
UNIT 16 CHALLENGES AHEAD: THE GANDHIAN ALTERNATIVE

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

The world has changed drastically and dramatically since Mahatma Gandhi breathed his last. The political map of the world has changed; the economic stage has witnessed unleashing of new forces, the social structures too have yielded to changes. Contemporary times are facing unprecedented challenges. It is at this juncture that a re-look in Gandhi's ideas and work is essential to guide us. Gandhi had to face many trials, tribulations and challenges in his eventful life. His quest for Truth by the means of non-violence steered him clear of all the obstacles. The moral issues he raised are still fundamental; and the questions he posed for social, economic and political justice still remain of crucial importance.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would help you to understand

- The impact of Gandhi's ideas,
- The nature of the challenges ahead, and
- Find possible ways to deal with them in the context of Gandhian perspective.

16.2 VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

The results of the conflicts today cross geographical boundaries of the nations and affect the countries across the world. The world has suffered in the last century the ravage and destruction consequent to two world wars and many civil wars. Hunger for power, dogmatic ideologies and skewed political views often stimulate violence. Terrorism, a war without geographical borders or a traditional military basis, has become a global problem

and the available figures about the terrorist activities are frightening. Terrorist groups in India are also getting more strident.

Gandhi had realised very early in his political life that violence is a formidable challenge. His teaching and practice of nonviolence and freedom from hatred can help people find their way in the tangle of violence, distrust and hatred. His well-articulated arguments against violence and terrorism are found in his *Hind Swaraj*, written on the return voyage from London to South Africa (November 13 to 22, 1909), on board the *Kildonan Castle*. In this little yet important book Gandhi puts arguments for supremacy of soul force over brute force.

Juergensmeyer elaborates that the guidelines given by Gandhi in response to the terrorism of the Indian activists in London in 1909 may be applied to the current situation. They are: stop a situation of violence in its tracks, address the issues behind the violence, and maintain the moral high ground. What is important is the fact that a nonviolent response is already an element of political discourse. It is not a new idea, but rather a strand of public thinking that deserves attention, and Gandhi might argue, respect. (Juergensmeyer, 2007, pp.38-39).

Gandhi clearly establishes the relation between truth and nonviolence and the relation between the purity of the end and the means. Truth is the end and nonviolence is the means. Nonviolence and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc (Gandhi, 1980, p.6).

Gandhian perspective tries to understand and then handle the root-cause of violence. For Gandhi, nonviolence is promoted not just by rejection of violence, but also by efforts to build societies through constructive work. He emphatically preaches that the evil must be resisted peacefully without hating the evil-doer. *Satyagraha* is a method of conversion, rooted in nonviolence and love. It aims at changing the attitude and thinking and behaviour of the opponent rather than the external behaviour of the opponent. It relies on the power of persuasion and reason, dialogue and consensus building, and love and understanding of the opponent. It is the exercise of the purest soul force against the injustice and oppression at all levels.

Gandhi's showed that opposing interests can be reconciled by transcending the conflict. His own approach to situations like those in Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli, displayed his unflinching faith in nonviolence. The mass movements of Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India instilled confidence and courage in the people. Gandhi teaches people to be brave, fearless, have faith in the truth in midst of dishonesty and falsehood. Mutual exchange of ideas and understanding the mindset of the opponents as preached and practised by Gandhi provides an alternative to the ruthless repression through violence.

Nations, like individuals, become captives of their own mistrust, suspicions, fears and prejudices and adopt the methods of violence. Increasing militarism in international politics, industrialization in world economy, thoughtlessness in the use of natural resources and dehumanizing human relations aggravate the crisis. It is time the world awakes to the fact that the alternative to violence, coercion, distrust and chaos is restoration of peace, love, faith and trust. The Gandhian technique of nonviolent action and protest is relevant in nuclear age. In the midst of destruction and disturbance there are some positive examples (*A Force More Powerful*: a film).

