

RELEVANCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY TO SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION: A REVIEW

Mutluri Abraham

This article presents the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy toward the Social Work Profession in India. It is a review article prepared with secondary data available in books and journal articles. Mahatma Gandhi was a prominent leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. His principles viz. Non-violence, Satyagraha, Swadesi, Sarvodaya and Democratic leadership led Indians to strive to bring independence to India. He had launched the freedom struggle movements viz. Dandi Salt March, Quit India and Non-Cooperation Movement for Independence. Gandhi found a few disparities in India and developed a concept called constructive programme with the points of conflicts between different religious groups, castes, untouchability, fear arising out of ignorance, economic disparities, decaying condition of our villages, the plight of Adivasis, Kisans and the labourers, and the position of women, etc. Gandhiji motivated his followers, and freedom fighters to work on the said disparities. These constructive programme points are very relevant to the social work profession and nowadays many social workers are working on these programmes. This article presents how Gandhian principles like Nonviolence, Satyagraha, Swadesi, and Sarvodaya are relevant to the social work profession. Gandhiji Principles such as seeking truth through service to the poor and needy, individual self-development and self-reliance, nonviolence social action and material simplicity are very related to the code of ethics of professional social workers. The study suggested that professional social workers should practice the principles of Mahatma Gandhi in their interventions. The associations of professional social workers should adopt the Gandhiji principles and include them in the social work curriculum.

Mutluri Abraham is Guest Faculty, Dept. of Social Work, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. Email: vijjyabhi@gmail.com

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Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the prominent leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. His ideology of Non-violence, Truth and Democratic Leadership led Indians to strive to bring independence to India. He had launched struggle freedom movements

viz. Dandi Salt March, Quit India and Non-Cooperation Movement for Independence. His non-violence ideas like Ahimsa and Satyagraha are very famous in the entire World. With respect to all his activities in India, he is widely known as the '**Father of the Nation**'. His birthday has been remembered as an 'International Non-Violence Day'. Gandhi struggled a lot for a united India and the unity of Indians. Gandhi is a normal person like all of us before reaching South Africa. The incident in Pietermaritzburg Railway Station has brought many changes in his life. He started fighting against South Africans on discrimination and he became a Leader. Then he came back to India to start movements for independence to Indians.

Gandhi read many books some of them include "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" by Henry David Thoreau, "The Kingdom of God is Within You" by Leo Tolstoy, and "Unto This Last" by John Ruskin which brought several changes in his thinking, ideology and personality. Ruskin's work had a tremendous impact on him and immensely stimulated his thinking about the lesson and spirit of Sarvodaya. Gandhi borrowed concepts including the Sarvodaya Principle and Non-Violence from the above books (Paul, 2016).

Gandhi has done a lot of work for the Indian Independence movement from 1915-1947. His main movements include "Dandi Salt March, Quit India, Swadesi and Non-Cooperation Movement". In the remaining time, Gandhi travelled the country and understood the problems of the people, vulnerabilities and their living circumstances particularly the poor and other marginalized groups. He fought against the evils of the society. He prepared a constructive programme to rectify such social evils and brought social change to the community. All the constructive programmes are related with the social problems of those days (Gandhi, 1945). Among the points in the constructive programme, a few problems were solved and remaining problems are still troubling the People and nation. To address such issues, Social Work Professionals are working to promote welfare, development and empowerment with rights based strategies and interventions. Gandhi likes the social work profession as it works of the people, by the people and for the people. During his speeches, visits and writings, he mentioned good words about social workers. He told always that 'if you want to do social work, you start it yourself' (Yadav, 2016).

Social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promote social change and development among poor, disadvantaged and backward groups. As a profession, Social Work started in Amsterdam in 1899 and spread throughout Europe and United States later in the

1920s after the First World War. The social work practice in India was started by Clifford Manshird in 1925 in Nagapada Slum of Mumbai which leads to the start of social work education. In India, it started in 1936 at Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work. Later in 1944, the name was changed to Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) which is one of the best Institutes in India. The main aim of Social Work practise is to assist individuals, groups and communities, or organisations to improve or regain their ability for social interaction and normal social functioning. Professional Social Workers apply their methods i.e., casework, group work, community organisation, social action, social research and social welfare administration to solve the problems of individuals, groups and communities (Abraham, 2021).

