

Interpreting Gandhi

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Nothing has inspired me more than the principle of integrity of thought, word and action that epitomized Gandhiji. Out of the vast amount of literature devoted to the life and work of someone who endeared himself to the masses and intelligentsia alike and commanded respect and reverence even from the most formidable of his adversaries, nothing has stuck with me than this principle which I believe was responsible for the huge sensation that Gandhi became during the most defining period in India's history.

I ardently believe this principle holds the key to the ever elusive search for peace and harmonious living with the self and others that is becoming increasingly hard to achieve owing to the dichotomy that we have created and the pretentious life that we live. It is even more relevant in the context of schooling as imbibing such principles (I am not sure if these things can ever be "taught") through inspiring models of behaviour can help impressionable minds to model their own conduct – a great lesson in character building; unfortunately the most neglected part of education today.

I find various versions of the life of the man popularly known as the “Mahatma” as seen through the eyes of people alien to this land, quite refreshing. Though there have been all sorts of attempts at glorifying, deifying, ridiculing, demystifying the phenomenon that Gandhi was, any sincere effort at understanding the man known for his simple living and high thinking will benefit anyone who would like to decode his “success mantra” to apply to everyday mundane and common occurrences and circumstances in order to lead a stress-free, purposeful, productive, and contented life.

Let us for a minute step back and examine what characterizes our lives today irrespective of who we are, what we do, and where we live. Don't we encounter conflicts within and without? Don't we feel overpowered by negativity all around us? The incessant battle to balance work and life, mounting pressure to conform and the equally strong pull to realize personal aspirations inevitably takes a toll on our health – physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual. So what can we do to make our predicament more bearable if not make it disappear all together? Integrate thought, word, and action? Can it be as simple as that? Easier said than done!!! But let us earnestly ask ourselves if it is really that difficult. For teaching practitioners like me who deal with young people, the thought gives a ray of hope. In our daily interactions, we come across children especially in their late teens who are conditioned to think and act in a certain way due to many factors like parenting, peer pressure, the social and cultural milieu due to which they have lost their individuality. They are a confused and unhappy lot! They have no clarity about who they really are, what they actually want,



and the means to figure out all this. If they are told early on to be truthful to themselves, stand up for what they think is right, and channelize their creative energies towards achieving their goals, then we will not have frustrated, unhappy, disgruntled students, who in their misery, make everyone around them miserable.

We all fret and fume about unjust systems, inhuman practices, sheer indifference, apathy and nonchalance that we observe in the society we live in. But have we ever paused in our frantic and mad rush that gets us nowhere to think why we are the way we are – miserable, dissatisfied, frustrated in our elusive search for happiness? The answer is as simple as it is profound. Dichotomy in what we think, say and do is responsible for our inability to walk our talk. Why do we go about wearing a façade and pretending to be what we are not? If one has belief in oneself, conviction in one's beliefs, determination to lead a life of purpose and follow one's destiny to the very end without any compromise, then the individual is close to what Gandhi practiced throughout his life.

The much touted life skills programme that schools are

integrating with the curriculum could be used to drive home this point by taking up a critical study and analysis of Gandhiji's principles and approach towards every challenge that came his way – both on the personal front as well as his public life. What will emerge from this exercise is an understanding of how an integrated approach to everything, from sublime to the commonplace is vital for efficiency, productivity, and ultimately to reach one's goal.

So everything boils down to this – integrity of thought, word, and action. If one wants to pay tribute to this iconic symbol of peace and non-violence, do away with the ritualistic ceremonies devoid of any real meaning and instead internalize those precepts and tenets that made him a beacon of light and a leader in the true sense of the word. Let us in our own little ways emulate those qualities to lead a life of virtue and righteousness and consequently make the world a better place to live in.

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