Gandhi's methods have been used in several cases such as movements for civil rights in US and liberation in South Africa. Martin Luther King summoned the traditions of resistance and maintained that nonviolence can be practised only by the brave. Nelson Mandela has demonstrated the efficacy of nonviolent method in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Lech Walesa of Poland, Benigno Aquino Jr. in Philippines, A. T. Ariyaratne in Srilanka, Danilo Dolci in Sicily and Lanza del Vasto in France have respected the ways shown by Gandhian ideas and practice. Similar developments in other parts of the world The political events since the late 1980s like the collapse of the former Communist regimes, breaking of the great wall between East and West Germany, have displayed the power of peoples' struggle. It has been realised that nonviolence is a more powerful way of establishing peace in the world than violence can ever be. Those who are resisting war use nonviolent methods and evoke the methods of Gandhi. Even the United Nations has accepted that Mahatma's legacy of nonviolent struggles and peace and has declared 2nd October (Mahatma's birthday) as the annual International Day of Non-violence.

It is true that not all nonviolent struggles yield immediate results. Sometimes the commitment to the principle of nonviolence weakens giving way to violent eruptions and at times the repression by the autocratic rule or the army is too severe to resist. The limited effectiveness of Intifada in Israel is one example. The principles of nonviolence and peace are undoubtedly difficult to practice, they are not mere high ideals, they have practical dimension too. A comparison of 323 nonviolent and violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006 shows that nonviolent resistance methods are likely to be more successful than violent methods and have achieved success 53 per cent of the time, compared with 26 percent for the violent resistance campaigns (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008, pp.7-44).

A mistaken belief still persists that violence can end conflict or that war can bring salvation to the world. Gandhi showed another way, lived it and demonstrated its success. As stated by Joan Bondurant, Satyagraha points directly to a new method of revolution (Bondurant, 1959, p.225). *Satyagraha*, for Gandhi, is not just a political weapon; it is a way of life. Throughout his life he sharpened his focus and innovated different techniques of Satyagraha and remained confident that beginning with the family, and can be effectively individually and collectively. As pointed out by Diwakar, *Satyagraha* is not a mechanical formula or a mathematical theory. It is a living, dynamic principle and philosophy of life which is yet to unfold itself and evolve fully. It may be said to be 'the law of being' of coming humanity. It has yet to replace fully and effectively the operation of physical force and coercion in social evolution and social dynamics. Love, nonviolence, is the law of our species, no doubt; but it has yet to establish itself firmly and fully (Diwakar, 1962, p.44). The virtue of nonviolence has to percolate to all the layers of all the sections of the society.

16.3 UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT

The present methods of measuring the economic development in terms of industrialisation, consumption of energy and urbanisation have proved to be inadequate to address the issue of the miseries of the millions. Gandhi was aware of the pitfalls of such a theory and the results of the unequal distribution of wealth between different classes in a society. Today science and technology have taken unprecedented strides, and yet millions live in utter poverty; basic human rights are denied to them, powerful nations dominate over the

powerless ones, innocent people become victims of terrorism, and high sounding words of peace get lost in the din of discord and disruption. It is this dismal situation that forces us to think of alternatives, and in this context Gandhian perspective is useful.

Political emancipation without economic equality is hollow. For Gandhi economics stands for social justice (*Harijan*, October 9, 1937). He emphasises decentralised self-dependent units bound together by the bonds of mutual cooperation and interdependence. He opposes exploitation, over-organisation, mindless drive for economic abundance, accumulation, massive technological progress, severe competitions, ruthless personal aggrandizement, unbridled consumerism and concentration of wealth and power. In his opinion, greed is detrimental to social good; he had hoped that Europe would retrace steps from the demoralizing industrialism (*Young India*, August 26, 1925).