The various forms of social work focus on the numerous, intricate interactions between people and their surroundings. Its goal is to make it possible for everyone to reach their full potential, improve their quality of life, and avoid dysfunction. Problem solving and change making are the main focuses of professional social work. In all facets of human services as well as many other fields, modern social workers are helping to address the after-effects of these and several other social ills. Social work has evolved from its earlier more scientific foundation, which supported the idea that poverty was an illness, to a more critical and all-encompassing approach to analysing and addressing social issues in more recent years. It is well supported that Poverty and Development works as a causes and consequence of each other with challenges or opportunities to move forward.

Gandhi's perspectives on Social Work

Gandhi has an idea for social work. He encouraged the social workers to do more services to the poor, marginalized, and other needy. He had written a few points on the importance of social work. Understanding human growth and behaviour, as well as social, economic, and cultural institutions and their interactions, is necessary for the practice of social work. "I understood from another visitor this afternoon that you are without any organisation here for doing this class of social work or political work of any nature whatsoever," wrote Mahatma Gandhi in a letter. "In fact, nothing would please me better than to find that as one of the results of this meeting, you had such a working organisation manned by selfless workers" (Gandhi, 1927, p. 398). And at the lowest, the poorest of the poor, and the restoration of society based on truth and non-violence (Antyodaya) are the key ideas. The lowest, the most impoverished (Antyodaya), not to mention the welfare requirements of

the disadvantaged sections and the issues relating to social injustice, economic exploitation, social discrimination, inequality, and the related problems that are the results of the discrepancies in the social systems, the most vulnerable members of society suffer the most in catastrophes like fires, epidemics, famine, and wars. Gandhian social work's primary goal was to address the root causes and conditions that led to the aforementioned issues.

Social workers thus play a transformative role in society as well as in the lives of the people, families, and communities they work with. An interconnected framework of values, theory, and practice underpins social work. "I argued to them that my work of social change was in no way inferior to or subordinate to political action," wrote Mahatma Gandhi in a letter (Gandhi, 1924, p. 501). "Your anxiety about my becoming caught up in political turmoil and intrigues may be fully set aside," wrote Mahatma Gandhi. I don't have the stomach for them, at least not just now; I didn't have any even in South Africa. I was involved in politics because it was the path to my own freedom. Montagu said, "I am surprised to find you taking part in the political life of the country!" Without a moment's thought, Gandhi replied, "I am in it because without it I cannot do my religious and social work," and I think the reply will stand good to the end of my life" (Gandhi, 1924, p. 124).

A social worker's analysis of complicated circumstances and facilitation of societal, organisational, social, and cultural change are based on theories of human development, behaviour, and social systems. 'I have now heard from Dr Jayaram', stated Mahatma Gandhi. He has concluded that Bhole never had tuberculosis, but whether he had or not, he is now completely free and that he should immediately leave the Sanatorium and engage in some social work or continue his education in order to distract himself (Mahatma Gandhi, 1935). Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "The hospital started under such auspices with fairly ample funds at its disposal should grow day by day and supply the need of the middle-class women of Bengal. This hospital reminds us of the fact that social work was as dear to the Deshbandhu as political. When it was open to him to give away his properties for political work he deliberately chose to give them for social service in which women's service had a prominent part" (Gandhi Samagra Sahitya, 1926).

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "We realize, they say, that our real work lies in villages, and that while doing this work we can also do other social work among the villagers". Wherever the volunteers work in a spirit of service, they succeed in creating a sense of brotherhood among the people (Yadav, 2016). There is a strong association

between social work and Gandhi's constructive programme. Both focuses to modify the social evils and bring social change among the people and communities.

Gandhi's Constructive Programme

An important strand in Gandhiji's work, notwithstanding his political career and spiritual-ethical concerns, was the 'Constructive Work' programme aimed at solving the problems of rural India. From 1920, his concept of Sarvodaya was formally embedded in this programme, of which the initial elements were communal unity, removal of untouchability and the promotion of khadi and other village industries. From 1936 till 1946, he stayed in the backward area of Sevagram to practice what he preached (Kumar, 1998).

