



Connecting India-Russia with the Great World Leaders: Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy

Miss. Rutuja Raut

Assistant Professor,

Centre for Central Eurasian Studies, University of Mumbai.

Visiting faculty,

Sonopant Dandekar College, Palghar.

rautrutuja4167@gamil.com

Abstract

India and Russia are the two global powers in today's context which play the crucial role on the global platform. Both the nations shared diverse relations with each other. One of the areas of mutual interest where both the nations are enhancing their relations is the connection of Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy. Mahatma Gandhi a renowned philosopher across the India had left his footprints on the millions of minds and hearts. His thoughts, beliefs and faiths and the tools of his philosophy had made him a true national hero. It was the influence of the Leo Tolstoy, a popular and Great Russian writer, novelist who inspired Gandhi for following the ideas related to non-violence in practical life. These two jewels have given the message of peaceful co-existence to the entire world with their remarkable literary contributions. The author has tried to reflect the connectivity with these two great souls for enhancing India Russia relations further.

Keywords: Inspiration, Philosophy, Non-Violence, Relations, Contribution

INTRODUCTION:

The two superpowers India and Russia shared a commonality of interests in multiple areas. Both republic of India and Russian federation are having a strong historical background with the accompanying mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. Both countries had withstood for each other during their difficult time and therefore their friendship is well known as a strategic and time tested partnership. India and Russia are significant countries on the global platforms which are reshaping the global activities. They are sharing mutual interests in diverse areas like strategic regions, science and technology, military and economic interest by signing various treaties and agreements with the socio-cultural exchanges through celebrating cultures and morals of each other. In this regard to touch the area of philosophy both India and Russia have contributed to the spiritual aspects also not only between them but also to the entire



world. Mahatma Gandhi the father of the Indian national freedom struggle and Leo Tolstoy one of the greatest authors of all time have connected India and Russia with their philosophical contribution and filled up one of the corner of India Russia philosophical and spiritual relations.

GANDHI AND TOLSTOY: TWO JEWELS

The great admirer of non-violence that India has ever produced (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)) and the famous novelist that the Russian Empire could ever produce (Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)) were born in different regions. In spite of belonging to different lands both Gandhi and Tolstoy interrelates in their thoughts, some ideas and values upon which they believed. Rather, it was Gandhi who was influenced and inspired by the thoughts of Leo Tolstoy.

Born on October 2, 1869 at Porbandar which is located in modern day Gujarat, he was a Lawyer, politician, activist, and writer. Since childhood only he was of opinion that love and truth are the supreme values of humanity. In South Africa he stood up against the racial discrimination against Indians and blacks. After giving his 21 years of life for fighting against the ill treatment and protect the civil rights of citizens his life was transformed and he returned to India in 1915. After coming to India he led various Satyagrahas like Champaran Satyagraha, Kheda Satyagraha, Khilafat Movement after world war I, Non-cooperation Movement, and Quit India Movement as a result of which India got independence on 15th August 1947. “Though he would be remembered forever for his great contribution to the Indian freedom movement, his greatest legacies are the tools of peace and non-violence that he preached and used in India's struggle for freedom against the British. He was for peace and non-violence all over the world, as he truly believed that only these virtues can save the mankind.” This even gets reflected through his literary work which includes the books, articles and letters. The best of it are ‘*Hind Swaraj*’ or *Indian Home Rule*, ‘*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*’, ‘*The Way to God*’, and ‘*Harijan*’. With such more compilation Gandhi has inspired millions of lives in the world.

Born in an aristocratic family on 9th September 1828 he raised his profile as a leading Russian writer, gaining the attention even of the current Tsar. Leo Tolstoy was not only the famous authors but also one of such a person who has changed the world. Gandhi has described Tolstoy as “the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced”. His two remarkable pieces of art are *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* put deep impacts in transformation of the society as they reflect the minute details. With the same ‘*The Kingdom of Heaven is within you*’ and ‘*Confessions*’ have made the incredible contribution to develop a deep interest in seeking a greater understanding and justification of life. “Influenced by Buddhism and Jesus Christ’s ‘Sermon on the Mount’ he developed a pacifist/anarchist philosophy; he became supportive of civil disobedience to improve the welfare of the oppressed.”

