

All Rise - How Gandhi's thinking can help us in the 21st Century

What is a Challenge Paper?

The concept behind a challenge is to call things into question. It is to criticise all pre-summptions, preconceptions and prejudices whether they have arisen from entrenched positions or from just lazy thinking. It is also to reflect on this criticism, to apply holistic and long term thinking to issues that are often dismissed with quick linear approaches that do not explore the consequences and knock on effects.

This questioning is what our Challenge Papers aim to achieve. They express ideas and opinions from the results of our research formulated as challenges to us all or to specific institutions or movements. They represent the ideas of the individuals who write them but are supported fully by the Schumacher Institute that holds open the opportunity for all to express themselves freely.

They will vary in style, length and focus but the intention is to write as simply and concisely as possible. We invite contributors to submit any work for consideration as a Schumacher Challenge Paper if it is within this spirit of perpetual inquiry.

Introduction

This challenge paper explores the teaching of Gandhi and offers them as a programme for us to follow. As you read you will find yourself thinking how much these teaching accord with the work and philosophy of E.F. Schumacher. They are also undoubtedly systems thinking in practice, what we like to call Living Systems Thinking. We all do it but some people have an immense ability for natural systems thinking, Gandhi and Schumacher are masters, the rest of us have to work hard at it.

The challenge in this paper is to understand Gandhi's systemic thinking and to then go and use it in our own work.

All Rise - How Gandhi's thinking can help us in the 21st Century

By Bruce Nixon

Gandhi's thinking could not be more relevant at a time when the Doomsday Clock edges forward and we fear we are moving closer than ever towards nuclear Armageddon and irreversible global warming.

People face the potentially devastating effects of climate change; increasing competition for scarce resources such as fossil fuels; economic and social injustice; fear and insecurity generated by out of control violence in many places; nuclear proliferation and the threat of international terrorism using dirty bombs. State violence and bullying are not the answers to these problems.

Much of this has been brought about by an unsustainable economic system, driven by the corporate world - imperialism in a new form supported by foreign policies to which there is growing opposition everywhere. It is based on consumerism, militarism and a military economy. Abuse of corporate power includes domination of global institutions and interference with democratic processes and the media.

Global sourcing for lowest cost, is destroying livelihoods, increasing poverty and exporting unfair working conditions. Commercialised Western culture is bringing life style problems through over-use of technology. Treating nature as a resource to be plundered, food as a commodity and agriculture as an industry is degrading the earth, causing water shortage and desertification, polluting water and the air we breathe and corrupting the food we eat. As companies externalise the problems and costs they create, public services are unable to cope and the burden of public expenditure and taxation increases.

Vandana Shiva says: "...the social, ecological and cultural impacts of corporate globalisation are exposing the limits of an economic and political model based on greed, inequality and non-sustainability. Farmers are committing suicide, climate chaos is growing, violence is increasing and inequalities are threatening the very fabric of society."

Gandhi was a whole system, living systems thinker. His systemic analysis of the world's problems is as relevant today as when he lived. He offers a systems approach to tackling these problems rather than "fixes" that don't work. Gandhi is a guide to those who wish to work to change things for the better.

Gandhian thinking is essentially about a sustainable way of life, an economic system based on trusteeship or servant leadership for universal welfare and a society in which everyone gains rather than the few become rich at the expense of the many. It is a complex, inter-related system of thought.

Gandhi has much to teach us. His ideas were a response to his time and need adapting for our time. They continue to inspire. He influenced Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Aung San Suu Kyi and others who inspire us today. Many of his ideas have already born fruit. He had little chance to implement his ideas in India because he was assassinated soon after independence was achieved. He feared that India might rid itself of the British only to perpetuate a "brown" form of exploitation still based on British and European values. The majority of his successors, including Nehru, who supported Gandhi in the political struggle, did not share his economic views and believed the future of India lay in industrialising like the West. Nehru ruled India for 17 years and laid the foundations of the Westernisation, which predominates today. Visiting London in 1935, when asked what he thought of Western Civilisation, Gandhi said, "It would be a good idea."

Gandhi illuminates the situation we are in today and how we can respond to the environmental crisis, poverty, violence and international conflict.

Gandhi's movement was called Sarvodaya or "All rise." It means remaining firm on the Truth and resisting the Untruth actively but using only Non-violent means. Sarvodaya is Sanskrit for 'the welfare of all.'

Gandhi's Eleven Principles are the core of his thinking and provide the basis for what today we would call a sustainable society and way of life. If all leaders received a Gandhian education, what a difference it would make to the world!

