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Relevance of Gandhi Today with Reference to Russia-Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

Born on October 2, 1869, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi's contribution cannot be limited to India alone. Beginning from fighting fearlessly for the emancipation of Indians settled in South Africa, a struggle which continued for almost 20 years, Gandhi came back to India not quite aware of the prevailing conditions in India. He made his mark in India by successfully leading three significant struggles – at Champaran in Bihar, at Ahmedabad and at Kheda in Gujarat. The death of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1920 gave opportunity to Gandhi to become the unrivalled leader of the freedom movement of India. He led a number of movements against the British Government. Distinguishable among them is the protest against the Rowlett Act (1919), Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), Dandi March (1930) and finally the "Quit India Movement" of August 1942 in which he gave the famous slogan to Indians, "Do or Die." With the end of World War II in 1945, India's freedom movement reached its final phase. Clement Attlee declared that a cabinet mission be sent to India to facilitate the transfer of power to India. And eventually, we find that India became free on the 15th of August 1947 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Keywords: non-cooperation movement, civil- disobedience, deadening wind, despot monarch, violence breeds violence, complete catastrophe, wail and moan, untouchability, truth and non-violence

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Relevance of Gandhi Today with Reference to Russia-Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

Born on October 2, 1869, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi's contribution cannot be limited to India alone. Beginning from fighting fearlessly for the emancipation of Indians settled in South Africa, a struggle which continued for almost 20 years, Gandhi came back to India not quite aware of the prevailing conditions in India. He made his mark in India by successfully leading three significant struggles – at Champaran in Bihar, at Ahmedabad and at Kheda in Gujarat. The death of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1920 gave opportunity to Gandhi to become the unrivalled leader of the freedom movement of India. He led a number of movements against the British Government. Distinguishable among them is the protest against the Rowlett Act (1919), Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), Dandi March (1930) and finally the "Quit India Movement" of August 1942 in which he gave the famous slogan to Indians, "Do or Die." With the end of World War II in 1945, India's freedom movement reached its final phase. Clement Attlee declared that a cabinet mission be sent to India to facilitate the transfer of power to India. And eventually, we find that India became free on the 15th of August 1947 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Russian attack on Ukraine has opened the doors for a, would be, III World War. A feeling of insecurity, besiege almost all the countries. Despite all requests and their rejection followed by strict sanctions against Russia, her stubbornness exhibits the zenith of inhumanity. Such testing times remind one of world leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. It takes one to Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence and Nehru's principles of Panchsheel. Had the world believed in and practiced these principles there would have been no war.

The behavior of Russia or to be more precise, Mr. Putin, is absolutely against freedom, liberty and progressive humanity. In the present situation, Mr. Putin is behaving like a despot monarch with no room for liberty and independence in thoughts and actions for his neighbours. Gandhiji was the greatest advocate of world peace in modern times. He held that injustice and tyranny exercised by one nation over another were intolerable and must be resisted, since individuals, as also groups, could not remain for long under such conditions without revolt. Gandhiji did not believe that world peace can be achieved through a policy of balance of power or through the fear of utter destruction induced by the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. World organizations will be effective only when there is a change of heart in big and powerful nations and their politicians.

How relevant sounds these thoughts of Gandhi, expressed by him more than 80 years ago, in the present world situation. Had Gandhi been alive he would have not only condemned Russia for its monstrous behavior but would have awakened the world community against such acts of hideousness of hers and would have left for Ukraine to make his supreme sacrifice. The world today needs a leader like Gandhi. The world today lacks a leader of the stature of Gandhi. It's high time that the leaders of the world unite, forgive and forget each other for their wrongs leaving all enmity aside, and make untiring efforts to meet Mr. Putin, communicate with him, hear him out, convince him, and assure him so that humanity and the world could be saved from another disaster. Human history evidences the fact that man has eventually conquered the brutal force. Violence breeds violence. And this cycle is unending. It will only lead to the disaster of the participating ones. The only path to peace

and development is what the Mahatma taught us; the path of truth and nonviolence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his broadcast to the nation on 30 January 1948, after Gandhi's assassination, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, said:

The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that has shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom. (qtd. in Gopal 107)

How true was Nehru? Yes, that light still illuminates us with the same vigour and vitality. Gandhi was an iconoclast who vociferously attacked the superstitious beliefs, dogmas and practices of the Indian religions and rejected untouchability, bitterly. It was under Gandhiji's leadership that the freedom struggle of India gained momentum and reached its final destination. He was the man who relentlessly fought for Indian independence and who spent many years of his life in prison so that India may breathe the fresh air of freedom.