INFLUENCE OF TOLSTOY ON MAHATMA GANDHI

Mahatma Gandhi’s very first reference to Tolstoy came in London during the time of Gandhi's student age. It is the book of Tolstoy 'The kingdom of God is within you' (1893) and his essay on ‘Christianity



and Patriotism' left the footprints in the mind of Gandhi. As he was inspired by the teaching of Tolstoy, he translated short stories like 'God sees the truth, but waits', "LETTER TO A HINDOO" into Gujarati language. He agreed that it was Tolstoy who had strengthened his love and passion for non-violence. "In 1910, Gandhi established another cooperative colony near Johannesburg, called Tolstoy Farm, having been inspired by Tolstoy's ideas. Tolstoy Farm became Gandhi's cradle of the Satyagraha activities." Here the disciples were trained for peacefully violating the specific laws and for occasional strike offs. Gandhi had reiterated about Tolstoy that he was a great warrior and served the army but eventually become a priest of non-violence in an entire Europe and gave up his life for putting an end to war. This had a deep impact on the mind of Gandhi. In addition to this during some circumstances and for some specific subjects Gandhi continued to refer to teachings of Tolstoy by referring his some books, letters and essays. Even in Indian freedom struggle Gandhi admired the thoughts of Tolstoy. "During the Non-cooperation movement, Gandhi repeated Tolstoy's assertion in his 'Letter to a Hindoo' that to get swaraj Indians must get rid of their helplessness, hypnotism and inertia under which they laboured." "The correspondence of letters between the two great souls, Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy displays the golden chain of admiration and respect for each other's principles and philosophies. In addition to the foregoing comments covered under specific subjects, Gandhi continued to refer to Tolstoy's life and teachings till the end. The peaceful means of agitations, non-violence and humanity propagated by Tolstoy influenced so deeply to Gandhi, that rest became the history." While writing letters to Tolstoy, Gandhi had always mentioned his obedience towards Tolstoy as being his 'faithful and humble servant' and while answering the letters of Gandhi Tolstoy had mentioned 'your friend and brother' to Gandhi which shows a very healthy relationship built by both towards each other.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TWO SOULS

There is a similarity between the teachings and morals that they shared. Both had given the 'law of love' and method of 'non-violence' as a very heart of their philosophy. They are of opinion that by adopting the instrument of civil disobedience on the wider scale people can achieve their rights in right way. With the same they were against the modern civilization and favored the traditional system. Both these leaders stood up for the downtrodden masses, the weaker strata of society, and have always tried to simplify their own life by helping such people out of their ways. The Russian writer and Indian social reformer highly respected the contribution of peasants as a benefaction for nation. Their teaching had such a deep impacts on society that led to the transition of not only their respective nations but also of the sections of people across the world. Both these popularly world famed leaders were considered as voice of conscience of their respective nations and of humanity in general.

Though Gandhi was inspired by the philosophy of Tolstoy it was a mutual relationship. Even Leo Tolstoy too had appreciated Gandhi for his unique efforts in non-violent resistance.

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY: A WAY TOWARDS WORLD PEACE

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas and thoughts do not merely shares philosophical contribution but it shares the morals of life. Gandhi is universally known as a great theorist, philosopher, and the practitioner of his



principles upon which his philosophy is based. The core principles of Gandhi are truth and non-violence, Satyagraha, thoughts on economy and education system and so and so forth. As the philosophical work put forward by Gandhi is very deep and broad. Below some of the glimpses of his philosophy are mentioned in brief.

Truth and Non-Violence – The Indian culture had reflected the ideals of non-violence through its multiple religions historically. Truth and non-violence are interrelated to each other. In general terms the non-violence means Ahimsa which ends up in loving all living creatures. Not only is this but a person supposed to be a completely non violent means even if someone has injured him, he is expected to be not angry, not using cursing or abusive words, or not even cause him any physical hurt. “Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Therefore, it embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beats. Non- Violence is, therefore, in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love.” Satyagraha – It is a way to attain the highest level of truth. According to Gandhi if all efforts of dealing with any issue in a peaceful manner have proven ineffective then one can go for the Satyagraha. Strike, Fasting, Non- cooperation are the some methods to stand for fighting against injustice and tyranny.

Thoughts on Economy – Gandhi have his own version of highlighting the economic model of India. According to Gandhi India is a country of villages. To self sufficiency of villages are important for which he promotes the production of Khadi. Rather than focusing on large scale industrialization, he vision to help the small scale industries so employment can be provided easily and the social evils like poverty and discrimination can be eradicated. “He was not against machinery as such. He was afraid that use of machinery on large scale would result in technological unemployment. He extends Ruskin’s concepts of the equality of wages to all kinds of labor and equal distribution.” According to Gandhi the hands that work are more holy than the lips which pray for others shows the significance of work.

Other Remarkable Contributions – His ideas for proposing the fulfillment of basic education will lead India as a self sufficient country. This education must be skill oriented. Proposing the education in mother tongue will be beneficial to child to grasp it in better way and became an independent. Education must aim to bring all round development of a human being from humanitarian perspective. For the smooth functioning of governance he visualized decentralization of powers towards the smaller unit. One of the thought that Gandhi has mentioned is the concept of ‘Sarvodaya’ means the welfare of all. It related to the idea of trusteeship. Besides this it was the efforts of Gandhi only who challenged the social downgraded image of women living in pre independence era and encourages them to participate in the national freedom struggle. “The role of educated women to impairment Gandhian programmers is unique. They become immates in the ashrams and promoted simmering, Khadi and other items of constructive programmers.” Not only is this but religion also one of the areas where Gandhi has put forward his thoughts. According to him all religions have equal status and teachings though there are different paths to achieve the same goal by religion.