Mahatma Gandhi's vision is for untied India and the unity of Indians. To make political independence more meaningful, there were certain weaknesses in the Indian social structure in those days which needed to be strengthened. Conflicts between different religious groups, castes, untouchability, fear arising out of ignorance, economic disparities, decaying condition of our villages, the plight of Adivasis, Kisans and the labourers, and the position of women were areas of major concern. Then Gandhi prepared a constructive programme in the train when he was travelling from Sevagram to Bardoli, and he appealed to all Congressmen and others volunteers engaged in the freedom struggle to address the issues mentioned in the constructive programme. The original thirteen items included are: (1) Communal Unity (2) Removal of Untouchability (3) Prohibition (4) Khadi (5) Village Industries (6) Village Sanitation (7) Nai Talim or Basic Education (8) Adult Education (9) Women (10) Knowledge of Health and Hygiene (11) Provincial languages (12) National Language (13) Economic Inequality. Later, to this, he added five more items i.e., (1) Kisans (2) Labour (3) Adivasis (4) Lepers (5) Students. The 18-point constructive programme thus became his framework for the new India as he wished to see after Swaraj. These points evolved into a feature of Gandhian Social Service (Gandhi Research Foundation, 2020). The Constructive workers lived in villages and introduce a social reconstruction programme based on self-help and self-reliance. The training of workers emphasised on austere personal life, development of attitudes and pursuit of skills suitable to the local industry. Ashram Institutions were the training centres (Kumar, 1998).

After founding Sabarmati Ashram on the banks of river Sabarmati in Ahmadabad, Gujarat on 20th May 1915, Gandhi proceeded to Champaran (Bihar) to protest against the tyranny and exploitation of the indigo

farmers by the British planters. In 1918, he took the cause of textile labour in Ahmadabad and used fast as a non-violent weapon for the first time in India, to secure an amicable settlement of the dispute. In the same year, he initiated Satyagrah in Kaira in Gujarat in support of the farmers. Nowadays many social workers are in the footprints of Mahatma and fighting for the rights of labour and farmers of India. Many Non-governmental organisations were established by social workers and helping the poor farmers in the present days (Ostergaard & Currell, 1971, p.183).

“Intellectual labour is crucial and has an undeniable role in the plan of life,” wrote Mahatma Gandhi. But I really believe that physical labour is essential. I contend that no man should be exempt from that duty. Even the quality of his intellectual output will benefit from it (Harijan, 1947). Early attempts by churches and charitable organisations to alleviate the effects of poverty, bring religious solace to the poor, encourage temperance and economy, care for children, the sick, and the elderly, and discipline the delinquent led to the development of social work as a profession. The typical outcomes of these actions were orphanages and nursing facilities for the elderly. The early actions, which were intended to partly alleviate specific maladjustments, are best described by the word charity. The primary factor in deciding whether to help families in such charitable work was deservingness, but the focus of subsequent social work was on helping people return to normal life for both their own sake and the sake of the community. In the present days, professional social workers have established educational institutions, orphan homes and hospitals and helped the poor and needy. There are some non-governmental organisations established by social workers that are helping the scavengers and sweepers with respect to their work.

Mahatma Gandhi showed the ways as a path to social workers to work on the social evil which he mentioned in the constructive programme. The professional social workers and social work practitioners established organisations working on the removal of untouchability, village sanitation, and promotion of basic education, adult education, women development, and services to the patients with different health problems, farmers' welfare, labour welfare, tribal development and so on. The 18-point constructive programme is one of the root maps for the social workers to provide services to the present generations. Many academics have attempted to condense Gandhi's Constructive Programme tenets. This makes it easier to determine whether the values Gandhi outlined have changed over time or remain a consistent part of the Constructive Programme, as well as whether any new values have been added to

this list. Understanding these components is crucial for providing clarity regarding the Gandhian ideals of a constructive programme that can enhance the existing body of knowledge in the field of social work.

