



Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and Racism

Mr. Kalekar Sanjay S.

Assistant Professor in English

Department of English,

Drt's A. E. Kalsekar Degree College, Kausa, Thane. (Mumbai)

University of Mumbai.

Email: kalekar_sanjay@rediffmail.com

And

Mr. Jagdish Mohan Magar

Assistant Professor in English

K.B. Arts and Commerce College for women

Kopari, Thane (E)

University of Mumbai

Email: jagdish7777@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi, The father of nation. He has been with the world today for his principles and values. The relevance of his philosophy is inevitable part of our nature and behaviours. Gandhi not only taught us the ideals but the way of life and the path towards salvation. He has a role model for so many great figures in politics, sociology or many be in rest all other disciplines. His journey begins as a lawyer in India and succeeds ahead. He was also called to South Africa for the legal assistance when he was about to leave Africa from the humiliation he had received from the European settlers of Africa. Interestingly, the young Gandhi experienced the racial treatment. The violence and also dominance from those elites of Africa. This has made him down and dismayed but he took it in optimistic way and proposed for an ideology of Non-violence. This is also called as Passive resistance. In his words it's pointed as 'Satyagraha'. This became the fervour all over the South Africa and to the rest of the world. People started following him with the proposed principles and non-cooperative movement. This brought a massive change in the life of entire South Africa. The present paper tries to focus upon the life of mahatma Gandhi spent in South Africa and the racism he experienced there. This also exhibits and discusses the statesmanship of Gandhi as a leader, social worker and a reformer. It also explains his encounters of racism. Segregation and humiliation. His relevance today is also a core part of this research.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Racism, Satyagraha, Humiliation, Non-violence.



Introduction:

Gandhi has been always hailed as ‘Bapu’ with love and affection. He holds a supreme position in the world history of stalwarts. He is nominated as Mahatma (The great soul) being a simple person of great morals and ethics. He has given a greater lesson to the entire world as simplicity is life. He himself has spent his thorough life at the service of society and the upliftment of poor’s. His contribution in the freedom fighting movement is noteworthy. He was born in Porbandar, Gujrat, started his career as a Lawyer and then become a freedom fighter. His thorough life is being spent in social service which result into the dawn of freedom in our live. He has given us the philosophy of life by attributing great morals to our live. The principles like Non- violence, truth and education still helps the society to progress and remain united.

Objectives:

1. To understand Gandhiji for his principles and philosophy.
2. To evaluate the significance if his teachings and philosophy at present times.
3. To project his place in present scenario in writings of all disciplines.
4. To analyse his philosophy critically with regard to racism.

Hypothesis:

Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings as philosophy are still relevant in the present times.

Background: South Africa before Gandhi’s visit:

Before Mahatma Gandhi visited South Africa, it was a fertile land of tea, coffee and sugarcane plantations. It was land of cherished beauty and meadows. It has its essence of everything that South Africa saw in need of. After the act of abolition of slavery, it was hard to survive for labour in the country and therefore they ran errands for human sources. It was really difficult for them to find workers for farming. This was observed by the European settles and they travelled across India and offered a lavish picture of job opportunities in Natal. They also assured the aspirants to be rest relax for a free passage for settlement, board and lodging as well. They would also earn handsomely like around ten shillings for the month. They would also be enabled to return back to their homes after every ten years. This has laid a ground to the Indian merchants it issue licence to the mass for the migration and settle in India. The entire process of hectic and tiresome. However, Indian were trapped and had to suffer by the hands of those masters. The colonial powers worked as superstructure and the labours remain at the bottom. These were the ideological predicated apparatuses used by the Europeans as to exploit the labour. Africa was colonised by the evil power in the era. Gandhi has witnessed it and hence, his revolt against such powers began.

Racism and sailing to Africa:

Racism in Africa was quite visible. It means a hatred of one person for the other. It has been evident with number of events across history of humankind. The history tells us about the black and white slavery, the dichotomy of great conflicts between whites and blacks. The conflicts between Jews and Christian, Hindus and Muslims and so on. These are the representative examples of hatred and also of conflicts. Gandhi himself has opposed all these binary divisions throughout his life. He proposed the concept of “Harijans” means all are the children of a single god. And therefore not to be necessarily discriminated. The discrimination continues till date and is visible all around the world.



The Indians being in South Africa had to face the rage of humiliation on daily basis. They were commonly hailed as the “Asian Dirt” and “chockful of vice”. This dirt live with help of rice and black vermin. It’s more like Indian Dalit’s they were not allowed to use footpaths. The railway journey was prohibited to them. They were not allow to buy the first class tickets for their journey. If a passenger board on a first class bogie, the whites used to object and would leave the passenger down the coach. In addition to that theses Indian slaves were not even admitted to the hotels.

It was later when the Gujathi merchants who trade with south Africa had invited mahatma Gandhi to Africa for legal assistance, he read the entire society filled with agony and suffering. A relative merchant called Dada Abdullah, a friend to Gandhi’s brother had invited Mahatma Gandhi to South Africa for pleading the case of Indian merchants. He was offered all his expenses for travel and also few more money as his fees to work as legal advisor to those Indian merchants. In total Gandhi was offered one hundred pounds as his fees. Then in 1893, he sailed to South Africa.

Gandhi’s arrival in Africa and racism:

Gandhi reached to Durban, in Natal state. He examined his work there and after two days of rest went to the court. When he entered the court the respective judge saw a turban was put on his head. He immediately objected and asked Gandhi to remove the turban. He said that all Indians except the Muslims, who habitually put on the turban, had to remove it as a token of respect to the court. Gandhi refused it and went out of the court. This was the very first time he had to face the insult in Africa.