Gandhi maintains that wealth is to be used judiciously, governed by the principle of 'each according to his need'; and emergence of inequality has to be curbed at all levels. According to him, all amassing or hoarding of wealth, above and beyond one's legitimate requirement is theft (*Harijan*, August 11, 1946). His concept of social use of wealth against the prevailing ethos of consumerism demands our serious attention. Values of 'truth' 'non-violence' and 'non-accumulation of wealth' are to be cherished for the very survival of the society, where the weakest has the same rights as the strongest.

Trusteeship for Gandhi is a dynamic concept that can bring change in the established institutions. It is a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. An individual is not free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction (*Harijan*, October 25, 1952). The common property is to be used for the good of one and all, all including the rich have to work for the society according to his/her capacity and they will receive as per needs.

Trusteeship aims at outcomes like capital-labour cooperation, formation of social capital, reduction in concentration of economic power in a few hands, the introduction of the philosophy of *anasakti* (worldly detachment), social development in all aspects or *sarvodaya* and egalitarianism. A programme may fail in realising one objective but may be successful in some other respects. Gandhi knew well that there would be some natural rate of inequality, and it cannot be rooted out from modern society even in the long run. Hence he tried for equality in its relative sense, called equity. The concept then becomes relevant in real world situations (Ghosh, 2007,p.245).

The quintessence of Gandhian philosophy is that the human values and not the market should govern life. Service of the teeming millions, the poor-*Daridranarayan*- is of the utmost importance. Gandhi presents the humane face of development. Ghosh brings out the following basic objectives of the Gandhian scheme of holistic development-(1) human development (including moral development) for capability expansion, (2) development in a balanced way through manual and intellectual labour (development of body, mind and soul), (3) development with social justice, rights and freedom. This is in accordance with the principle of social and human development. (4) Attainment of self-sufficiency and self-reliance through rural development, (5) reduction in poverty through the generation of additional income and employment (Ghosh, 2007, p.213).

Gandhi's emphasis on decentralisation, community-based economics, self-sufficiency, handicrafts, village professions and production, use of low capital intensive appropriate technology indicate his vision for a self-sufficient economy. He disapproved the use of machines that replace men or makes them subservient to machines. He advocates

judicious use of machines; and simple, indigenous technology of non-exploitative nature in tune with nonviolence. He emphasizes the importance of whatever can be produced locally (From Yeravada Mandir, 1980, p.44), and thinks about a decentralised economy. He propagated the use of the spinning wheel and *Khadi* for self-reliance as well as moral and economic regeneration.

Gandhi draws our attention to the need to protect the environment and to guard against the abuse of natural resources. Mighty projects, big dams, giant industries and other massive ventures raise questions about the quality of life affected by them. The quest for the mirage of material development often leads to the destruction of forests, ecological imbalances, scarcity of water, soil erosion, silting of rivers and desertification pose grave dangers to environment.

Gandhi insisted on regulation of wants and use of the goods and material not imported, but made in one's own country. His concept of *Swadeshi*, a dynamic concept of self-reliance, is closely connected with *Swaraj*, political freedom. Another of his important concept is that of 'bread labour', that propagates that some amount of physical labour has to be done by every person every day. It is a great equalising force, and the need for socially useful manual labour is obvious. Influenced by John Ruskin, Gandhi maintained that all works are of equal dignity. He also said that in the conflict situation between the capital and the labour, cooperation and amicable settlements are the way out and not violence.

Gandhi was sure that too much emphasis on materialism leads to violence and unhappiness. He criticised the exploitative and materialistic Western civilisation and believed that India cannot be a replica of that. Many western thinkers also have noticed trends of exploitation and dehumanisation trends of industrialisation. Gandhi's critique makes us aware of the fact that economic progress devoid of moral elements will not ultimately help the people but will make internal divisions and dissensions more intense. Parekh suggests that Gandhi's critique was directed to modern, materialistic society rather than the Western culture in general. He argues that the modern society is built and maintained by massive violence, and relationships are characterized by struggle, mastery, subjugation, domination, victory and defeat (Parekh, 1995, pp.20-26).