Born on 2 October 1869, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi's contribution cannot be limited to India

alone. Beginning from fighting fearlessly for the emancipation of Indians settled in South Africa, a struggle which continued for almost 20 years, Gandhi came back to India not quite aware of the prevailing conditions in India. Under the great leadership of Dadabhai Naorojee and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi began to understand and realize the temper of the Indian people. The miserable conditions of the Indian people and their sufferings stirred Gandhi to such an extent that he decided to sacrifice his life for their emancipation and upliftment. He made his mark in India by successfully leading three significant struggles – at Champaran in Bihar, at Ahmedabad and at Kheda in Gujarat. The death of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1920 gave opportunity to Gandhi to become the unrivalled leader of the freedom movement. His protest "*hartal*" against the Rowlett Act of 1919 was a huge success. And this evidenced his potential before the other leaders of the Indian freedom movement. There was no looking back. Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement by surrendering the title of "*Kaiser-e-hind*" bestowed upon him by the British. On the 1st of August 1920, signaling the non-cooperation campaign, Gandhi surrendered his decorations and titles including the *Kaiser-e-hind* Gold Medal and wrote to Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy of India, thus:

It is not without a pang that I return the *Kaiser-e-hind* Gold Medal granted to me by your predecessor for my humanitarian work in South Africa, the Zulu War medal granted in South Africa for my services as officer in charge of the Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps in 1906 and the Boer War medal for my services as assistant superintendent of the Indian Volunteer Stretcher Bearer Corps during the Boer War of 1899-1900. . . . Events that have happened during the past month have confirmed me in the opinion that the Imperial Government have acted in the Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immortality, I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government. (qtd. in Tendulkar 1).

The non-cooperation movement was a turning point in India's struggle for freedom. The excitement of the Indian people was unprecedented. But due to the unfortunate incident at Chauri-Choura, wherein an encounter between the police and the *satyagrahis*, after the police opened fire, the *satyagrahis* burnt the police-station which killed 23 policemen; Gandhi had to withdraw the non-cooperation movement in 1922. Gandhi was arrested and indicted on the charge of disaffection towards the Government and of instigating others to overthrow it. Sir J.T. Strangeman, Advocate General of Bombay, in his arguments, held Gandhi responsible for the bloodshed at Bombay and at Chauri-Chaura. The great leader overflowing with exemplary strength and courage accepted the charges levied against him by the Advocate General before the British Court:

I knew that I was playing with fire, I ran the risk, and if I were set free, I would still do the same. I felt this morning that I would have failed in my duty if I did not say what I say here just now.

I wanted to avoid violence, I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first and foremost article of my faith. It is the last article of my creed. But I have to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done an irreparable harm to my country or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it, and I am, therefore, here to submit not to a light penalty, but to the highest penalty. I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, Judge, is either to resign your post or inflict on me the severest penalty. (qtd. in Rolland 116-18)

This was followed by the imprisonment of Gandhi for a term of six years though he was released after two years on health grounds. At the Lahore Session of the Congress Party, Gandhi declared the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1929. The movement started with the famous Dandi March of Gandhiji in 1930. The defiance of salt law was followed by the spread of the Civil Disobedience Movement all over the country. There were demonstrations, *hartals*, boycotts of foreign goods, and later refusal to pay taxes. Even the women of the country participated in this movement in large numbers.

Another important movement I would like to name here is the "Quit India Movement." Addressing a gathering in Bombay on the 8th of August 1942, Gandhi gave a slogan which had a remarkable electrifying effect on the people of India:

Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is 'Do or Die.' We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. (qtd. in Chandra et. al. 459-60)

This movement is important because here one can visualize the feeling of absolute sacrifice in the Indian people for liberation from British rule and secondly it has made the British realize that their days were numbered in India.

With the end of the II World War in 1945 India's freedom movement reached its final phase. Clement Attlee declared that a cabinet mission be sent to India to facilitate the transfer of power to India. And eventually, we find that India became free on the 15th of August 1947.

Let us briefly analyze the source of Gandhi's strength and his indomitable spirit. And such an analysis makes us realize that it was his extreme faith in the concept of truth and non-violence. Truth for Gandhi was God and realizing this truth as God was the ultimate purpose of his life. He expounded that truth could be realized only through nonviolence. "Truth is the end and nonviolence the means." It was this phenomenon

which Gandhi preached and practiced throughout his life and which became the weapon for India to attain its freedom.

Gandhi believed in simple living high thinking. There was absolute harmony in his thoughts, words and actions. "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony," he said. He was a messenger of truth and love. Hate the sin and not the sinner was the precept he believed in. And this was the reason that despite opposing their imperialistic policies and actions he nursed no grudge or ill will against the British. Gandhi believed that the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

On January 28, 1948, Gandhi had a premonition of his death. Sitting outside his room in Birla House, he told Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, "If I were to die by the bullet of a mad man, I should do so smilingly. There must be no anger within me. God must be in my heart and His name chanting on my lips" ("If I were to die by the bullet of a mad man, I should do so smilingly"). Two days later, on his way to the prayer ground, a young man approached him with folded hands and bowed in greeting. The man's name was Nathuram Godse. He had a gun in his pocket. He took it out and pointed straight at the Mahatma, fired three shots. Blood seeped through the white cotton in which Gandhiji was clad. The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, the man whose name is inextricably linked with *ahimsa*, i.e., nonviolence, the world over, had himself become a victim to *hinsa*, i.e., violence. He died exactly the way he had wished- with God on his lips, "*He Ram.*" A man of prayer, he died in prayer.

