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## **Mahatma Gandhi And The Concept Of Vows**

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### **Introduction:**

Mahatma Gandhi's personality fascinated the world. He was a great man. He wanted to create a balance of Non-Violent Society based on moral values. The aim was to create equality, physical and moral development of mankind and the society. He believed that it is possible with the help of Truth and Non- violence. Gandhi introduced the concept of Vows to prepare humans mentally to use the principles effectively.

### **Meaning and need of Vows:**

“Vow” means firm decision according to Gandhi. There are many problems in our life. Vows are useful to solve the problems. A firm decision is to face the problems without hesitation. Gandhi Says, “A life without vows is like a ship without anchor built on slip sand instead of a solid rock. A vow imparts stability, ballast are firmness to one’s character. According to him, vows are important to know ourselves and to build our character.

### **Gandhi’s Concept of Vows:-**

On every Tuesday after prayer, Gandhiji used to write a letter and send it to the people living in the hermitage (Ashram).

All the sesermonsare collected in his book,Mangal Prabhat.All these sermons are written on Tuesday mornings.Therefore the name „Mangal Prabhat is given. Gandhiji’s Disciple Vinoba Bhave has written eleven vows in the form of„Shloks.

"अहिंसा सत्य अस्तेय ब्रम्हचर्य असंग्रह !  
शरीराश्रम आस्वाद सर्वत्रभय वर्जन !!  
सर्वधर्मी समानत्व स्वदेशी स्पर्शभावना !  
ही एकादश सेवावी नम्रत्वे व्रत निश्चये !!

The first five Vows are considered as great Vows. Gandhiji has told these Vows to nurture moral and good thoughts. According to him the root cause of grief is selfish and greedy attitude. Because of this kind of attitude violence, injustice, atrocity, inequality,

exploitation has increased. All human beings are nurtured; their power can be used for the following vows.

**1) Satya (Truth):-**

The concept of truth is the most important or deterministic value of Gandhi's thought and activism. For him it is the *raison detre* of all existence and is therefore the all-inclusive principle. It is considered by Gandhi as the indispensable principle for the individual if he is to evolve as a human being. This desire for truth, according to Gandhi's advocacy, extended to the desire to observe truth in thought, speech and action. However, truth for Gandhi is more importantly to be practiced as principle by the individual rather than placing it merely at the ideational or thought level.

Truth is the main principle of Gandhism. Human behaviour should be pure and sacred. We should not give up morality. Everyone should insist on „Truth“ to change the minds of people and create an ideal society „Truth is God and God is Truth“, Gandhiji used to say.

**2) Ahinsa (Non-Violence):-**

According to Gandhiji, „Truth is God and, „Non-violence is Religion. Gandhiji expected the thought „Ahinsa Parmodharma Non-violence is psychological power. First and spiritual power at the end. We should oppose cruelty and injustice. If it is not possible with Non-violence, violence is excusable. “Violence is better than cowardice, Non-violence is the best.”

At a personal level; Ahimsa consists in not only forbearing from physical violence; in order to achieve non- violence it is necessary to remove from the mind all hatred, all jealousy and all desire to harm even those who harm us. The next step would be to extend our love to all living beings, including living beings like snakes, tigers, etc.

At a social level, the goal of Ahimsa is to create a society where there would be no need to act in an anti-social manner and hence no need for any punishment. This can happen only when the economic differences between the classes get considerably narrowed down and when the erring members of society are considered as their own brothers by the righteous.

**3) Asteya (Non-Stealing):-**

Asteya means not to steal. To steal means to deprive of the authority of others to use things. Gandhiji expected the broad meaning of “Asteya”. According to Gandhiji making use of many without work, using money unnecessarily, not collecting money, using things carelessly is not expected.

Gandhiji, however, gave a far wider connotation to stealing. According to him those members of the family who help themselves to better facilities depriving the other members, are thieves. Even those who enjoy luxuries not available to the lower strata of society are also thieves.

So, a person who wishes to apply Asteya in his life ought to lead such a simple life that he takes for himself from society only his minimum requirements.



**4) Brahmacharya (Celidacy):-**

Brahmacharya normally connotes a rigid control over sexual urge. An unmarried man who shuns sex is called a Brahmachari.

