

The Most Barbaric Wars in Human History: The Political Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi

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The world over these are apocalyptic times. We are witnessing the financial and economic collapse of regions which historically owed the most to capitalist development and simultaneously the most barbaric wars in human history, to re-colonize and to destroy independent nation states in all continents, to seize every nation's budget and the entire economic space and markets of countries, directly targeting for elimination or mass displacement the civilian population considered rivals for the consumption and use of resources.

Despite several countries militarily invaded or occupied, including Palestine, the Congo, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Haiti, among others and despite Iran, Russia and China, either immediately threatened or targeted for future action ; there is today no serious attempt to promote a political understanding of Imperialism and fascism, extensions of capitalism, despite the overwhelming courage and success of resistance forces in on the ground combat and the political movements now gaining momentum .Consequently one country after another is destroyed by military onslaught or is succumbing to internal fascist takeover. This ideological failure to politically educate citizens, is fatal to long term political independence of citizens and societies and has seriously weakened the capacity of even those governments established after historic revolutions,to mount a determined national and international opposition to defeat the propaganda offensive accompanying military aggression, which is now global.

Along with other societies, India and its people are once again an economic and financial prize for global and Indian Multinational companies, even as three committees of the government of India report that more than one third of the people of India live in the poverty zone and workers constituting approximately 700 million of the unorganized working class sector, subsist on less than a dollar day and many on approximately twenty rupees, that is less than half a dollar .Compounding this situation, a fourth Committee on Agrarian Reforms and the Unfinished Task of Land Reforms' is critical of the recent land acquisition policies of the State to benefit foreign and Indian Multinational Corporations, holding that the cycle of growing lawlessness, poverty and violence is the natural outcome of the State's neo-liberal economic agenda and amendments altering legislation, which hitherto protected land lived in from time immemorial and cultivated by Indigenous tribal people and the peasantry from being arbitrarily seized. Speculative forward trading in commodities prohibited for decades after Indian Independence is now permitted by successive governments of ostensibly different political complexions, all committed to the ' Free Market', financialization and indiscriminate foreign investment, even as food prices have risen astronomically, with agribusiness companies poised to devour India, known for thousands of years as a region of traditional agricultural surplus and biodiversity . With this

backdrop, orchestrating of alleged 'Islamist Terror' along other governments to which it is closely allied, is alternative diversionary policy, with police officials and defense lawyers exposing fabricated terror plots victims of assassination, along with those falsely framed or set up .

As we search for strategies to these brutal onslaughts on humanity, which affect most societies, it is time to recall among other movements of relevance in the 20th Century, the political struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi, his determined opposition to the domination of Indian economic space by foreign companies, his concerns for the world evidenced by his opposition to the colonization of Palestine beginning with the Balfour Declaration of the British government in collaboration with European Zionism, his critique of the human ravages of colonialism and capitalism as economic systems and his political strategy of political education, mass struggles, civil disobedience and non-co-operation, to overturn unjust political systems, still of relevance for those searching for a just reconstruct of human society for the 21st Century ..

Following the defeat of the 'Great War of Indian Independence of 1857', with 10 million Indians slaughtered by the army of the East India Company, even as the anti-colonial movements were in disarray, Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the leader of the dominant stream of the Indian Freedom Movement, stressing that isolated acts of terrorism would not defeat British colonial rule; that consistent and continuous political education, with mass struggles and protests on vital issues and withdrawal of all co-operation in all sectors of the administration, to make unjust governance impossible, would be the strategy .This political program of sustained and steady action, along with the diverse tactics adopted by other streams of the anti-colonial struggle in India, to complement this movement, resulted in the collapse of the entire edifice of foreign political and economic control, culminating in the historic 'Quit India' movement .

A revolutionary is known by his outstanding disciples .In the United States of America, Reverend Martin Luther King emerged to follow Mahatma Gandhi, to lead one of the largest mass movements in American history to begin emancipation of the African American people, consistently opposing US militarism, which he held was a continuation and extension of the anti-human policies of economic exploitation and racism within the United States and against the interest of the working people of the United States . Whereas Mahatma Gandhi believed that in a country where millions were hungry, food was the 'divinity' required to be installed in every home and that religious philosophy in fact mandated respect for all of humanity, cutting across cultures; Martin Luther King stressed that : " Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with slums that damn them, the economic conditions which cripple them, is a spiritually moribund religion in need of new blood."

In view of his political apprenticeship in South Africa, Gandhi had chosen the political strategy of mass 'Civil Disobedience', 'Non-Co-operation' and 'Satyagraha', the struggle for truth. In India, inspired by this movement, progressively millions shed their political apathy and fatalism, daily discussed the political issues of the day and participated in mass struggles, as a consequence British Imperial rule became impossible. In recent years Bolivia witnessed its Indigenous citizens resorting to civil disobedience, blockading the seat of government, with successive governments having to resign until Evo Morales was elected. This was not a coloured revolution; the people of Bolivia changed their government through a mass movement for political and economic justice for the Indigenous people of Bolivia.