They are:

1. Non-violence or love - Ahimsa
 2. Truth - Satyagraha
 3. Fearlessness - Saravatra Bhaya Varjana
 4. Self-organisation or self rule - Swaraj Self regulation means self-knowledge and taking responsibility.
 5. Non-stealing - Asteya. Part of this is Non-consumerism - Asangraha. This requires ecological humility; realising that waste is a sin against nature and that nature's cycle should be followed. It is about having enough.
 6. Sacred Sex - Brahmacharya
 7. Physical work - Sharirashram
 8. Avoidance of bad taste - Aswada.
- Sattva - simplicity
Rajas - glamorous

Tamas - depressing

9. Respect for all religions - Sarava Dharma Samanatva
10. Self economy or Local economy - Swadeshi decentralisation.
11. Respect for all beings - Sparsha

Here is an expansion of the principles:

Non-violence or love - Ahisma

To deal with abuse of power, you confront love of power with the power of love
Satish Kumar

Simply, it means resisting oppression non-violently through love - non-violence in thoughts, words and deeds. Gandhi got a response from the British, rather than a reaction because of non-violence and the power of large numbers of people. Liberation does not mean killing people. Problems cannot be solved with the same mindset that created them. We can see this clearly in Iraq and Afghanistan. Privileged people with huge salaries are as much victims of the system as perpetrators, eg Bill Gates. Change of heart changes the system - eg, Apartheid in South Africa.

At a conference in Delhi, held to mark the centenary of the start of Gandhi's non-violent movement, in a video message, Nelson Mandela said in a world full of violence and strife, Mahatma Gandhi's message of peace and non-violence holds the key to human survival in the 21st Century. Damian Gramatticas 29-1-07, BBC News, Delhi

We need non-violence as a worldview - non-violence towards nature, women, the imposition of factory agriculture and inhuman conditions in factories. Gandhi admitted we will never reach Utopia - humans are aggressive as well as compassionate. We need to develop non-violent ways of dealing with violence and soldiers of peace to deal with conflicts.

Hitler was a product of our military education and an unjust settlement after WW1. The roots of the Middle East conflicts lie in the history the Crusades, Western foreign policy, injustice and exploitation and the greed of the ruling classes of oil rich Arabian states. Saddam Hussein was built up and supported by the West. We need to look at the system that creates violence and produced Hitler and Saddam. There is no essential difference between Bush and Saddam. We are running a war economy. Violence is not working in Iraq and Afghanistan. Violence only creates more violence. Today we have the power to destroy ourselves completely and this is a growing risk. If ever there was a time to have the courage to try non-violence it is now. It may be difficult but it is not impossible.

Satish Kumar argues for a, global, Peace Council, rather than a Security Council, to which recognised spiritual leaders are appointed, "Wise Elders" who have the interests of the world, rather than corporate or national interests, at heart.

We may doubt Gandhi's method but it worked - he got rid of the British. Today's

campaigns against nuclear power, nuclear weapons, militarism and war are Gandhian (CND, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Peace Pledge Union).

Truth - Satyagraha Lack of truth is a daily issue. Political and corporate leaders mislead the public to achieve their will and are in denial when it goes wrong. Untruth leads to disaster. Truth and integrity are vital for bringing about change non-violently. Pursuit of truth is an open-ended journey requiring respect for all points of view, however hard to articulate. It requires exceptional courage, especially in politics and business organisations. Gandhi subtitled his autobiography "My experiments with truth".

Linked to truth is respect for all religious traditions - Sarava Dharma Samanatva - and tolerance for beliefs with which we may disagree. We need to see that beliefs representing different cultures and traditions have a common essence.

Gandhi believed in bringing about fundamental change through:

1. constructive programmes
2. resistance - non-violent

You lose integrity if you just protest. Your life needs to demonstrate integrity and reflect your mission The basic principles of transformation are: create readiness; readiness grows out of your lifestyle and popular need; spot the occasions when there is sufficient groundswell ready to take action; without readiness, you wait and prepare the ground. When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, he travelled for six months by train visiting, learning from the poorest people in the villages. Here, indeed, is a model for today's leaders!

Satyagraha is a way of life: "Life is a continuous conversation with the universe" - dialogue not monologue, then change will occur. The lessons for change agents are:

1. Patience
2. Learn to spot the opportunity
3. Learn to endeavour, endure, face difficulties
4. Be fearless.

Fearlessness - Saravatra Bhaya Varjana. Non-violence requires us to speak our truth and that requires courage; fear causes violence. It stops people from acting powerfully, speaking out and being true to themselves. Gandhi was not afraid of death. We can become fearless by seeing each situation as an opportunity for learning; and developing confidence that we will overcome difficulties.

