhi on a street - kill him because it would not matter if his body lived or died. And anyway, we are killing him everyday, everyone takes his name without meaning anything. In India Gandhi only has Government walls behind his picture in every Government office.
- When anyone who tries to change something fundamentally - this is the fate she/he will meet and that is the proof or the test if you like that, that they were speaking speaking the Truth - and Truth is uncomfortable - it shows us a mirror - and that is why we can not let her/him live.
- An individual is not important; he or she is only a medium, an instrument for the philosophy to come - to spread in the world.
- Followers often kill their Guru - kill the philosophy - as they often do not have the same wisdom/capacity to grasp and appreciation, or understanding.
- But the philosophy is so powerful that it does not die - it cannot die. In fact, after the person departs, its importance often increases.
- As far as the question of evolution - progress of society is concerned - Importance of an individual has limited role. But we do exactly the opposite as it is our requirement, the requirement of market - we need an icon.
- We need individuals, leaders, heroes, icons - each has advantages and disadvantages.
- As far as human beings are concerned we are/our evolution is such a place where leader does have a role - be it in politics, sports, advertising, and fashion. So what we do is we create a celebrity for something to sell.
- Similarly in a movement also we look for an icon - for example, NBA has worked towards collective leadership but everyone looks up to a leader - And someone who takes initiative - thinks ahead – slogs ([schuftet](#)), naturally becomes a leader - media, fellow citizens ([Mitbürger](#)), colleagues also make such leaders. This is how things work in our society (at least that is what I understand from India experience).
- When we hero-worship - we put the responsibility on someone else - somebody will deliver us (at least in India) - we do not want to be responsible for what we do - we do not want to work our minds - human being generally is idle - does not want to think - is generally irrational (as human being).
- When we put someone on a high pedestal then it is also very easy to not give a thought or condemn it by saying it is impractical etc. That is what we have done with Gandhi, also because he asked hard questions and wanted us as human beings to be truthful to oneself in all our actions.
- Gandhi is different things to different people. So Gandhi is a person, a human being, a devine person ([göttliche Person](#)), one who experimented, a philosopher to different people.
- To my mind, Gandhi is not a person - but a philosophy - I would not like to call myself a Gandhian, not only because of my modesty/humility tells me, I am far from being one but also because I would not claim that I have understood the philosophy completely, and also because personally, I do not believe in any 'ism'.
- At the same time, I am convinced that Gandhi/his philosophy/the learnings from what he wrote - what he did and talked about, show us / has a lot to teach us in the present scenario.

- Very interestingly, as many of you may know, in his small book which he wrote back in 1909 "Hind Swaraj" he had predicted almost all the burning problems (except may be environmental catastrophe - although he had hinted at it ) that we as country and the world faces today.
- And that is why it is interesting to examine him all the more. I am aware that there exists an opinion which says Gandhi is irrelevant. Not only that, but he made many mistakes. To the first charge, I would not agree but with the second one not only me but he himself agrees and has said it himself and moved forward - that is why he was someone who experimented.
- The violence prevalent (**vorherrschend**) within the individual, the family, society, work-place and most of all - politics as well as Trade & Commerce is not only a cause for concern but is extremely alarming. The situation is delicate, volatile, explosive
- The human specie / homo sapiens lives in perpetual (**fortwährend**) stress due to competition, the constant pressure to perform at every step
- Once upon a time - at least in the Orient - 3 generations lived together - now the old and often children are treated as burden on family - divorce rates rise continually, we see a generation that fears the institution of marriage, can not live with ourselves (depression)
- What we characterised as society is disintegrating (**Zerfall**) fast - the culture of being available for each other - helping each other is disappearing - support systems are disappearing
- The systems that held the social fabric together are subject to the whims (**Launen**) of the polity and the market
- The market does not subject itself to any morals or rules - naked profit, selfishness, power, the dying urge (**sterbender Drang**) to hold the No. 1 spot have taken overhang (**Überhand**)
- Medicines often create disease rather than curing it, e.g., Nestle, Thalidomide (**Contergan**) (mild sleeping drug - unsafe for pregnant women contrary to propaganda - malformed babies)
- Age of predatory capitalism (**Raubtierkapitalismus**) where the big swallows the small
- Erosion of human values, humaneness, humanity
- Corporations, especially of the Transnational-variety have a stranglehold (**Würgegriff**) / vice-like grip (**lasterhafter Griff**) over the economy, policies (**Strategien**) , trade & commerce, politics, market, as well as social life
- Market & Money are Gods to the powerful corporations (**Unternehmen**), nothing else matters - nothing else exists
- Power & Money can assert (**beanspruchen**) control over land, water & forests - Adivasis as a race (**Ethnie**) need not existence - they can pretty much wipe out forests, construct dams & kill rivers, connect rivers, ... list can go on
- Mining today destroys environment and ecology, livelihood is destroyed.
- It is easy to ignite a spark that turns into a flame in the name of race, religion, caste. nation in order that effective power remains in the hands of the powerful and neighbour becomes enemy – because we are constantly live on the verge (edge, limit)
- Politicians want easy votes and business needs cheap labour - the business-politics nexus only cares for their benefit/profit, in doing so they will not care about the society. That is the reality and mega-challenge today