In India on the other hand, mainstream political parties did not oppose “Operation Green Hunt”, a large scale Para military operation recently launched against the Indigenous tribal and peasant populations of Central and Eastern India, even as the Supreme Court directed the winding up of the ‘Salwa Judum’, the privately armed militias financed by Indian and foreign Multinational corporate mining and other interests in Central and Eastern India, to clear thousands of acres of mineral rich land of the tribal people and peasantry, cultivated by them from time immemorial, in excess of all rational requirements for mining and industrialization, in a massive land seizure, destructive of the habitat of these regions, referred to by some as ‘internal colonization’ in a region of one of the lowest human development indexes in India. There is no doubt whose side Mahatma Gandhi would have chosen in this region, even while attempting to strike a just balance between agriculture and industrialization. Presently even Gandhians working among tribal people and peasantry have been targeted and imprisoned.

Mahatma Gandhi did not oppose industrialization and economic development as is sometimes wrongly projected. His view was that heavy industry should be regulated and under social control, with workers participation in management in all sectors, even as a massive effort should be launched for improved agricultural techniques and employment in cottage and small industry to abolish mass unemployment in rural and urban India, stressing the importance of rural infrastructure for clean water, sanitation, health, literacy, education and basic shelter, as immediate priorities. There are many similarities in the program of Mahatma Gandhi and of Mao Tse Tung for rural uplift as a prelude to the take off of economies, in countries of agrarian distress, historically ravaged by colonization, however their methods differed. Mao Tse Tung was a nationalist concerned primarily with the people of China; Mahatma Gandhi while understanding the specific conditions of Indian society, shared a concern for humanity as a whole. Yet Gandhi was a political realist, with an acute understanding of the political movements of the 20th Century. In 1945, in a revised edition of his 1941 ‘Reconstruction Programme’, (published in the Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol III,) at Para 13 of the programme titled ‘Economic Equality’, Mahatma Gandhi warned that :

“A non-violent system of government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring classesa violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the common good.”

Gandhi laid great stress on personal example by individuals and movements, transforming simple living into an elegant culture, emphasizing that excessive consumption was vulgar and indecent, always at the cost of societal resources and morally repugnant. This is in absolute contrast to the present day political classes in India and elsewhere, condoning corporate salaries and bail outs of banks in millions and trillions, far in excess of the requirement even of the needs of one lifetime of comfortable existence, only to serve obscene and indecent living standards, with millions consequently stacked away in paper securities or such other inanimate objects, producing nothing but frequent asset bubbles and speculation, even as many governments now confront inevitable sovereign debt default, with worldwide impact on all societies.

There was a moral angle to the political struggle of Mahatma Gandhi which was irresistible, making it difficult to defeat. Gandhi kept the attention focused on the injustices of society and the political system enslaving humanity, rather than on individuals, de-personalizing

issues and was a political people's 'General' par excellence, with strategic and intuitive political understanding, based on extensive experience of political advance and retreat. His movement overshadowed in sheer scale of support and diverse composition any other anti-colonial movement.

It is not widely known that Gandhi sympathized with the objectives of the first Socialist Revolution of 1917 which extended support to all National Liberation Movements, as Gandhi's paramount concern was not only freedom from colonial rule, for him that was only the first step in the objective to abolish hunger, unemployment and large scale penury and for overall welfare and social reform of Indian society decaying with feudalism, the caste system and religious taboos, with ritual overriding religious philosophies. Gandhi having been exposed in England to advanced capitalism was aware that this economic system itself was the cause of widespread unemployment and human degradation. Gandhi believed that it would be necessary to transcend capitalism and explore alternatives, if mankind was not to sink permanently into human degradation through exploitation, unemployment, indecent disparities, violence and war. While residing in a workers colony on a visit to London for political negotiations, Gandhi publicly stated that the workers in England would be the first to understand the movement for the boycott of British goods in India.

Dr M. S. Swaminathan, the agricultural scientist identified with India's green revolution (controversial in those circles supporting organic farming free from chemical fertilizers and pesticides which they believe have been off loaded on to farmers in large quantities increasing their debt and polluting land and water resources) in a television interview on Bloomberg UTV relayed on 20th January 2010, recalling the political priorities of Mahatma Gandhi, regretted that India had not fulfilled even half of the United Nations goal in respect of availability of food and nutrition in the past decade, whereas China and Vietnam had fulfilled their programme, warning that the spiraling of food prices and absence of food security would inevitably lead to mass unrest.

The Mahatma was targeted and assassinated by the fascist right wing, not any other leader of alternative political persuasion, at an advanced age, when most political personalities lose their relevance, as his continuing political programme and activity were perceived as the most serious threat to the divisive Imperial future agenda for the Indian Subcontinent, whatever explanation the assassins and their ideological kinsmen may now give, though Partition, which was the restructuring of the Indian subcontinent had already been imposed as the last Imperial act through political forces of both religious groups, financed and cultivated by the colonial ruler, trained for sectarian religious killings, on the pattern of what is now happening in the occupied countries or in those societies targeted for control.

On Gandhi's assassination, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who studied at Columbia University in the United States, at the height of the 'Great Depression', one of the foremost architects of the Constitution of India, representing in the Constituent Assembly with Gandhi's overwhelming political support, the most downtrodden of India's urban and rural working classes, now referred to as Dalits, with unsuppressed emotion said - "Mahatma Gandhi was the closest to us". This tribute sums up the life of India's gentle yet uncompromising revolutionary, who politically inspired the people of India and movements in many parts of the world along with other outstanding leaders of the 20th Century, to resist Imperialism and political systems structured to deny working people economic, social and political justice.

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