Self-organisation or self rule - Swaraj. We can learn from nature, which is a self-organising, self-correcting, self-healing and self-managing system. It requires mutuality and reciprocity. The village is the first form of government. We need not "trickle down" but "trickle up". We need to start on a small scale, applying self-organising first to our selves; then in our families; our village or community. This maximises the potential for creativity, innovation and diversity. From there, to smallish provinces, national governments, arrangements like the EU and finally world government. The roots need to be intimate, giving maximum power at the bottom,

co-ordinated at the top. Needs should be met wherever possible locally.

Since WW2 government has drawn more power to itself. It is recognised that this is not working. There are growing calls for decentralisation and devolving power. Central control impedes successful change; takes away responsibility and initiative from people who best understand their communities' needs and how to meet them. Hence the importance of the bottom up campaigns - Pressure Works, Charter 88 and New Politics Network's "Power to the People" proposals, headed by Baroness Helena Kennedy, and the Local Works campaign for a Sustainable Communities Bill. Gandhi proposed that tax should be collected locally, most of it retained locally, only sending smaller amounts to the next level - as in Puerto Alegre. It would be better to have Social Forums in every part of the world, where local problems are better understood.

Non-stealing - Asteya.

It is impossible to conceive of a world at peace when the poorest 60% of humans live on just 6% of the world's income. Winner of Last year's Nobel Peace Prize, Bangladeshi banker, Mohammed Yunus.

This goes far beyond not taking what does not belong to you. The Earth and natural things are sacred. Earth, fire, air and water are sacred elements. It is theft when family farms are destroyed by agribusiness, livelihoods are destroyed by globalisation, crafts are destroyed by industrialisation and big trawlers over-fish. It is a form of theft when food, seeds, trees and plants are patented. Vandana Shiva calls it biopiracy. It is theft when commons like water are privatised, rivers diverted, salinisation is caused by excessive irrigation or large amounts of water is taken by drinks companies like Pepsi and Coca Cola.

Greed by a few individuals, excessive remuneration, abuse of corporate power are theft. Global sourcing that involves exploitation of poor workers and displacement of local workers in order to cut costs is theft. Gandhi says accumulation and over-consumption are stealing from God. Asteya is a way of consuming only what nature can replenish, having enough, consuming only to meet our vital needs, knowing that other peoples and creatures need to have their share, so I only take my share. "Living simply, so that others may live, a way of generosity" (Kumar, S, 2000).

Non-consumerism - Asanraha Part of this is ecological humility and realising that waste is a sin against nature and that nature's cycle should be followed. Satish Kumar says: "Greed has become a creed, a new religion!" Consumerism is theft and causes crime.

Sacred Sex - Brahmacharya means loving sexuality within a healthy human relationship. Sexuality is a source of energy and creativity which may explain why tyrannies of mind, for instance many religions, have most often suppressed it throughout history. Sexuality appropriately practised is part of love of God. Trivialisation and commercialisation of sex, pornography and sexual exploitation stem from disrespect for the sanctity of sex. Sacred sex is based on commitment, responsibility, celebration and joy (Kumar, S, 2000).

Physical work - Sharirashram.

"Sharirashram means the practice of daily labour. Physical work is a form of worship, a spiritual practice. It is a healing process and an antidote to alienation and exclusion..... Our hands have a tremendously transformative power.... A deskilled society is a degraded society." (Kumar, S, 2000).

Making things by hand, creating, doing ordinary things like cleaning, working with the soil and growing things is embedded in the human psyche. When affluence, industrialisation and technology take us away from using our hands, this separates intellectual from manual workers and does us physical and spiritual harm. Separating mind and body, denies us our identity as human beings.

Avoidance of bad taste - Aswada. Three Qualities of Life are:

Sattva - simple

Rajas - glamorous

Tamas - depressing

There is much here for leaders, so easily corrupted by power, celebrity, wealth and honours.

Truthful means simple, how life is. Rajas is glamour and ceremony. Tamas is dark, depressing. In everything we can see the three qualities. Living in the here and now, having a conversation with nature is Sattvic. Sattvic food is healthy, simple, fresh and local, easy to digest and nutritious. Organic can be Sattvic - not cruel factory farming with large, distant abattoirs and unhappy animals. Meat, produced with cruelty, is Rajasic. Meat is sustainable when consumed in moderation, to supplement our diet or when there is no alternative, provided killing is done with respect and humility. Rajasic is the banquet or when food becomes more important than the people who cook it, a display, a statement, showing off. The same applies to clothes, cars and houses. A temple or church can be Sattvic or Rajasic. Prisons, the Home Office building, a nuclear bunker, nuclear weapons are Tamasic. All three qualities are present in everything and you can appear one way but in your heart be something else.