There was another similar incident was of his train journey. He boarded a first class ticket. He explains that it was quite cold and shivering out. The train was to reach to Maritzburg station, a railway officer appears on the scene and ask Gandhi to vacate the seat for a white man. He was advised to move to other compartment. Gandhi refused his order and reluctantly sat there till he was thrown away from there. The train left him shuddering in the cold all through the night at the station. He was pondering over the insult he had witnessed. In the morning he continued his journey by horse cart and half of it by train. He witnessed that only Europeans have access to the first class compartments. Even in the cart he was not allowed to seat but was asked to occupy the place at footboard. The Europeans only allowed to seat in carriage. However he was beaten up but he didn’t move an inch.

This was the subjugation he faced at the initial level. This untold shame and racism he encountered for which he was not prepared for and that deeply hurt him and his self-respect.

On the very time he became determined and enlighten his inner self to help and protect the fate of all the Indian settlers in South Africa.

It was Abdullah Sheth who became successful in holding back Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was about to leave Africa. At his farewell, the Indianpeople from Africa requested him to stay back and help all of us on legal matters. Then, his farewell turns into his welcome and the onwards he stared fighting for citizenship rights of the Indian settlers in South Africa. Hence, his struggle for fighting for all downtrodden began there.

There onwards he stared an organization known as “The Natal Indian Congress”. This was meant for the Indian struggle at South Africa. Along with this movement he started one newspaper named as “The Indian Opinion” as an agent in sensitising people for their problem and rights in South Africa.



Satyagraha took shape:

In around 1907 the African government had tighten the rules and laws against the Asian settlers in Africa. The law was made and named as Asiatic Act. As per this law the men and women of Asian origin above the age of 8 years were made to register themselves and the marriages should take place as per Christian customs as legal. In this respect the Hindu and Muslim marriage customs were invalid and outdated. The law also restricted the movement of mass from one place to another.

Gandhi in action advised his men to not obey the registration law and called for a strike. All Indian settles should defy the new law and opt for the punishment rather than doing any violent reaction. The resistance action took shape with the incident. He there announced for the campaign called Satyagraha. This is the procedure of being passive and silent and also non-violent. The also called as civil disobedience. All men women and children were forced to offer Satyagraha. This passive protest was known as 'peace Brigade'. This continued for next six months and spread from a city called Transvaal to Natal. This resulted into the settlement and the government came down on an agreement with Gandhiji. The peaceful revolt bestowed all the citizenship rights of Indians and the incident recognised Gandhiji as a leader of peace and harmony.

Satyagraha, the innovative way of struggle in Africa began as a landmark revolution in political history of world. Normally, politics is a defamed sector with cheating, beating and killing, but Gandhiji had set an example in protest of non-violence. This is moral way to demand your rights. He proved it that the protest is possible and successful with love and non- violence that leads to harmony.

Racial indenture:

The indentured case of Balsundaram was brought to fore by Mahatma Gandhi. This provoked him to bring down the taxes paid by the Indians in Africa. In the year 1894, the African government adopted the heavy to heavy taxes on indentured Indians, which surprised Gandhiji. He discussed the topic with the congress and adopted the necessary protest against it.

Gandhi as a leader: A Correspondence:

Gandhi was an unchallenged leader as well as correspondent. He always attacked his friends, opponents, newspaper editors and others who were in authority. He used the mode of telegrams, letters and memoranda of the grievances of the Indians of SouthAfrica. Gandhiji was successful in publicising the issue of indentured Indian settles in Africa as worldwide known. The Indian national congress took notice of it. The London times devoted great number of leading articles, focusing on the issue of Indians in South Africa.

Non-violence at peak:

It is the strength of inner self that enables every one of us to practice and control the rule. This is nothing less than your non-violence. He became the public figure who driven away the Europeans from the land of South Africa. He never reacted with violence or no other destructive medium. He never adopted to the sundry ways of protest but the non-cooperation movement and succeeded in achieving his goal. The technique was well experience by the mass and now wold wide adopted. His principles became at the peak and shown a light to many in future those who fumble.



Relevance of Mahatma Gandhiji at Present Times:

The present time is moving ahead with great completions almost in all the fields. The sectors like politics, sociology, religion and castes all discuss Gandhiji for his contribution. Gandhiji is very much practised for his Satyagraha by Anna Hajare and Arvind Kejariwal for their demands recently. The non-cooperative ideology is being practice by government employees to fulfil their demands. Gandhiji has portrayed as a hero in many of the Bollywood movies which transmits his philosophy and teachings to the youngsters of our country. Naturally, this also takes its shape internationally. Gandhiji is acknowledged as a world leader too. Gandhian study centres at foreign universities are fulfilling the purpose and imparting his teachings and its relevance in present times.

Conclusion:

Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy has enlightened the entire world. His principles are the guiding milestones to all of us. His work has no bounds and contains. His contribution to the Indian settlers in South Africa is noteworthy. His own torture turns him into a self-light or a torch for himself that made the way for many to survive in long run. His stay in Africa made him a well-recognised leader and a lawyer. His professional visit become a milestones in his life and saved many poor's from getting ruined forever in their life. Racism which happens to be a world wide spread phenomenon was eradicated by Gandhi. The stereotypical binary and stratification was abolished and made invisible by Gandhi. The class structures, societal, religious, political and elite divisions are annihilated through his ideals.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has rightly said it as “the greater light has gone today” when Gandhi was assassinated. Gandhian Philosophy has kept people ignited and will keep so forever.

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