- Creating conditions where people lose faith in nonviolence & start thinking that violence and militancy work while violence of the system is denied or ignored. Any self-defence actions by victims leads to them being demonised as being anti-national, anti-development, Maoist etc.
- Violence appears in many forms, dimensions and has many layers - some forms of violence are visible but there are many invisible forms, subtle forms
- There is often so much invisible & subtle violence that freeing oneself of it, ridding ([loswerden](#), [befreien](#)) ourselves of it seems impossible because we're part of, subject to a monstrous, faceless, inaccessible system
- we need to be aware of the phenomenon of 'being born with violence, being born in violence' - analogy: 'born with a silver spoon' today has a variation, "born with violent spoon"
- Gandhi is enemy of consumerism, people who believe in sectarianism, have faith in violence and seek to spread disharmony
- While Gandhi did not explicitly address the problem of the Environment, consumerism is one big cause, something he addressed in Hind Swaraj
- **Gandhi had sounded a warning bell against this 100 years ago!**
- Gandhi talked of culture of Non-violence instead of culture of violence.

#### **His main thesis was:**

- people think bodily welfare/comfort is the object of life
- we have better houses,  
better clothing  
more sophisticated weapons  
These are considered the signs of civilization.
- farming with manual labor has changed to machines - acquiring ([erwerben](#)) more wealth instead of farming for food or need.
- travelling by air or other means with or without need - without walking/without any labor...
- Now it is easy to take away thousands of lives by one person working behind the gun from a distance.
- writing a book or an article was serious work before - now anybody writes anything - poisoning / spreading lies etc.
- food was simple, because, it was hard work.....now you may eat 24 x 7 etc.
- In short there is inherent violence imbibed ([aufgesogen](#)) in the way we have created this 'comfortable civilization.'
- We know today that we love our comforts, we as not just you and me but as countries, civilization (remember, Bush saying our lifestyles are non-negotiable....Bush can say that because he is aware of weakness of human being).
- Socrates once said, "If we ask for more than bread and rough clothes, we invite war."

- Other thinkers/philosophers have also warned the human kind, against materialism. They said, we are gaining the luxuries of life but we are losing life from our lives (**Lebensweg**). (Thoreau John Stuart etc.)
- Gandhi's conviction about the evil root of this civilization helped him accurately pinpoint (**aufspießen, festnageln**) the disease.
- "People make bodily welfare and external pursuits (**Streben**) the object of life. Everyone is preoccupied, all busy in earning bread that they have no time for anything else... The frenzied race (**das fieberhafte Rennen**) leaves no time for people today for higher pursuits (**höhere Ziele**) - and therefore, the eternal soul shall remain feeble (**kraftlos, schwach**) so long as the body is at the center and the rat-race of this civilization continues.
- Gandhi similarly points out another (diseased) (**krankes**) symptom that had taken the root in modern civilisation - money is their God, human beings in pursuit of wealth/money to-day can do anything - compromise their integrity, resort (**sich flüchten in**) to unethical means (**Mittel**), forget their duty or responsibility. Not only that, human being does not hesitate to tinker (**basteln**) - destroy the nature or human life.
- Formerly people were made slaves under physical consumption. Now they are enslaved by temptations of money and of the luxuries that money buy.
- To understand the essence of "Hind Swaraj" it is necessary to grasp another essential element in Gandhi's thinking. Gandhi's vision was founded on morality and boundless (**schränkenlos**) devotion (**Hingabe**) to the Almighty. The modern materialistic philosophy has banished God and done away with the concept of morality. It believes that issue of moral - immoral has no place in economics, politics or the science or revolution etc. It is considered disposable/unnecessary in the cut-throat competition - obtaining in commerce and industry or be it a case of war.
- That according to Gandhi, is the root of many evil. According to him if a civilization lacks morality it cannot last. And for him God was not an idol but Truth was God, morality was God for him.
- He repeatedly argued that this was the root cause of the evil that prevailed (**herrschte**) in contemporary (**gegenwärtige**) society and he said he had taken upon himself/taken the challenge to root out this evil. It worships (**anbeten**) the body more than the Soul and is prepared to sacrifice everything for its glorification.
- "My life would be unbearable if the soul did not exist and I did not experience the oneness of the soul in each one of us and would prefer death to such existence." Such a strong was his conviction. I am amazed how prophetic his words were. And that is why I feel Gandhi is not mere (**bloß**) relic but a person with profound vision.
- I must tell you one thing though. When I use the word Gandhi, it's a philosophy we are talking/referring to, more than a person.
- Today we see that in the world and in India, people are working for peace and justice, inter-religious harmony, non-violence, equality, primary needs for every citizen, work for all and development for all - committed people - young and old - men and women - fighting for their rights to save environment or to save constitution and democracy. People lay their lives so that other people can live peacefully.
- They do not call themselves Gandhian. But does it matter...?
- In fact, if today Gandhi would have been around he would be with all those of us who are fighting injustice - non-violently.