Another principle of Mahatma Gandhi is Satyagrahi which is closely associated with the social workers' social action. Controlling one's wrath, refraining from retribution, avoiding attachment to one's possessions, and fearlessness are among the guidelines that serve as the foundation for a Satyagrahi as an individual. The Satyagrahi Principles, which Gandhi defined as a requirement for Satyagrahi in India, first appeared in Harijan in 1939. The guidelines he gave were: having a living trust in God, speaking the Truth, abstaining from Violence, respecting one's own Dignity, not possessing anything, wearing a Khadi (swadeshi), Spinning, and abstaining from Possessions (Gandhi, 1939). The social workers apply these principles and methods of social action to the advocacy with the policymakers which further help the poor and needy.

Gandhi's ashram residents' code of conduct was his first set of guiding principles. Ashrams served as his lab where he conducted Constructive Programme experiments in a structured setting at the micro level. The initial requirement for participation in this experiment was the "Satyagraha Ashram Vows." The ashram's members had to act and speak in accordance with a set of ideals. Truth, Ahimsa (non-violence), Celibacy, control of one's Palate, Non-Stealing, and Non-Possession are considered major vows whereas Swadeshi, Fearlessness, Language (Hindustani), hand Labour, and Handloom (spinning wheels and handlooms) are classified as subsidiary vows by R. Diwakar (Diwakar, 1946, pp.184-187). The key distinction is that Gandhi's Ashram members were asked to take vows that reflected his emphasis on personal responsibility over individual's rights.

Pinto described Constructive Workers as "dedicated missionaries and conscientious revolutionaries, bound by vows, willing to introduce the monastic as well as the heroic ideal into political and social life" when describing their character as social workers reflecting the principles to which they remained devoted. Gandhi planned for a vanguard of devoted and hardworking workers to be formed over time, primarily from the rank of Satyagrahis, to carry out the Constructive Programme in the village across the Country (Gandhi, 1941, p.5).

Gandhi established Harijan Sevak Sang along with G.D. Birla as its President and A.V. Thakkar as Secretary in 1932 to serve the Harijans in India. This is a direct social work intervention of Mahatma Gandhi to Harijan Welfare and Development in India. Gandhi realised that

Harijans are backward in Social, Economical and Educational status than other communities. There is a practice of untouchability in India. Through the Harijan Sevak Sangh Gandhi and his followers started free education for Harijans, free access to the Temples, Public Tanks and Wells, opening of Schools and Hostels for their children, and teaching them the simple rules of Health and Hygiene were undertaken with great zeal. Gandhi motivated his followers to contribute their resources to the development of Harijans. Many of his followers contributed their wealth and time to the Harijans. A few followers of Gandhi opposed visiting the houses of Harijans. But Gandhi strongly said, if I have a rebirth, I will be born as a Harijan in India. Still, many professional social workers and Gandhians are working for the development and empowerment of Harijan in India for better living with dignity and respect.

Mahatma Gandhi introduced eleven Gandhian tenets. Gandhi substituted chastity for Brahmacharya. Gandhi emphasises a certain principle coded in a particular colour more frequently on different occasions when that principle is present under a particular promise. Therefore, Gandhi's five core principles - Truth, Nonviolence, Swadeshi, the Abolition of untouchability, and equal Respect for all religions were those he emphasised the most in his vows, rules, pledges, etc. (Pinto, 1998, p. 67-69). This does not, however, negate the significance of other Gandhian ideals. These principles and tenets are important elements for social workers in their social work practice.

The Gandhian Constructive Programme was given in the study as a different concept for Indian Social Work Practises and Principles. It underlined the distinctiveness of this extensive effort. The concepts Gandhi highlighted the most were deconstructed through a review of the vows, pledges, and rules he introduced on numerous occasions. The same set of guiding principles serves as the framework for thinking about social work ideals in daily practises. If Gandhi is alive, he would have worked for AIDS Patients, Cancer Patients, COVID-19 Patients, Orphans, Dalits, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), Disadvantaged Women and other needy through his constructive programme.

Gandhiji established Ashram Institutions in many places over India to prepare the personnel for the developmental activities to be pursued in the constructive work programme. The people will be capacitated in the Ashram Institutions on the Gandhiji Philosophy and sent them to bring change in the Society. Gandhiji emphasized the spiritual nature of man as the basis of change and development. He used spiritualism as a technique as a change making process.

