

Contextual Reference of Gandhian Philosophy in Human Resources Management Practices

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Abstract: India is a land of philosophers; Gandhi is a reformer and a modern philosopher who invented tools to inspire the masses. These tools find relevance in present day, Gandhian Philosophy is based on the four pillars; Truth, Non-Violence or Ahimsa, Self-Respect and Satyagraha. He practiced and preached the life of austerity, humbleness and truth. His philosophy of simple living and high thinking attracted the peasants, humbled the mighty and the rich. The present paper analyses the application of the principles in the present context with respect to human resources practices. The present global context requires inspirational leadership style with appropriate strategy; Gandhiji is the best strategist with follower centric approach. The human resource management practices were linked with human factor theory and defined as a bundle of practices. The strike as a right, collective bargaining, arbitration and self-introspection were some of his contributions.

Keywords: human resources management; self-introspection; Gandhian philosophy; collective bargaining; inspirational leadership

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1 Introduction

The 19th century has seen the birth of leading humanists; the age old traditional philosophy was molded to oppose the oppression of the colonialism. The leading luminaries of that age fought the colonialist and brought transformation in the societies ridden with inhumanism, casteism and exploitation. The Industrial revolution has transformed the society from agrarian to industrial. Gandhism flourished during this transformation period. Gandhism started with a purpose, aim and objective. The genius learned the art of living with reality. The art of living with reality is an experiment; the fruits of these experiments are the philosophy. The philosophy easy in language but has in-depth meaning comparable to the slokha's of Upanishads. The religious literature created a mindset which can be

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easily made applicable to reality. Gandhism is a way of life, easy to think but requires tremendous commitment. Gandhi was born on 2nd October, 1869 in Porbandhar; he practiced the life of austerity, humbleness and truth. His simple living attracted the peasants, humbled the mighty and the rich. Prof. Gilbert Murray, a British classical scholar, says “a modern genius of world significance and that for every oppressed nationalist in every continent, he became a champion, a matinee idol”.

An individual difficult to understand and he may be categorized as a religious, labor and political leader and also an apostle of peace; admired as the path finder for downtrodden and underprivileged and has been hailed as the undisputed leader of India's struggle for freedom. The spiritual and religious leaders like Gautam Buddha, Lord Jesus Christ, Mahavira, Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi had practiced and preached the gospel of truth, love and non-violence. They applied these principles to leverage the human welfare and values with gospels and thereby bring peace, harmony and co-existence. The miseries of the life are due to non-acceptance and practice of these truths. The roads chosen to attain these goals by the practioners are different. But for accomplishing their mission each has chosen his own path. The path chosen by Gandhi came to be known as Gandhian thought or Gandhism.

Human Resources Management is defined as human capital; this perspective considers human competencies as resources of the organization (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990). Elton Mayo has concluded that human factor and its manifestation is human relations movement. This human resource management practices were linked with human factor theory and defined as of bundle of practices (i) career system (ii) work system (iii) development system (iv) self-renewal system and (v) human resources development system. The Human Resource Management is that part of management associated with working of human capital.

2 Gandhian Philosophy

The Gandhian philosophy is based on the four pillars:

1. Truth;
2. Non-Violence or Ahimsa;
3. Self-Respect and
4. Satyagraha.

2.1 Truth

The meaning of truth has the same connotation as the dictionary meaning i.e. seeking the cause. But, to him it is more than simple finding of the cause, self-realization. The truth and its laws are universal. The truth is powerful and it is the

ultimate winner. The application of truth in daily life improves purity of heart and it ultimately results in self- realization. Gandhi once said: “Politics bereft of religion is death trap. Religion to him was first humanity and omnipresent God, while God for him was another face of the truth. Therefore, the manifestation of Politics or Religion is god.”

2.2. Non-Violence or Ahimsa

Non-violence is the principle hallmark of his philosophy. The ahimsa is a weapon or tool to win over the enemy. The ahimsa is not attained through preaching but only through practice. The ahimsa has a religious and political meaning.

2.3. Self-Respect

Gandhian self-respect means upholding ones’ right. The meaning here includes righteousness and protecting our atma gauram.

2.4. Satyagraha

Satyagraha means passive resistance, a proactive approach to goal attainment. The term satya means truth, graha means realization.

3. HRM Concepts and Gandhi Philosophy

Gandhian philosophy is based on humanistic approach, Mahatma Gandhi is known as social engineer and social innovator with his own set of mindset. Gandhian practices are time tested. According to C.K. Prahalad (2006) “Gandhi taught us the concept of clarity of goals and so we had to invent the ways and means to inspire the generations to change India, in the same fashion as he inspired”.

The application of his practices to human resource management started with his initiation. The exemplary strike in Ahmedabad is the beginning of his experiments; he applied the principles in practice to prove his point. The Human Resources Management is not redundant and open to experiment with his principles; some of these may be extracted as:

- Strike and Satyagraha;
- Ownership and Trusteeship;
- Conflict Resolution and Non-Violence;
- Collective Bargaining and Middle path;
- Trade Unionism and Unity;
- Self-Realization and Understanding;
- Self-Introspection and Human Resource Development;
- Wages and Equal Sharing;
- Ethics and Values.