With this very brief political biography of Gandhi, let me connect his relevance in the present times. Today's world condition, especially after the Russia-Ukraine war, is no different from what has been described by Romain Rolland in 1924. Let me be permitted to quote a paragraph from Rolland's biography of Mahatma Gandhi, titled, *Mahatma Gandhi (The Leader of Universal Peace & Liberty)*:

The world is swept by the wind of violence. This storm which ravages the harvest of our civilization did not break out from a clear sky. Centuries of brutal national pride, whetted by the idolatrous ideology of the Revolution, spread by the empty mockery of democracies, and crowned by a century of inhuman industrialism, rapacious plutocracy and a materialistic system of economics where the soul perishes, stifled to death, were bound to culminate in these dark struggles where the treasures of the West succumbed. . . All- be they Nationalists, Fascists, Bolsheviks, members of the oppressed classes, members of the oppressing classes - claim that they have the right to use force, while refusing this right to others. Half a century ago, might dominated right. To-day things are far worse. Might is right. Might has devoured right. (128)

And exactly, this is what is happening in Ukraine. There is flesh and blood all over. Blood rushes in search of veins, flesh craving to reunite. A dead woman is getting identified by the colour and texture of her nail polish. Shrieks, screech, scream and cry all around. Dying innocent faces, questioning the cause of their state! At least tell us our fault, our crime! What have we done? Where did we go wrong? Why are you killing us? At least let us know the reason, why? What will happen to our children? Who would take care of them? At least show some mercy. Aren't you afraid of God? All such questions being suppressed under the sound of bomb blasts and the clamour of bullets!

The deadening wind blows the ash particles, at times sky high. Its sound merges with the wail and moan of the dying ones. No one to help, no one to hospitalize, no one to treat! Humanity cries for existence. Complete catastrophe!

Anyone can witness such scenes on television as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. Extreme violence, distrust and lack of truthfulness, exemplifies itself everywhere.

Russian attack on Ukraine has opened the doors for a, would be, III World War. A feeling of insecurity besiege almost all the countries. Despite all requests and their rejection followed by strict sanctions against Russia, her

stubbornness exhibits the zenith of inhumanity. The dispute between Russia and Ukraine has been continuing for a long time. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the states which came into independent existence had severed their ties with each other. Ukraine, in order to attain its sovereignty, balanced its foreign policy with both, European Union and Russia. In the year 2014, Ukraine witnessed wide protests against its decision of not signing the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement after it was approved by the Ukrainian parliament by majority. Very naturally, Russia was opposed to this decision. The removal of Yanukovich, the President of Ukraine, and the installation of an interim government by the opposition was followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine as a counter attack. Tension continued between the two countries and finally Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022 with the aim of ending Ukraine's desire to join NATO.

I am convinced that the Russian feeling of insecurity from NATO is the primary cause of his devastating aggression against Ukraine leading to its holocaust. Even if Ukraine survives the war, it will take many years for him to recover from this immeasurable catastrophe. As I was writing this paper today, i.e., 14.05.2022, I saw the news that Russia is now threatening Finland to not join NATO. I am surprised as to how many countries do Russia wish to threaten alike.

Such testing times remind one of world leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. It takes one to Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence and Nehru's principles of *Panchsheel*. The five principles of *Panchsheel* formally signed by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and the first Premier of China, Chou En-Lai, on 29th April 1954 and unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1957, had been the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement established in Belgrade in 1961. These five principles have virtually defined the inter-relationship between the different countries of the world. It is a different matter that China herself did not stick to the principles of *Panchsheel* when it attacked India in 1962. These five principles of *Panchsheel* are; mutual respect for each other's territorial

integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. Had the world believed and practiced these principles there would have been no war.

Coming to Mahatma Gandhi, we get reminded of the principles of non-violence and truth which Gandhi had practiced throughout his life. These two principles are a part of the five essential vows or principles, viz. non-violence, truth, not stealing, non-possessiveness and sexual continence, which Jainism (Jain religion) preaches. Therefore, there was nothing original in this thought of the Mahatma. What was original of Gandhi was to make these five principles of Jainism as enunciated by Mahavir and as expanded by Buddha, strong and potent weapons to fight for the freedom struggle of India. What was original of Gandhi was that he infused fresh life and blood into what has already been present in the soul of India but was lying dormant. Throughout his life Gandhi practiced these five principles. Throughout his life Gandhi preached these principles to India and to the world.