Gandhi visualised exploitation-free society, based on cooperation and ethics. He envisioned productive employment for India's millions, schemes for rebuilding villages and creating communities of care and concern, promotion of *khadi* and local handicrafts, production of need-based basic goods, empowering people by imparting basic education and required skills to enable them to create decentralised structures of power, and ensuring equality of opportunity for all.

In Gandhi's political economy, human development and development are inseparable because the two are interactive in more ways than one. Human development includes capability expansion through the improvement of human capital and uplift of morality and also human contestability that can be raised through empowerment, entitlement and endowment by inculcating ethical and moral principles to make the capability expansion operational. Contestability is the manifested overt ability to prove the inherent or acquired capability. Gandhi does not use the term "contestability" but it can be inferred from his various writings and speeches. His idea of contestability cannot be used in the sense of material gain in the arena of the market but it is more a moral force without which there may be the problem of capability failure (Ghosh, 2007, p.214).

16.4 EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC NORMS

Contemporary political scenario shows the erosion of democratic values and the decline in ethical norms in public life and the effectiveness of the political institutions. The troubles of implementing a democratic constitution on a traditional and hierarchical society in India are not yet over. Conflicts of all kinds- communal, religious, casteist and regional- and at all levels- from local to national- are on rise. The voice of the deprived is very often suppressed. Political parties lack effective leadership and programme. The vulnerability of the democratic process to criminalisation at all levels is acquiring dangerous dimensions. At this juncture Gandhian perspective becomes relevant.

Gandhi presents a dynamic concept and a unique practice of politics by connecting it with ethics. Spiritual dimension of politics is of vital importance, as spiritualisation of politics changes the present exploitative system and humanises the soulless surroundings. Religion is the element that concerns all human beings, which teaches him to transcend the barriers of passions and which takes him to above the material level. By declaring that Truth is God he revolutionised the approach to see the realities. In his words, “God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of light and Life and yet He is able and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist” (*Young India*, March 5, 1925). To reach Truth, one has to strive constantly through nonviolence and must overcome fear, violence, falsehood and helplessness. He was emphatic that, “as the means, so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and end.” (*Young India*, July 17, 1924).

The rise of fundamentalism and terrorism in our times in the name of religion poses a real threat to peace and tranquility. India experienced unprecedented suffering and holocaust, when it was partitioned in the name of religion. It is a sad commentary on the present condition on our country that even after six decades of independence and despite our state being secular, politics is often marred by appeals made in the name of religion. Gandhi had realised the dangers of interpreting religion with narrow perspective. He advocated equal respect for all religions and provided an original insight in the relation between religion and politics. He believed that the state should maintain neutrality in matter of religion.

Gandhi provided space for different opinions and for persons from different strands of life; and respected diversities. He advocated the practice of gentleness, forgiveness and the methods of dialogue. We must concede to our opponents the freedom we claim for ourselves. Intolerance is also a form of violence and an obstacle in the way of progress. As diversities get accepted, hierarchies will start getting redundant. As common interest takes precedence over individual interests, conflicts will be lessened and violence will be lessened.

For Gandhi democracy is the rule of unadulterated nonviolence (*Harijan*, October 13, 1940). Gandhi had understood the relation between the freedom of the motherland and the international amity. He remarked:” We want freedom for our country, but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries” (*Young India*, September 10, 1925). Nonviolence nurtures the civil society by encouraging changes required for democratic norms. A Freedom House study conducted in 2005 points out that “recourse to violent conflict in resisting oppression is significantly less likely to produce sustainable freedom, in contrast to nonviolent opposition, which even in the face

of state repression, is far more likely to yield a democratic outcome” (Karatnycky and Ackerman, 2005, p.8). Nonviolent movements give credence to people’s power and articulate people’s urge for good governance and stimulate active civic engagement.