3.1. Strike and Satyagraha

The strike as a right is recognized by the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947. The strike is legal only if it is conducted in peaceful manner. However, the right to demonstrate, abstain from work under common agreement is a Gandhian principle legalized by Indian legislation. But, Gandhi laid principles for calling a strike: a) don't idle during strike period b) search for alternate source of livelihood before striking c) call for strike based on majority opinion. Further, he advocated Satyagraha marg to achieve just demands of the employees. During those days strike is not legalized in industries.

3.2. Ownership and Trusteeship

The owner is a trustee or custodian of the assets and the worker is an equal in the trust. But, a controversy rages regarding whether Gandhi authored trusteeship or not. Some authors attribute the theory to the managing practices of Sabarmati Ashram and Tolstoy Farm (South Africa). The worker has a right to claim from the trust on equitable basis, the concept of worker director (worker's nominee to the board) sounds similar.

3.3. Conflict Resolution and Non-Violence

The Gandhian principle of non-violence has relevance in the present day work context. The recent industrial violence (Regency Ceramics, Maruti Suzuki) is a testimony to manifestation of violence. The increasing globalization has made markets as localization meaning global presence in local market. This factor increased competition and which ultimately influenced change in mindset of the parties i.e. employers and employees to pursue a path of mutual acceptance, collaboration and middle path. He suggested shunning violence and resolving conflict with mutual acceptance. Gandhi proposed win- win positions for conflict resolution, a strong proponent of arbitration for peaceful resolution of conflict. Arbitration as an alternative dispute mechanism was legalized by labor law legislation (Section 10A of Industrial Dispute Act, 1947).

3.4. Collective Bargaining and Middle Path

The collective bargaining has been the hallmark of his negotiation style. The collective bargaining is a recognized means for settlement of disputes and prevention of disputes, the directive principles of state policy directs the state towards proposing such legislation. The Gandhian style of putting demands and ultimately compromising for justifiable solution is the trend in the present context. The workers shall negotiate with more than reasonable demand and never settle for less than minimum just demand. He suggested the policy of stepping down demands by both the employers and workers to arrive at reasonable just settlement i.e. middle path.

3.5. Trade Unionism and Unity

The trade union movement was given impetus by Gandhi, his efforts at organizing unions is a trade mark which ultimately recognized the principle unity wins. The entry of Gandhi into labor movement during 1920's has engraved a new path in settling dispute. A strong proponent of collective bargaining, and pushed for with win-win settlement and not to compromise employer or employees' interests.

3.6. Self-Realization and Understanding

Gandhi urged to realize oneself from his experiences; self-realization is the best method for behavioral corrections and awareness of self.

3.7. Self Introspection and Human Resource Development

The self-introspection principle is related to SWOT analysis. The SWOT Analysis method is an important tool to build competencies of the human resources. Maria "Gandhi's style of leadership as applied to corporate India would involve making even the lowest person in the organization believe in it and the significance of his contribution towards it."

3.8. Wages and Equal Sharing

The middle path suggested by Gandhi is an important methodology in fixation of wages. The owner is a trustee who shares the fruits of labor equally with the workers; the equal share is the middle path. The core values build the culture of the organization; the values are influenced by the ethics. The organization creates these values to show its sincerity to the society. Arindam Chaudhuri has propagated the Theory 'I' management as India-centric management and concluded Gandhi as the best practicer. His leadership style is dependent on the circumstances. In India, he used Khadi style whereas in South Africa he launched the same Satyagraha with suit. The democratic style with more importance to followers is found in his strategy. Gandhi applied different strategies to suit the requirements, the same was suggested by Blue Ocean Group as Reconstructionist Strategy and hence it is a lesson to human resource practioners.

3.9. Ethics and Values

The above principles are invariably connected with human resources development. In today's turbulent industrial setting the linkage of Gandhian ideology to HR practices is expected to give human touch with self-development and ultimately industrial harmony. The organization development is also likely to be achieved with application of the above principles. The economic, social, political factors of Gandhian era are different in comparison with present liberalization, globalization and privatization period.

4. Conclusion

The post globalization phase was an important chapter in Indian economic history. The redundancy of existing policies to face competition was a subject open for discussion, but economics out of philosophies and ideology may be replicated or tried with the current terminology. Gandhian Philosophy of peaceful co-existence is wonderful tool to bring humane face to current economic problems. Further, managing the human and workers problems on account of globalization is a priority. Therefore, an attempt is made to bring a comparative linkage between Human Resources Practices and Gandhian Ideology.

The selection process, collective settlement and trusteeship find a place in management practices. Therefore, his philosophy is relevant to Human Resource Management function. These principles are intertwined with the development and conceptualization of Human Resources practices.

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