Power can be Sattvic when it comes from spirit inside; Rajasic when from status or position; Tamasic when power and beliefs are imposed.

Self economy or Local economy - Swadeshi. Gandhi saw that industrialisation was sweeping the world. He predicted that it would destroy creativity, diversity, culture, agriculture and replace it with industrial farming.

Swadeshi provides an answer to the destructive effects of globalisation that contribute to poverty and debt in countries like India and starvation in Africa. There are similar effects on food, farming, communities, diversity and livelihood in UK and continental Europe.

The campaigns of the New Economics Foundation, Local Works, the Soil Association,

Garden Organic, Slow City, Slow Food and LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems) and Transition Towns are Swadeshi.

Under this principle, whatever is made or produced locally is produced first and foremost for people of that locality. The primary motivation of business and entrepreneurs must be not to damage society or the environment but to serve the community by meeting needs, rather than creating wants.

The local community should be a microcosm of the macro world (with its own craftspeople, technicians, clothing-makers, farmers, food producers, musicians, artists etc). The local community or nation should have power to decide what is imported into or out from it, not some distant authority like the WTO.

The principle is not against cities, but against sprawling suburbs and megalopolises. Cities of one to two million would be flanked by greenbelts and sufficient amounts of farmland to provide food. Gandhi wanted a system for a post- industrial society which provided a balance between city and rural - 20% of people living in cities and the rest in villages. He wanted to educate planners and architects to create cities that provided their own food within 30 to 40 miles' radius like Havana today. Herbert Girardet's CitiesPeoplePlanet - Liveable Cities for a Sustainable World and Transition Towns are 21st Century expressions of these principles.

Gandhi was not against trade but he believed trade with distant countries should be the icing on the cake and basic food and clothing should be produced locally.

Respect for all beings - Sparsha

Belief in scientific solutions like nuclear power represents an arrogant and blinkered view of the natural world of which we are part. Genetic engineering, terminator seed technology and patenting of life forms shows a desire to dominate natural processes.

Satish Kumar says:

Sarvodaya requires us to put nature at the centre. We are part of nature and there is no separation. No one is above or below. Worms are as important as trees. Everything plays its part. The mango tree teaches us about unconditional love as it feeds animals, wasps, birds, humans and worms. Nature is not there to serve our needs. We do not have dominion over nature or the earth. The ecological crisis stems from the view that we do. We do not even have power over our own bodies or when they will die. We can receive the gifts of nature but not exploit nature. We need to liberate our minds from:

Nationalism

Racism

Colour

Sexism

Species-ism.

Gandhi held the view that we all rise together and we are completely interdependent.

Over 20 billion years we are all made of each other, all the food we have eaten, the air we breathe, our parents, ancestors and all our teachers. The wellbeing of one is dependent on the wellbeing of all. Diversity and unity are integral to unity and two sides of the same coin. The Advaita tradition argues everything is divine and there is no two-ness - we are all one. We cannot live happily whilst violence and injustices are going on. Every human being is a microcosm of the universe - there is no separate self.

Most movements for preserving nature spring from a utilitarian viewpoint and are inspired by fear rather than love. We have to make peace with nature and give up all cruelty towards animals, poisoning of the earth with chemicals and make peace with the earth.

Other Gandhian Ideas

Appropriate technology Gandhi was not against technology. Appropriate technology is an important concept - technology that serves rather than harms human beings. We need to ask, Technology for what? and choose whatever best meets need and purpose. So, mechanical things such as cars cannot be made locally. Technology should aid, not replace human hands. This means technology for service, not greed, with gratitude and humility towards nature. The aim of new technology should not be increased power, ego gratification, excessive profit and consumption. Change should not be for change's sake or to create obsolescence. More and faster and faster change may mean more rapid destruction of the planet.

Appropriate scale and markets. It makes sense to have a global market for some things but for others, a regional, national or local market may work best. It means neither small nor large scale but appropriate scale and choosing whatever scale is best for different purposes. Wherever possible, food should be produced organically and grown locally. Food, the source of life, health and spiritual wellbeing is not a commodity and generally should not be industrialised. We should not be separated from the process of growing and cooking food as we have become.

Appropriate scale also applies to organisation structures, which need to be as small as possible for the purpose to make them democratic and inclusive.