According to Gandhi, true freedom is allegiance to the law, law not necessarily passed by the legislature or implemented by the executive, but the higher law rooted in the moral ground. For Gandhi, freedom consists in being true to oneself and to be concerned about others. Each individual has access to the community’s resources, and gets opportunities for his/her growth at his/her pace. He/she is free to speak the truth, but not free to lie, free to serve but not free to kill or injure. The attainment of this freedom is within the reach of all. Gandhi maintained that there is no place on earth and no race, which is not capable of producing the finest types of humanity, given suitable opportunities and education (Gandhi, 1972, p.33). The state by itself cannot create such an atmosphere and impose morality. This has to come from conscious collective social action rooted in social conscience. The social order is to be reconstructed by purifying the inner being of the individuals. Everyone should rule himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state there is no political power because there is no state (*Young India*, July 2, 1931).

Life is to be guided not by external forces of coercion and fear, but by voluntary acceptance of duties, compassion and cooperation. With the increase of virtue in individual lives, the coercive action of the state will be redundant. For him *swaraj* of a people means the sum-total of the *swaraj* (self rule) of individuals (*Harijan*, March 25, 1939). Gandhi had the concept of *Swaraj* as a self-regulated society. Gandhi does not distinguish between the private and the public spheres of life and emphasised commitment to democratic norms for the rulers as well as the ruled. He visualised a free individual in a free society, retaining his self but being a part of the integrated whole. He believed in human beings’ capacity to challenge injustice and to change the unequal power structure.

Gandhi realized that rights cannot be unconditional, there have to be corresponding duties. Rights for Gandhi are inseparable from duties. He believed that the true source of right is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. Gandhian perspective is not utilitarian, but seeks all the happiness of all the people. Resources will be spent not on army but on means to combat hunger, poverty, diseases.

Gandhi’s vision of a system based on complete decentralisation and dissolution of hierarchies holds promise for a better future of mankind. We cannot neglect the fact that contradiction between the private and public spheres of life is stifling for the growth of the individual and the society. Rights have meaning only when coupled with responsibilities. Ethics in politics is necessary because it will change the exploitative system and will humanise the soulless surroundings. Besides bringing ethics to the centre stage, Gandhian perspective also emphasises qualities of discipline, well ordered schedule and time management. There are many obstacles to participatory democracy such as divisiveness, parochialism, communalism and corruption. Corruption is corroding the very structure of the government like the termites and the escalation of corruption at every level is frightening. This situation is indeed alarming. Gandhian values and principles show a way to come out of this situation.

16.5 SOCIAL DIVIDE

Since the independence in 1947, democracy in India has been experiencing tensions

arising from the struggle for political equality against the history of social hierarchy and from the interface between the state and the emerging collective identities. The traditional society resists the forces of change and reforms, and the same society, because of its plural composition and democratic polity, needs changes and reforms to achieve justice and equality for all its citizens. The democratic state promises fundamental rights and equality to all the citizens, and yet suffers from in-built limitations which hamper social change. As collective identities muster strength and demand rights which they consider are due to them, other collectives face the fear of repression and exclusion. Each of such groups, at some point or another, forcefully tries to assert its identity by making demands which it considers are legitimate and at the same time feels threatened or excluded by similar demands of other groups. Today, the civil society in India face unprecedented challenges resulting from such tensions. The situation calls for entrenchment of respect for the Rule of Law as well as measures for nurturing harmony among various communities and groups in the society.

A noteworthy study by Varshney shows the value of a vibrant civil society and the importance of professional and social ties among members of different groups. It argues that inter-communal civic engagement is better for communal peace than no engagement or only intra-communal engagement; and within the former category, as the size of the locality increases, associational engagement is better than everyday engagement. Care has to be taken today to preserve and establish harmony among and within various communities and castes to strengthen the vibrant democracy in India (Varshney, 2002, p.281).