It would be incorrect to criticize Great Britain all the time and in all respects as is the habit of the rustics of India. The concept of democracy which includes the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity arrived in India via Europe, particularly, Great Britain. Before the advent of democracy, India was governed by more than 500 kings and kingdoms having their own laws, rules and procedures, many a times, illogical, unreasonable, unjust and brutal. These Rajahs, Maharajahs, Emirs, Sultans and Nawabs as they were called were autocratic despots and were deft to the groans and cries of their subjects. The scions of the kings were the particles around which debased snobbery of the royalty would conjugate. Mahatma Gandhi along with his associates in the freedom struggle, like, Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and many more was a votary of democracy, justice, liberty, independence, inequality, fraternity and brotherhood in India. Lala Har Dayal, the founder of *Gadar* Party, during the freedom struggle of

India, describing democracy in his book, *Hints For Self-Culture*, writes:

The true criterion of good government is not the increase of population or wealth; it is the criterion of character and personality. That government is the best which produces the best type of men and women. This ethical test will establish the indisputable superiority of Democracy over all other forms of government. Democracy is the mother of the highest Virtue and Wisdom, of true Philosophy and religion, of free and progressive Humanity. Without it mankind would decay and dwindle with no hope of recovery. Long live Democracy! (342)

The behavior of Russia or to be more precise, Mr. Putin, is absolutely against freedom, liberty and progressive humanity. In the present situation, Mr. Putin is behaving like a despot monarch with no room for liberty and independence in thoughts and actions for his neighbours in the name of, would be, danger to Russia, thereby justifying his spectacular atrocities being inflicted in the name of Russian nationalism. Have our conscience not been awakened even after the disastrous impact of two World Wars? Do we await the final extermination of mankind by the use of nuclear weapons? The words of Lala Har Dayal once again become pertinent here:

The World-State will not be founded by Force or on Force. It will abjure, eschew, abhor, and abolish organized brute-force in all its forms. Nature has given us deft hands and feet, not sharp claws and talons. Nature thus says to man: "Work! Don't fight and wound and slay." Force has been the sworn foe of justice and equality at all times. (353)

Deliberating on Gandhian thoughts with respect to international affairs, J.B. Kripalani in his book, *Gandhi His Life and Thoughts*, opined:

In the international field, Gandhiji was the greatest advocate of world peace in modern times. He held that injustice and tyranny exercised by one nation over another were intolerable and must be resisted, since individuals, as also groups, could not remain

for long under such conditions without revolt. Gandhiji, as we have already stated, wanted this revolt to be open and peaceful. Also humanity has now in this nuclear age no other way left. It must, however, be remembered that this fundamental reform in the international field, as in every other sphere of life, would need 'the martyrdom of man'. . . . A *satyagrahi* has to face voluntary martyrdom, when all other forms of non-violent resistance have failed. In Gandhiji's scheme of world peace, not only individuals but also groups and nations will have to be prepared for martyrdom, if need be. The martyr may appear to be defeated but he conquers death. Moral conduct does not pay high dividends. Everybody may not have to make the supreme sacrifice of life; but one has to suffer every day for the faith that is in one, unless one is fortunate. Even then one must be prepared to pay the highest price.

Gandhiji does not believe that world peace can be achieved through a policy of balance of power or through the fear of utter destruction induced by the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. He does not believe purely in a world organization keeping international peace. But a world organization for peace must consist of nations whose politicians are genuinely anxious for peace and do not aspire to dominate other nations. World organizations will be effective only when there is a change of heart in big and powerful nations and their politicians. (364-365)

How relevant are these thoughts of Gandhi in the present world situation, expressed by him more than 80 years ago. The reader would excuse me for the length of the quotation. Today, the powerful nations need to initiate a change in their overall attitude. Had Gandhi been alive he would have not only condemned Russia for its monstrous behavior but would have awakened the world community against such acts of hideousness of hers and would have left for Ukraine to make his supreme sacrifice. The world today needs a leader like Gandhi. The world today lacks a leader of the stature of Gandhi. It's high time that the leaders of the world unite, forgive

and forget and leave all enmity aside and make untiring efforts to meet Mr. Putin, communicate with him, hear him out, convince him, and assure him so that humanity and the world could be saved from another disaster. Let no nation forget, that no nation or individual can prosper without peace or in violence. Material wealth and brutal force might dominate the physical body of a nation or an individual, but it does not have the power to dominate its soul. Human history evidences the fact that man has eventually conquered the brutal force. Violence breeds violence. And this cycle is unending. It will only lead to the disaster of the participating ones. The only path to peace and development is what the Mahatma taught us; the path of truth and nonviolence.

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