Money Gandhi believed currencies should be created, not by banks, but by communities and government:

Local
National
International

Money is a means of exchange and should be subservient. Instead, it dominates and people are enslaved by debt. Speculation in money markets and the stock exchanges causes damaging instability for enterprises, their stakeholders, savings and retirement pensions. Free market capitalism obstructs long-term stewardship, which is seen as a constraint on the fullest short-term exploitation of people and capital for share

growth, profit and dividends. Making a few people super rich without creating real wealth damages the rest of humanity. The harm cannot be undone by setting up charitable foundations. James Robertson's radical ideas on monetary reform, debt and taxation, the Christian Council for Monetary Justice and LETS are in a similar tradition.

Our political system. Gandhi advocated participative not representative democracy. Instead of a system in which parties fight elections, he favoured voting for people who contribute well and are highly thought of, have the required skills. A system like this would prevent the huge cost of election campaigns that corrupt democracy.

Hence the importance of the UK Power to the People campaign and Helena Kennedy's Unlock Democracy report, a combined effort by Charter 88 and the New Politics Network.

Cohesion. His philosophy is about synthesis and integration. The Indian idea is to bring together after analysis, the outer and inner together - matter and spirit - leading to cohesion. Western tradition analyses and separates. This is illustrated by the contemporary lack of joined up thinking, which constantly gets in the way of efforts to tackle climate change and the successful implementation of sustainable strategies. Another example is not recognising the importance of feeling at work. When feeling, intuition, joy and spirit are brought into work, everything fits together. Gandhi stood for integration and cohesion

1. Yagna - meaning soil or the replenishment of nature.
2. Tapas - replenishment of soul.
3. Dana - replenishment of society.

Western society is based on exploitation and indebtedness to nature. Replenishment means, we take wood; we replace it with a tree. We use soil; we replenish it. Industrial society does not believe in replenishment and waste is dumped. In Gandhian language, this is a sin against nature. Humans need to be part of nature's system. Yagna is the responsibility of every living being. Tapas means silence, rest, meditation, walking, putting our feet in water, sitting in the forest and accepting yourself for who we are, being ourselves. In silence we use our whole self - not just our voice and brain. Every morning and evening Gandhi would go into prayer. He gave himself one day a week for replenishment, to retreat, reflect, introspect and listen to his inner voice. Dana means giving back to society, taking care of society and its replenishment.

Conclusions and Implications

The biggest threats we face are violence and destruction of planet earth on which life depends. Gandhi provides insights and guiding principles to help us avoid these disasters and create a sustainable, fairer, less violent world and a new world order fit for our time.

For those of us who believe Gandhi's thinking can help avert disaster in the 21st Century, these are amongst the key campaigns:

1. Abandoning violence Resolving conflict non-violently - personal, national and international. Strengthening nuclear non- proliferation, ending nuclear armament, abandoning nuclear power generation and replacing the Security Council with a Peace Council (CND, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Oxford Research Group, Peace Pledge Union; RoadPeace)
2. Agriculture instead of agribusiness; ending the degradation of Planet Earth; (Soil Association, Vandana Shiva and Garden Organic)
3. A radically new framework for global trade; reforming unrepresentative global institutions and an unfair and unsustainable trading system. (WDM, Christian Aid)
4. Better measures of progress and human wellbeing than GDP and continuing, unsustainable economic growth. (New Economics Foundation and others).
5. Creating sustainable buildings, cities, communities and transportation. (Herbert Girardet's CitiesPeoplePlanet - Liveable Cities for a Sustainable World, Transition Towns and Transport 2000).
6. Localisation, particularly of healthy food production and distribution; restoring high streets and village communities. (New Economics Foundation, Local Works, the Soil Association, Garden Organic, Slow City, Slow Food and LETS (Local Exchange Trading Systems) and Transition Towns)
7. Reforming company law; enabling alternative forms of company ownership; and widening the duties of directors to embrace the interests of all stakeholders such as the environment and society as a whole (Centre for Tomorrow's Company).
8. Reforming democracy - unlocking local democracy, making parliament more representative; giving greater power to parliament to prevent the executive withholding information and ignoring the wishes of the people - eg in going to war. (One World Trust, Pressure Works, Charter 88 and New Politics Network's "Power to the People")
9. Tackling the instability and power of financial markets; Reforming the debt money system, unsustainable taxation and evasion and lack of adequate income. (James Robertson - working for a sane alternative, SP Worldwide International Simultaneous Policy Organisation and Christian Council for Monetary Justice)

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I also draw on Gandhi's eleven principles, or Eleven Vows as he called them, described in the last chapter of Satish Kumar's autobiography "No Destination" and his "The Three Qualities of Life" and Gandhi's "Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule."

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