India's freedom movement created a whole range of associations and organisations in India. Indians did interact with one another before that, but pre-1920 civic engagement was basically an everyday and informal engagement. By creating cadre-based political parties, trade unions, new educational institutions, and new cultural and social organisations, the Gandhian shift in politics laid the foundations of India's associational civic order. Gandhi was a master of civic activism and thinking. His reliance on moral transformation of society meant a lot of civic, nongovernmental activity. Principled nonviolence, Gandhi argued, would produce helplessness in the ruler, for it would make the use of violence self-defeating and morally disgusting. By doing so, it would also build strength in a community. Nonviolent resistance to unjust laws would defeat the British and build a strong Indian nation. Education, campaigning, and organizations were important for such a nation-building project (Varshney, 2002, pp.114-115).

Gandhi believed in the unity of life and egalitarian values in all spheres of life. According to him life cannot be divided in sphere like social, political, economic, moral and religious. If one part of the society suffers, all parts suffer. *Sarvodaya* presupposes justice, generates movements for changes, outward as well as inward and strives for egalitarian social order based on truth, nonviolence and purity of means. Gandhi never compromised at the cost of individual freedom, equality and social justice; his principle of nonviolence was not a mere philosophical principle but it was the rule of life. He had visualised India where "all interests not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether indigenous or foreign" (*Young India*, September 10, 1931).

Gandhi visualised a society based on mutual understanding, mutual cooperation and mutual respect, freedom and equality for all. Gandhi transcends barriers of caste, class and colour. Gandhi opposed untouchability. Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph show how

Gandhi adopted the language of civil society to communicate with rural, religious and predominantly illiterate people. He created a 'public' focused on matters of common concern imbued with the values of tolerance and civility (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2003, pp.337-404).

Gandhian programme is holistic and multidimensional. The objective of his constructive work is the creation of non-violent society. The need for such voluntary work in the contemporary Indian society cannot be over emphasised. Gandhi's ideas on the system of education were also in tune with the ideal of social reconstruction. The aim of education is character building and development of one's potential that can help an individual to differentiate between right and wrong. Contemporary times, unfortunately, put premium on the education's ability to enhance the earning capacity thereby curbing the creativity of the young generation. The system is not very conducive in the development of a human and humane outlook. Gandhi evolved a value oriented system of education which aims in developing not merely the qualities of head but also of heart and training of hands through crafts.

Gandhi envisages a healthy society based on harmony and dialogue, where the ideas of equality and justice are translated in the lives of teeming millions. It is heartening to know about the persons like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Narayan Desai, Ravindra Upadhyaya and Ela Bhatt translating Gandhian ideas into practice. Many young and old persons and organisations work tirelessly to spread Gandhi's ideas. Such efforts make us aware of the principles of commitment and nonviolent methods.

16.6 GENDER INEQUALITY

Though the Indian tradition equates the woman with the goddess, power has always eluded her. Seeped in traditions she accepts a subservient role in the private sphere and remains powerless. Her development is marred by the social prejudices. Not many women have been able to occupy the positions of power. Apathy to accept her work in the family and unorganised sector raises basic question regarding the definition of work. Statistical invisibility of women's work reflects the deep rooted social bias against them. Statistics of crimes against women are frightening. Woman has to deal with the violence on her body, mind and life in her daily life. Issues like killing of female fetuses, propaganda of use of harmful contraceptives, violence represented in media, and domestic violence demand immediate attention. The women's movement since the seventies has been largely responsible for critiquing the social system, generating new perspective on women's inferior status and initiating measures which could combat the forces oppressing women. Important steps taken by the government such as amendments in the acts pertaining to issues like rape and dowry have been considerably influenced by the struggles launched by women. The promise of justice and equality, however, remains to be translated in the lives of ordinary women.