Gandhian Philosophy of Social Work

Gandhiji had his own vision of the new Society. He visualized that young men and women can fruitfully be employed for eliminating social evils. They should stand on high moral values to support each other. Tackling off the dowry menace, eliminating age-old caste taboos and other discriminatory practices, discouraging child marriages and ill-treatment of widows are some of the glaring examples to be tackled by youth for proper social development. Mahatma Gandhi suggested and practised twofold strategies to resolve community problems. The first component is nonviolence. It means non-appreciation and abhorrence of power of domination, control and forfeit. Nowadays many issues are associated with Violence. Crime, Juvenile Delinquency, Gender-based violence and Aged Abuse are more associated with violence. The social workers should propagate Gandhi's nonviolence model to promote peace among People and Communities. The second component is Satyagrah, which means the use of truth as a force setting examples through suffering for one's convictions. The concept of Satyagrah is closely associated with one of the social work methods i.e. social action. The social workers should apply the Satyagraha to solve the problems of people and bring changes in the policies. These qualities are necessary for social workers to be change makers.

Swadesi is also one of the important independent movements initiated by Gandhiji. The philosophy behind this programme is that every Indian should buy local products and increase the National income which leads to the Country's growth, income and development. There is a need in the present days to buy the country's products to make India a developed or self sustainable country. Another important principle of Gandhi is Sarvodaya. It means 'Development of All' and Universal Uplift. Gandhiji's concept of development is Sarvodaya through Antyodaya, implying the welfare of all through the weakest of the society (Prasad, 1951, p.19). Antyodaya means that the services and the benefits should reach the unreached both in quantity and quality. The social workers should follow the same and encourage the people for the development of our Nation.

Principles such as seeking truth through service to poor and needy, individual self-development and self-reliance, nonviolence social action and material simplicity are very related to the code of ethics of professional social workers (Sharma & Ormsby, 1982). Principles of Gandhi are also relevant to the code of ethics of National Professional Social Workers Association i.e. human rights and dignity, social justice, integrity and belongingness, sustainability, services and human

relations. Gandhi worked for promotion of human rights and social justice to the deprived classes' viz. scheduled castes, tribes and women. The Gandhian human relations dignity and integrity are also relevant to the social work profession (NAPSWI, 2015). People in the villages face many problems and far away to the development. The majority of people are deprived of their life and bound to live marginalized life. Villages are completely ignored in growing urbanization and industrialization and ignorance of the village will be a big mistake for the Indian perspective of development (Walz & Ritchie, 2000). Mahatma Gandhi suggested the concept Grama Swaraj for the development of villages. Now a few state governments like Andhra Pradesh recognised the concept and initiated the Grama Sachivalayam concept to promote the development among villagers. There are many professional social workers are working in Grama Sachivalayam for the welfare and development of poor and needy. This model should be replicated in all over India and the world. There is a need to develop the theory on relevance of Gandhi to social work profession by the professional associations of social workers.

Conclusion

The Social Work Profession was started by kind-hearted people by provided charity services to the poor and needy. Then the social workers started developing voluntary service organisations and provided welfare services, livelihoods and vocational training to the poor and needy as part of empowerment covering both social and economic domains later added environment as third domain as that it plays a key role in achieving sustainability. Then the social workers planned many interventions, services, and methods for the development and empowerment of the disadvantaged people in society. Mahatma Gandhi was a true social worker fighting against the evils of society. He always said, if you want to do social work, you start it yourself (Bharti, 1991, p.87). He was very worried about poverty, and untouchability in India. He started a constructive programme to serve and motivate the poor and other needy a solution for better living. His components i.e., Nonviolence, Satyagraha, Truth, and Swadeshi are more relevant components to present-day social workers. Gandhiji's ideology is also relevant to the social work profession today and tomorrow with values, principles, systems, and opportunities for empowering the poor and other marginalized groups for happy and healthy living with better sustainability which finally leads for improving their Quality of Life (QOL) in an Accessible, Inclusive and Healthy Environment / Community at all levels.

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