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Gandhian Ideology towards Health

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“**M.K. Gandhi**” the word denotes not only the name of sample freedom fighter but a great thinker, social reformer, Social Scientist, Naturopathist’, father of the nation etc. Before explaining Gandhian ideology towards health it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word “health”. A healthy man is a person whose body is free from disease and can carry on his normal activities without fatigue. Gandhi states that it is necessary to have knowledge about one’s body which most of them are ignorant about. Good working of the human body depends upon the harmonious activity of the various component parts, “It is Health that is real Wealth and not pieces of gold and silver” he explains.

Gandhi was an independent thinker. He looked at all ideas afresh. He believed that modern medicine is the bane of man when used to perpetuate bad habits. Unpleasant reactions to food, drink or bad habits are our body's way of telling us to form better habits but instead we resort to medicine to mask the symptoms and inculcates faith in our body's own self-healing mechanisms. Gandhi’s book on “**Keys to Health**” is one of the most popular than all of his writings which sheds light on importance of his ideas regarding health.

Gandhi states that observing Brahmacharya lead to a healthy life. It is the mode of life which leads to realization of God. The realization is through practicing self-restraint of senses. The next point to focus on is: what is the use of the human body? Gandhi replies to it that, “everything in the world can be used and abused and it applies to our body too. We abuse it when we use it for selfish purposes, in order to harm our body. It is put to right use if we exercise self-restraint and dedicate ourselves to the service of the whole world.

Gandhi was a great philosopher & experimentalist, His thoughts regarding health and medicine is relevant even in today’s modern era. He opined that health is the actual wealth. Therefore,

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Gandhiji always emphasized people to adopt and be regular for meditation, yoga, exercises, in their daily routine. It may tough to provide health services to every single person in society, ever then, awareness programs regarding measures to gain good health & measures to prevent from diseases can be through the every corner of society, making every single person can have access to it. Gandhiji was very alert on health perspective and committed a lot on how to identify the symptoms and cure from the diseases. Gandhiji believed that the human body is an outcome of nature. His thoughts regarding health were also natural. Gandhiji urged that pure air, water and food have it's all and important contribution in healthy human body & mind. Gandhiji wanted to make people aware about health and to cure them from different kinds of diseases. Thus we find that Gandhiji's ideologies & philosophies on health relevant in even today's modern sector of community medicine and professional social work. Gandhiji's ideology regarding health is long lasting to the society. He always advocated for simple, nutritious food to the people. He strongly opposed to any kind of drug or alcoholic consumption and stressed on not to fall with these health hampering & mind pollutant objects.

This paper presents a view on how Gandhiji advocated for good health of common people believing that in order to make a nation with strength the citizens should be healthy with mind and body. This paper also focuses on his philosophies and ideas which advocate for the better health applying the natural means, awareness & control on the senses.

He believed only in truth. The truths get by experiment. So after his writing autobiography 'my experiment with truth' the subject of "health" was one to which Gandhi was intensely dawn, And his views, experiments, and findings it are therefore of considerable interest. "Health" -is the real wealth".

Very few people knows that in his young age Gandhiji wanted to be a doctor but because of his father and brother's objection he denied it. But the interest of knowing of human body and medicine was alive in him. His studies and experiments on health convinced him that the system of allopath was basically wrong. He accepted that Ayurveda and Naturopathy which are based on sounder principles and in effect, because a practioner of a system of medicine based on their teaching. He wrote articles on health in Indian opinion and after that published them under

the title guide to health.

Ayurveda is totally different from, allopathic fundamentally techniques and methods of treatment of Ayurveda and allopathic is different. In fact Ayurveda is more closely related to naturopathy because it uses methods such as fast and control of diet and medicine it prescribed are made from leaf, fruits barks and roots. Gandhiji was conscious of the similarity between Ayurveda and naturopathy and he took a lively interest in the different medicines prescribed by Ayurveda.

In his writing regarding health “Bapu” mentioned the meaning of the word “Health”- Which means body ease. Gandhi mentioned that of healthy man is a person whose body is free from diseases carry on his normal activities without getting tired. He stated that human body is made up of five elements “earth, water, vacancy, light, and Air. He says that human body can only work if the activity of various component parts is harmonious in his whole life. Gandhi did experiment and believed that only Ayurveda & naturopathy is the way to be cured. He only supported allopathic in critical occasions in need of modern medical intervention in the form of surgery. We needed an operation in 1924 when he was severely suffering from Appendicitis.

