



An **icon** ahead of his **time**

IN THE eyes of many Millennials, Mahatma Gandhi would be seen as an uber-influencer, followed by global millions. In that pre-Instagram-Twitter-social media era, he shaped the most inspiring and influential philosophy, a way of life for the future.

When you look back at his life, after 150 years, his approach cuts across time, space, context, culture, geography and the state of development in a society. Albert Einstein was prescient when he said that with future generations, few would believe that such a man - in flesh and blood - had walked amongst us on the face of the earth. Gandhi was ahead of his time and he still remains ahead even today. His relevance today is immensely important, but unfortunately, there is more lip service to Gandhi's philosophy than actual efforts to imbibe and emulate it in our lives. In that sense, we remain hopeful that a society will emerge in the future, where we will not just celebrate anniversaries, but really connect to Gandhian ideals in society, politics, and culture.

Gandhi was the tallest among the leaders of his time. It is only fair to say that we had other prominent leaders including, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Dr BR Ambedkar, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, C Rajagopalachari and many others who laid the foundations of the Republic. Today, we need such inspiring individuals in all walks of life. While Gandhi led from the front, there were others who played an influential role in the freedom movement. In fact, some of those leaders disagreed on different aspects of the evolution of the freedom movement. But they were united by their sense of moral compass, personal integrity and a larger vision of nation building. Gandhi inspired them as well by his selflessness, commitment and dedication to the larger cause of India's freedom.

Another extraordinary trait of Mahatma Gandhi was his ability to focus on things that were important to society. While he was deeply committed to achieving independence and resisting laws that were discriminatory, he also worked towards empowering Indians to pursue the ideals of cleanliness. He lived it as a philosophy at his ashram and inspired others for enabling clean environment in their communities. This was not just physical cleanliness, but spiritual upliftment as well. This is now also the vision of our PM for a Swachh Bharat, that India pursues these noble goals. That was Gandhi's aspiration and made it a part of his life. He believed in simple, but sustainable living, which is a precursor for addressing the environmental concerns we have today. It was the basis of Gandhi's deeper sense of equity and social justice.

A remarkable aspect about Gandhi's life

A remarkable aspect about Mahatma Gandhi's life was that his political philosophy inspired many other movements, not just against colonialism and apartheid.



Prof (Dr)
C Raj Kumar

BY INVITATION

was that his political philosophy inspired many other movements, not just against colonialism and apartheid. Generations of leaders in the 50s and 60s saw Gandhi as a powerful actor in their imagination.

HE ALSO deeply influenced the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Dr. Martin Luther King has famously acknowledged that Gandhi was his ideal in the movement against discrimination and segregation. What is unique about both of them was how they could link the progressive dimensions of religion and faith into politics and gained indomitable strength from it. They could appeal to the masses and galvanise their social consciousness to a higher ideal. Gandhi and Dr. King could engage with religion in an empowering manner to advance tolerance and non-violence.

A number of young people get influenced by violence and their level of tolerance to deal with many issues that confront society has diminished. This is a message they get out of political cultures where powerful interests and countries, at times, feel that violence can be used to legitimise their actions. We need to instill and infuse a deeper sense of non-violence and acceptability of the other. We must move away from notions which limit our acceptance of others. When you embrace pluralism and celebrate diversity, you are not just tolerating the different and the other, but accepting and celebrating it. This is crucial for India and the world at large. Diversity is particularly part of our civic and political culture. We also need to develop stronger values in the need to encourage generosity and a culture of giving. Gandhi famously talked about wealth and trusteeship. People with means are essentially trustees and it is their responsibility to contribute for the next generation. Today it translates as corporate philanthropy.

Gandhi has indeed given powerful foundations for the future of humanity. Every aspect of his philosophy is relevant today and as we celebrate his 150th anniversary, we should aspire to bring some of those ideals to our approach to institution building and nation building.

— Professor (Dr.) C Raj Kumar, a Rhodes Scholar, is the Founding Vice-Chancellor of OP Jindal Global University

