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## Postmodern Gandhi: A light bearer of 21<sup>st</sup> century

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### Abstract

This paper addresses to solve some of the fundamental questions like: Is Mahatma Gandhi is a modernist or postmodernist? Are Gandhiji's ideas modern or postmodern? And what is the relationship between Mahatma Gandhi and modernism and postmodernism? The entire paper was divided into four different sections. In the first part, the author discusses why Gandhi is called a postmodernist; the second part is devoted to the analysis of truth and science; the third phase deals with Mahatma Gandhi's perspective on truth, and the last section concludes with a contested debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru on development. From this critical analysis, readers will briefly understand that since Gandhi was born in the age of modernism but his philosophical ideas are postmodernists per se.

**Keywords:** post-modern, modern, truth, science development

### Introductions

#### Theoretical framework of the paper

In this article, the author argued that Mahatma Gandhi is a postmodernist and the argument is based on a book entitled 'Postmodern Gandhi and other essay' written by Rudolph and Rudolph which published in 2009 and the fundamental understanding of this book justified the theoretical framework of this paper.

#### Method of justification

In this study, the author used a critical analysis method to justify each argument precisely.

#### Interpretive analysis of Gandhi's postmodern philosophy

In order to bring clarity in understanding, the author answered all four questions in a row and tried to defend the cited questions with the help of simple logic, based on both primary and secondary sources including books, articles and journals.

#### Mahatma Gandhi is considered as postmodernist thinker

Considering this question, the answer would be Mahatma Gandhi is a postmodernist because his theory and practice of nonviolence collective action i.e., satyagraha was articulated and exemplified postmodern situational understanding of truth. Second, Mahatma Gandhi is a postmodernist because he challenged the existing ritual order of Indian society and ritual order of upper caste Hinduism and wanted to abolish untouchability. Third, Gandhi is a postmodernist because he rejected modern civilization and he opposed Nehru's concept and approach to development. On the other hand, Gandhi provided a civilizational alternative to development which based on the axiom "Love your land". Four, Gandhi's idea of "localism" seemed resemblance with Lyotard's understanding of mini/local narrative (Lyotard, 1984) [6]. Lyotard opposed universal and grand theories as the means of enlightenment, human progress, freedom, etc., and claimed little narratives/stories to be put forward to solve local issues. In the similar fashion, Mahatma Gandhi argued that without understanding the local/village level problems it is quite difficult for human beings to solve global issues.

#### Relationship between science and truth and Gandhi's perspective on truth

So far, the second and third cited questions are concerned Gandhi believed that modernity epitomized that scientific thinking provides objective knowledge and universal truth. Gandhi respected science as a form of truth. But for Mahatma Gandhi, truth is not universal and

fixed rather it is contextual, situational and contingent. Gandhi believes in the truth in action, interestingly, Gandhi did experiment on truth which is reflected in his autobiography entitled "My experiment with truth" (Gandhi, 1948) <sup>[2]</sup>. Karl Popper, the philosopher of science observed that Mahatma Gandhi conducts his experiments with the truth with utmost accuracy but he did not provide a definite conclusion. For Gandhi, the proposition 'truth is God' is an attempt to overcome the modernist critic of religion. According to Gandhi, if we accept God as truth then the meaning and definition of truth will be a limit, because it is not accepted by atheist but on the other hand, if we accept truth as God then it will be limitless. The boundary of knowledge will be expanded because it will be accepted by theist and atheist as well as religious and non-religious people. Gandhi believes that the truth is situational which is reflected in Satyagraha or Non-Cooperation movement led by Gandhi against British Raj in India. For Gandhi, truth is not absolute, it is contextual and contingent as it reflects in his book "My experiment with truth".

### **A contested debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru on development**

Keeping third question in mind, it is observed that Pandit Nehru liked president Roosevelt of the United States of America and preferred big plants and big dams. Pandit Nehru expected that big dams represent the modern temples of Indian society. After World War II and decolonization, Nehru like thinking was conceptualized by social scientists as modernization. On the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi in his book "Hind Swaraj" (Gandhi, 1997) <sup>[3]</sup> stated that his imagination of village would be self-reliant not self-sufficient. He wanted to establish village level democracy in India. According to Gandhi, democracy should start from the bottom of the village. Therefore, he was in favour of local autonomy and establishment of cottage and khadi industry in villages of India because India is a land of villages, but on the other hand, Nehru was in favour of creation of modern states, cities, industries, industrial production and material well-being. Gandhi wanted to establish decentralized bottom of state with village communities at the centre and came up with a top-down state capable of planned development. Gandhi's dream of village swaraj came true in the 1990s with the amendment act like 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> with an establishment of the Panchayati Raj system in India. After passing of these two acts in India, a three-tier democracy was established in India; one at panchayat level; another at block level and third at the district level. And this three-tiers democracy started working from the grassroot level with an aimed to decentralize power in an egalitarian manner.

### **Concluding remark**

Mahatma Gandhi is a postmodernist because he believed in decentralized economic and political order with village communities at the centre. He further believed that 'Ahimsa' is the only method for attaining truth because 'Ahimsa' is based on pure love. Once Gandhiji said, "I value individual freedom, but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being" (Gandhi, 2013, p.144) <sup>[4]</sup>. His ideology of means and ends, the inner and the outer, of religion is neither pre-modern nor modern, but distinctively postmodern in the constructive sense. However, after discussing Gandhiji's ideas, vision, and his approach as a

social scientist, the author tried to convince the reader that Mahatma Gandhi is not only a postmodernist but also a deconstructive postmodernist because he wanted religion must recover its positive roles in society.

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