According to Gandhiji, however, this is a very narrow meaning of the word. 'Brahmacharya' really means 'Moving towards, Brahma' that is, towards truth. For such a person's control over all senses is necessary. So also, it is necessary to keep him self away from attachment to social Brahmacharya connections. In achieving this end, control of sex is perhaps most helpful, because sex is one of the strongest temptations to cause one to stray from the narrow path of truth. Again marital relations are the cause of the strongest social bond, that of the family. Hence the importance attached to the control of sex, which became synonymous with Brahmacharya. Control of sex, can also help the Sadhaka to gain control over his other senses.

Gandhiji has told this vow for self-control and patience. Students should not give importance to sexual desires during their educational period. Students should avoid the life that nourishes sexuality. Brahmacharya is a mental state: It is undoubtedly helped by abstinence in all respects. Indulgence of the palate will be the surest signs of a weak mental state which is repugnant to Brahmacharya.

“A large part of the miseries of today can be avoided if we look at the relations between the sexes in a healthy and pure light and regard out selves as trustees for the moral welfare of the future generations.”

**5) Asangraha (Not-Possession):-**

This vow is like 'Asteya'. Asangraha means not collecting things. The person who is non-violent and searching for truth does not collect things. Asangraha is almost a corollary of Asteya. In order to follow the dictum of non-thieving one must have as few possessions as possible.

For Gandhiji, Non-possession was also a proof of one's faith in God. He used to quote instances of devotees who did not believe in keeping back a little food even for the next meal. Asangraha also helped one in slowly giving up the attachment towards worldly possessions, an essential condition of a seeker of truth, which every Ashramite was expected to be.

These, then, are the interpretations of Panch Maha Vratas. Let us now turn to the other six vows, which project the social application of these five.

**6) Sharira-shrama (Physical labour):-**

According to Gandhiji physical labour is necessary for everyone. Everyone should work for his livelihood. Any kind of labour (work) like spinning, weaning, carpentering, farming etc. can be done. Gandhiji got the idea of Bread labour from Tolstoy. The idea is that everyone must put in some physical labour to earn his daily bread. An intellectual or an artist or a person with any other ability should utilize that ability for the service of society, while bread should be earned through physical labour alone.

**7) Asvada (Control ofPalate):-**

Relishing is closely related to Bachelorhood. But this vow has been given an independent place. It consists of control over tongue. To live simple life it is necessary to have control over tongue. The taste of life can be experienced if our interests are scientific and having patience. This theory is at the root of this vow. This vow is important to live a life of “Simple living and high thinking”. Gandhiji gave it a special place as a separatevow because he believed that control of the palate was inevitable for Brahmacharya that observance of Brahmacharya became easier if taste was conquered. Besides, conquest of taste was helpful in the conquest of other sensestoo.

The most important condition of Asvadawas the conviction that food is meant only to sustain the body for service of others.So, to indulge the taste by a variety of culinary delicacies was against the spirit ofAsvada.

This vow was adhered to rather rigidly in the Ashram. The food in the common kitchen was as simple as possible, without any condiments, some times even without salt. Individual families who cooked at home did not always develop Asvada to the extent desirable. All the same most of these families had their own rules regarding simple diet more or less in keeping with the concept of Asvada.

**8) Abhay (Fearlessness):-**

This is a very important vow. This mentality is necessary for person who believes in truth. Freedom from fear increases with the belief in truth. It means freedom from all kinds of fears. To tolerate agony means freedom from fear. A coward can not believe in truth.

Fears are innumerable. All of us are afraid of disease, injury, death; of loss of wealth, loss of prestige, loss of loved ones; of displeasing our dear ones, of displeasing the boss, of displeasing society and so on. Some people can get rid of some of these fears, others struggle to conquer other fears. In order to realise truth, it is necessary to remove all fear, which is hardly possible. A Sadhaka should, therefore, endeavour to rid himself or herself of as many kinds of fears as possible.

The fear of God, which in other words means the fear of wrong doing, is one fear which no one should give up. This fear keeps us on guard against further growth of unwholesome traits of the mind and perhaps helps us in going beyond ordinary fears.