- That is why today we comprehend (**begreifen**)/accept what dalits or militant dalits have to say. When Naxalites or Maoists, militant leftist talk about people's rights over natural resources - we are ready to support them 100 %.
- We will stand behind those modern- liberals who have serious objection with Gandhi and his name but she/he is an advocate of the poor and the exploited.
- As I have mentioned before we (my friends, my colleagues) would not take Gandhi's name (as we do not believe in any ism and would like to learn from all over - would like to be open for all thoughts) but we sincerely think the philosophy does show us a way forward.

### **To-day's Reality:**

- Privatization of Natural and material resources.
- The economy (system) is such that poor = slavery - to live on the remains of the rich and powerful.
- So called educated, vocal (**lautstark**) and the class which has potential to 'think' has unfortunately mortgaged (**verpfändet**) /surrendered its thinking faculty (**Fähigkeit**) to the philosophy which sustains (**erhalten**) present system which is based on exploitation. But the livelihood (**Lebensunterhalt**) of this very class (middle-class or upper middle class, if you like) depends on the stability of this unjust system. And in the process it (this class itself) gets exploited - and so goes the vicious (**boshaft**) cycle. Due to vested interests (**Eigeninteresse**) and the allurements (**Anziehungskraft**) /attraction enticement (**Verlockung**), it is difficult for people to look/think about what are the ill effects of it.
- The present system is sustained on a myth that we are progressing, everyone has equal opportunity and if we work hard/harder we will get justice. This is a myth because we are doing everything we can to sustain unjust system/order.
- A clinical lack of sensitivity to the growing violence is alarming. What is worse is that this influential-powerful-vocal opinion makers blame and tragically, the oppressed also believe that they are themselves to blame
- This order or system is so unjust and unsustainable, full of inner contradictions and myths - Due to these inherent weaknesses of the system it collapses from time to time. I can give many examples :
  - violence in West Asia. (Growing unrest world over, various extremist groups are sprouting)
  - Growing insecurity and right wing politics gaining popularity in many parts of the world
  - frequent Tsunamis in coastal areas/countries.
  - frequent cyclones in U. S. and other continents.
  - Recession in the world every few years in spite of tall claims (**hohe Ansprüche**) by Governments. All these are symptoms of the collapse of the present system. We either choose to hide like an ostrich (**Strauß**) or we do not have the courage to say what we see, experience and understand.
- I think it is still not too late. We still have some time to work on our future, our planet's future.

## Way Forward

Gandhi's fight for justice started with fighting the British. Vinoba's quest for justice involved redistribution of land, the means of production for equity and justice.

Our search for equity and justice is to fight for

- development that is not violent to people
- development that is in harmony with nature
- development that does not sell unrealisable dreams
- Nonviolence might seem too slow but is the fastest to sustainable social-political change
- Collective ownership, collective wisdom, decision-making power to every Gram Sabha / county / every local unit
- Welfare - only stepping stone for justice - grow out of it, transcend it - self-reliance is the way
- Training for nonviolence
- People's action - boycott (non-cooperation)

**The good news is the fight is on ...**