Gandhi was the person of free mind. He defined everything on the basis of experiment. Regarding human body also. Gandhiji tells that it is our body only we are responsible for its cure. He always supported the quotation “Prevention is better than cure”. He stated that we abuse our body for selfish purposes, in order to harm our body. Still we are talking regarding Gandhian view on health. It also covers the food portion.

Further Gandhi divides food into three categories: vegetarian, flesh and mixed. According to him, vegetarian is best among all followed by mixed. Gandhi states the importance of milk, cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, fats and the proportion in which it should be used. In his opinion there are definite drawbacks in taking meat as in order to get meat we have to kill. Regarding condiments Gandhi says, that body requires certain salts which mostly occur naturally in various food stuffs and from his personal experiments of fifty years is that there is no need for such condiments to keep body healthy except is necessary for medicinal purposes. Regarding sweets he is of the opinion that jaggery is the best among all and fried food should be avoided. Moving forward let us consider how often and how much to eat?

Here Gandhi replies, "Food should be taken as a matter of duty even as a medicine to sustain the body, never for the satisfaction of palate. There should be self-control as such habits of elders influence children to some extent." Then Gandhi focuses on how often should one eat? So the general rule is to take three meals. Gandhiji accepted only vegetarian food in any situation. Once his wife Kasturba bai had to be operated in a hospital for a major gynecological disorder. The attending Dr. (Physician) insisted Mrs. Gandhi to take at least meat broth to reduce risk to her life, however Gandhiji dismissed him, removed Kasturba from Hospital, & nursed her back to health with nature cure methods. Gandhiji was the person who always tried to find out the root cause of any problem. He was in support of nature and naturopathy. His thinking was that the main cause of people's mental and physical illness is disharmony with nature.

Again he (Gandhi) states that, "Drugs and drink are the two arms of the devil with which he strikes his helpless slaves into stupefaction and intoxication." Gandhi gave various reasons for drinking such as imitating the rich people, addiction formed during medicinal use, to get assistance from whites during British rule, environment and social disorganization, easy availability of it, etc. The effects are not only financial loss but also moral loss. Focusing on tadi, Parsis are of the opinion that though it's an intoxicant it helps in digestion of food. Gandhi examined this point in detail and came to conclusion that, tadi use can lead to nuisance in society and so it can have no place in man's food. The advantages of tadi are available in other food-stuffs. Tadi is made from fresh khajuri juice which is not intoxicant and it's known as nira which is useful for constipation. Tadi is the fermented form of khajuri juice which is intoxicant. Moving forward Gandhi states that khajuri is variety of palm tree and palm tree is useful for jaggery making. But since it's been used to make tadi there is shortage of sugar which affects the poor people the most. Another vice was opium abuse which started during British as they commercialized it in India. He also states the evils of smoking cigarettes which is both among young and old. Earlier smoking was limited and was done in privacy but under the influence of Englishmen it became widespread in use. Gandhi gave various ill-effects of smoking like impaired eye-sight, problem in digestion, etc. The most humiliating thing related to smoking was during Gandhian period certain company sold cigarettes bearing the

name of “Mahatma Gandhi” cigarettes because tobacco use was opposed by Gandhi. Gandhi further implied that, ‘if every smoker stopped the dirty habit of making his mouth a chimney to foul breath by making a present of his savings to some national cause, he would benefit both himself and the nation.

Gandhi laid stress on spiritual purity as a requirement of good health. According to him the dirty mind can never be anything but just diseased. His belief was that a person who attends to his daily namaz or Gayatri in the proper spirit need never get ill. After several experiment Gandhiji come to know that only medicine (Allopathic, nature is not the solution of every problem but) to observe fast is also a cure. He told to avoid over eating and obesity.

A part from the originality of this insight it is the key stone of Gandhi’s philosophy of health. Nutrition and public sanitation are other major topics Gandhiji were deeply interested. His observation was that Indians lack in public sanitation. The most important reason for illness in India is the defective and harmful method of answering calls of nature. The unhygienic toilets and defecating in open leads to major diseases. Hence sanitation is a major problem. For improving the conditions regarding this Gandhi had made a committee in Africa and also in Ahmadabad where volunteers would visit every nook and corner and also homes to check and educate regarding sanitation. But it was later observed that old habits die hard. People are clean as individuals but not as members of society.

After doing discussion on so many topics M.K. Gandhi came to community. He described regarding nutrition and public sanitation. These were the topic in which Gandhi was deeply interested Gandhi complained that the sanitation condition is very deplorable in India. And not only the problem of sanitation was these but the condition of the person who use to carry human excreta was also not well. They were exploited. In that condition Gandhiji gave them a name “Harijan” He was a powerful advocate of the abolition of untouchability.

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