**9) Sarva-dharma-samabhav (Equality respect for all Religions):-**

Man on the earth had to depend on his own understanding of his predicament unlike the members of the animal kingdom. He was stricken by fear of insecurity; so, it is said, man has inherited the fear of the primordial man. The fear is the cause of the birth of religion. Religion as a psychological security for him has helped him grow into a modern man and achieve so many skills. Yet the fear in him was not disappeared.

According to Gandhiji equality to all religion is a very important Vow. Gandhiji says, “I call broadmindedness as equality to all religions.” Respect to all religions is expected here.



Gandhi viewed that there is no religion superior or inferior. All religions are equal. And all prophets also are equal. He argued that just as a tree had a million leaves, similarly though God was one, there were many religions as there were men and women though they were rooted in one God. They did not see the plain truth because they were followers of different prophets and claimed as many religions as there were prophets.

**10) Swadeshi (Duty towards neighbor and):-**

This is basic concept of Gandhiji's principles. Gandhiji call it a great vow of the era. According to Gandhiji swadeshi is freedom from all external relations.

As early as 1909 Gandhiji had found that India was filled with items of every day use imported from England. This was one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the country. Then again, it was necessary to induce Indians to be proud of their country. In order to achieve this, Gandhiji after returning to India in 1915, researched on Khadi, reestablished the forgotten Charkha and unfolded his theory of Swadeshi, for the rejuvenation of Indian economy and Indian self-respect...

But then, Gandhiji was never satisfied with only the economic or political aspect of ideas. He gave Swadeshi a deeper significance based on an ancient ideal which says that one's first duty was not one's neighbours. Fulfilled in the spirit of love, that duty was not to at variance with one's duty to men further away either.

It was in this light that Gandhiji said that the Swadeshi movement was not harmful to the British mill hand, as it saved him from exploitation of his Indian brethren. This spirit of love made the labourer in Manchester his friend when Gandhiji went there even though Gandhiji was instrumental in bringing about unemployment of the British textile labourer.

**11) Asprishyatnivarana (Removal of Untouchability):-**

Untouchability has an important place in Gandhiji's principles. There is discrimination on the basis of caste, religion of races, in Indian Society. There is feeling of superior, inferior and touchable. It is harmful for national integration. For Gandhiji ever since his twelfth year the ideal that any human being was inferior to another was not palatable. He always resisted the very basis of untouchability. He called it a cancer of Hindu Society. He had already started practicing the removal of untouchability while in South Africa.

Then, soon after he returned to India he accepted an untouchable family in the Ashram. Several of the inmates, including Kasturba were quite upset at this step; the financial aid that the Ashram was receiving all but stopped. Gandhiji, however did not flinch from his decision. The resentment soon died down and sympathetic friends solved the financial problem as well.

Later on Gandhiji gave the name 'Harijan' to the untouchables and gave a great deal of his time to their amelioration. So these were how the eleven vows were observed in Gandhiji's Ashram. They were quite well known in his lifetime. Even non-Ashramites studied them and tried to follow some of them to some extent.

The eleven vows cover such a vast canvas of life that one cannot say enough about their relevance today and tomorrow.

The concept of vow is not new. From the ancient times the concept of vow has been introduced. People followed vows, but it was for their personal salvation. It did not contain social service and social duties. Gandhiji gave a new intention to salvation and social vow in his concept. Gandhiji did an eminent work by relating these vows with earthly welfare instead of relating with heavenly world.

**Findings:-**

1. Gandhiji introduced the concept of Vows to make use of truth and Non-violence effectively for the psychological development of human beings.
2. Vow means, "To face the difficulties without hesitation."
3. Vows are important for understanding and characterbuilding. Gandhiji told it in his book,,Mangal Prabhat.
4. Gandhiji has told eleven vows to nurture human beings.
5. Ahinsa, Satya, Asteya, Brhamcharya and Asangrash are considered as great vows.
6. Sharirshram, Aaswad, Abhay, Sarvadharmasambhav, swadeshi and Sparshbhavna are important in one "slife."
7. Gandhiji has related individual salvation and social duties very well.
8. Gandhiji related his vows with earthly welfare instead of heavenly world.
9. Gandhiji"s concept of vows is a gift given to human life.

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