It is important to have a re-look in our recent past. Women's participation in the nationalist struggle under Gandhi's leadership against the unjust British rule is a glorious chapter of our history. Women's entry into national politics through non-violent methods brought miraculous results. It established legitimacy of moral elements in politics and made women aware of their potential. It proved that women can evolve their own perception of politics and can chart out their own methods.

Gandhi was confident that 'if nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women' (*Young India*, April 10, 1931). Gandhi's presence had an electrifying effect on Indian women-rich and poor, educated and illiterate, urban and rural. Women from all parts of the country came out of their homes to sell *khadi*, to organise meetings and processions, to spread the message of *swadeshi* and to picket near the shops of liquor and foreign cloth. Women in India could non-violently present a critique of the colonial unethical state. The Gandhian critique of authoritarian colonial state that emerged during the freedom struggle contained women's perspective of politics. As pointed out by Karen J. Warren and Duane L. Cady, feminism and peace share an important conceptual connection. Both are critical of and committed to the elimination of, coercive power over privilege systems of domination as a basis of interaction between individuals and groups. A feminist critique and development of any peace politics, therefore, ultimately is a critique of systems of unjustified domination (Warren and Cady, 1994, p.6). Women realised that the only factor that would enable them to come out of such situation was the determination and strength of women themselves. Gandhi maintained that ultimately woman will have to determine with authority what she needs (*Harijan*, February 24, 1940). According to Aloo Dastur and Usha Mehta, one of the enduring results of Gandhi's great life work has been the awakening of women which made them shed their deep rooted inferiority complex and rise to great heights of valour and dignity, of self-reliance and achievements (Dastur and Mehta, 1991, p.1).

The activities of women in the nonviolent struggle for freedom give messages for inner strength, simplicity, self-reliance and the need to identify with the deprived sections. Some of women's struggles like Chipko movement and anti-arrack and anti-dowry agitations indicate the strength of nonviolent methods, nurtured by women. Women in different places are raising their voices against injustice and inequality.

Women's movement has brought the women issue to the centre stage, and has also played a pivotal role in empowering women to stand up against forces that curb their freedom and equality. Women have to recognise, collectively and critically, the forces that limit them, and to work collectively and continuously to change the unequal power structure. Gandhi had tremendous faith in the abilities of women. He had conveyed in his message to All India Women's Conference in December 1936 that "When woman, whom we call *abala* (weak) becomes *sabala* (strong), all those who are helpless will become powerful."

16.7 SUMMARY

In a troubled world with rising tensions and violence, Gandhian perspective offers a sane way to a peaceful and dignified human life. It gives a clear message of nonviolence, balanced development and self-sufficiency. It shows that only the quest for peace, truth and justice is the moving force of human life and not the aggression, exploitation and lust for power. It urges us to rise above the narrow frontiers of caste, class, and religion. It teaches us that the society of diverse people has to be based on mutual respect and mutual understanding. It draws our attention to the dangers of mindless consumerism as well as social, political and economic disparities. It demonstrates that women do not have to follow the accepted norms of male-dominated politics; they can evolve their own perception of power and their own methods. It teaches us to that freedom from fear and inner strength is the pre-condition of the effective struggle against inequality and injustice. It emphasises the importance of non-violence for the success of democracy. Gandhian

perspective is a ray of hope in contemporary times of sharp inequalities, because the values of truth, non-violence and humanity as well as the moral and ethical issues raised by him are relevant. Lessons from his insistence on uniformity between preaching and practice, high standard in public life and the purity of the end as well as the means can be neglected only at our own peril. His name and work evoke profound respect across nations and his ideas instill hope in the suffering humanity. They inspire harmony among communities, societies and nations as well as between man and nature. His words “My life is my message” are truly inspirational.

16.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion is Gandhian perspective relevant today? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Write short notes on three persons or organisations trying to translate Gandhi’s ideas in practice.
3. What, in your opinion, are the important strategies to propagate peace in contemporary times?

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