THE RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY OF GANDHI

The philosophy of Gandhi does not limit itself in theorization only. Rather it was used and properly channelized across the world. As far as its applicability is concerned non violent methods were adopted in South Africa even after the apartheid. “The gandhian technique of mobilizing people had been successfully employed by the oppressed societies in several parts of the world and he has influenced great leaders – Martin Luther King in USA, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in South Africa, Dalai Lama and his Tibetan followers, Aung Saan Suu Kyi in Myanmar.” Not only in the outside world but Gandhi was such a unique leader who also stood up for the social reforms. He tried to restrict the oppression of lower castes and the communal violence. It was under the leadership of Gandhi only mass participation of people belonging to different strata of society could assimilate in the national freedom struggle and importantly the participation of women were larger. Though, Gandhian philosophy became very famous, with changing time and circumstances in present situation it is reducing its relevance. In the view of Gandhi ‘An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind’, so the oppressed should not apply the same measures to the oppressor. However there are chances that it may not happen everywhere. There have been various misconceptions about the philosophy of Gandhi. “Thus, the failure of Gandhism is not a failure of ahimsa, but a failure of Satyagraha. The modern world is so complex that the truth about it cannot be perceived by common sense or by mystical insight, important as these things are.” Also it is more of idealized society and even the governance system for which he visions for. So some principles contrast within themselves and does not suit to the contemporary society finally leads to the critical part.

ENHANCING INDO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS FURTHER....

The influence of Tolstoy on Gandhi and the exchange of communication between two does not limit between themselves. It does flourish the cultural and spiritual ties between the two nations. Besides other areas of relations even the cultural and philosophical angle provides a different outlook towards their growth of the general relationship. “To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Gandhi’s birth, Indian students and expats gathered together with Russian scholars, politicians and ministers in Tolstoy’s Yasnaya Polyana estate and in the State Duma to mark the relationship of two men equally revered in and representative of their respective countries.” With the same the famous books written by both the great personalities named ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ and ‘Hind Swaraj’ were exchanged during the exhibition conducted in Russia recently. Also there were discussions on the teachings, thoughts and ideas of these two popular leaders for growing more academic contributions.

For celebrating 150th Anniversary of Gandhi various dignitaries, officials and authorities from India and Russia highlighted the common theme of love and non-violence and its role in governance. Various other programs were also arranged on this occasion to relive Gandhi and Tolstoy. It was Gandhi and ahead his family who set the strong foundation for Soviet-Russian relations with India before India gets independence. Today’s explored relations in diverse areas are the result of this powerful foundation only. Due to this beginning by Gandhi and Tolstoy, India and Russia are still continuing to work together in extraordinary ways and in future also they will definitely continue to work together by protecting their strategic interests in creation of the multi-polar world.



REFERENCES:

1. Aga, A. (2011). Timeless Inspirator - Reliving Gandhi. (R. Mashelkar, Ed.) *The Continuing Relevance of Gandhi* , p. 67.
2. Anand, Y. P. (2010). *The Relationship between Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi - A Historical Review*. Retrieved from https://www.asthabharati.org/Dia_Oct%20010/y.p.htm
3. Asopa, S. (2019). Importance of Ghandhian Philosophy. *International Journal of Political Science* , 5 (3).
4. Boulding, E. K. (n.d.). Why did Gandhi Fail? (G. Ramachandran, & T. K. Mahadevan, Eds.) *Gandhi - His Relevance for our Times* , p. 146.
5. *Cultural India*. (n.d.). Retrieved 02 16, 2020, from Mahatma Gandhi: <https://www.culturalindia.net/indian-history/modern-history/mahatma-gandhi.html>
6. Gund, N. (2018). Enduring Legacy of Leo Tolstoy in Mahatma Gandhi's Life and Philosophy. 41.
7. *Impact of Leo Tolstoy on Mahatma Gandhi*. (n.d.). Retrieved 02 18, 2020, from <https://www.gktoday.in/gk/impact-of-leo-tolstoy-on-mahatma-gandhi>
8. Mukherjee, S., & Ramaswani, S. (1994). *Facts of Mahatma Gandhi Economic and Social Principles*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications.
9. Perera, L. (n.d.). *Tolstoy and Gandhi: From Non-Violence to Climate Change*. Retrieved from <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/04/tolstoy-gandhi-non-violence-climate-change-a67602>
10. Pettinger, T. (n.d.). *Biography of Leo Tolstoy*. Retrieved 02 18, 2020, from <https://www.biographyonline.net/writers/leo-tolstoy.html>
11. Ramchiary, A. (2013). Gandhian Concept of Truth and Non-Violence. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* , 18 (4), 68.