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THE MAHATMA OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Communication of any type has its root in the person's personality and psyche. Person's practices, philosophy and beliefs and clarity of means and ends affect his/ her communication style, use of words etc. Communication for Gandhi was the output of lot of thought process combined with experience and experiment and his words would come out with utmost clarity and conviction in an understandable language. If we want to see Gandhi from two sides they are as simple as the man himself: action and communication and communication and action. He was an enormous communicator and his communication ranged from individual to mass communication, from speeches to discussions, from writing to body language and from symbols to silence. This communication made him reach out to the rich and the poor, to the metros and hamlets, to the illiterate and the celebrities and intellectuals. The enormity of the reach of his communication and the penetration cannot be fathomed easily. In this article there is humble try to analyse Gandhi's communication style and manner, the impact of his communication and what lessons can be gained from his method of communication.

Keywords

Communication, Communication Skills, Writing Skills

1. Introduction

Gandhi, a leader and politician, a deep spiritualist and die-hard realist, a lawyer and jurist, a social reformer and law breaker, an experimenter and enigma, an economist and educationist, a writer and communicator; we may add many attributes and wonder if all or none fit him. There was one role of a communicator or writer that never changed with Gandhi whenever he donned different hats of the above mentioned roles. “He is such a great public, polysomic figure, open to so many different-even paradoxical-interpretations, that he has been ‘appropriated’ by a variety of individuals and groups with differing worldviews and ‘co-optations’. It is this phenomenon that has, to some extent, contributed to his sustenance and endorsement as an enduring and a contemporary ‘evergreen’ man of ideas and action.” [Sheth 2008] If we want to see Gandhi from two sides they are as simple as the man himself: action and communication and communication and action. Today the world knows about him, his thoughts and his actions and experiments because of his writings and writings on him. There are also some videos available as it was rare then.

He was an enormous communicator and his communication ranged from individual to mass communication, from speeches to discussions, from writing to body language and from symbols to silence. This communication made him reach out to the rich and the poor, to the metros and hamlets, to the illiterate and the celebrities and intellectuals. The enormity of the reach of his communication and the penetration cannot be fathomed easily. In this article there is humble try to analyse Gandhi’s communication style and manner, the impact of his communication and what lessons can be gained from his method of communication. “Gandhi’s communication style is now being rediscovered as there is a renewed interest in him and his ideas in the world and many people revere him as one of the greatest moral, political and peace communicators of the twentieth century”. [Kakadia, 2016]

2. Discussion

Communication is the lifeblood of any social or professional relationship or dealings. It is the only line of connect between humans. In the current world of technology it has become pertinent in various aspects. This research article tries to juxtapose the communication style and method of Mahatma Gandhi whose influence in many spheres is immeasurable and this is possible because of his communication. There are many problems that the modern professionals face in communication, especially in method of communication which this article will try to

address. The scope of the article is limited to the importance of communication, Gandhi's communication style, methods or techniques and what can be imbibed by the 21st Century person in professional and social sphere.

2.1 Communication as an Individual Style with Gandhi

Communication mainly a few aspects like oral, written, non-verbal and symbols. Those who tend to be effective leaders concentrate on oral and non-verbal communication, those who have flair for writing become writers or journalists, corporate leaders sometimes resort to use of symbols in communicating their philosophy. Communication of any type has its root in the person's personality and psyche. Person's practices, philosophy and beliefs and clarity of means and ends affect his/ her communication style, use of words etc. communication for a man like Gandhi was not just an external play of words and jargons or contrived tone and pitch or even meticulously trained non-verbal language. His communication was the output of lot of thought process combined with experience and experiment and his words would come out with utmost clarity and conviction in a simple understandable language.

Gandhi was not a great orator; his speeches are not at all examples of rhetoric, he was also not a great writer in the literary sense, he even did not have stunning looks and elegant or graceful body language. But he was a convincing speaker that people thronged to listen to him wherever he went, a very effective writer that the mass always look forward for his writing and comments on various themes, he was a charismatic figure that people in India and abroad swarmed at any place for his 'Darshan'. If one applies the theories of communication to Gandhi, he may be an average communicator and experts or Image Consultants today may also advise him to take training in speech mechanism, rhetoric, influential body language and dress sense. Yet, we know he was the most influential personality not only in India but in the world then and he is equally relevant in the contemporary times. The world leaders who have been known for their rhetoric, chic dress sense and leadership qualities have always looked upon Gandhi as the ultimate leader and a perennial source of inspiration on innumerable topics ranging from politics, world order, economics, sustainable development, emancipation, non-violence and so on. Why is it so? Let us try to analyse the communication of Gandhi and the intensive and expansive effect it had on Princes to paupers.

2.2 Essence of Gandhian Style of Communication

The first and the foremost aspect of Gandhi is deep thought process resulting into resilient conviction as the above model shows. Communication for Gandhi was not just an

outward pretence; he did not utter a single word till he was not ready to give his thoughts clearly and boldly. The words, be they from his mouth or pen would come out only after churning into the furnace of conviction and all the times he put his words first in action. There is a famous story of an old lady who approached Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram complaining that his son ate lot of jaggery. She knew that if Gandhiji convinced him not to eat so much of jiggery, he would agree. Gandhi told her to come after a week. She followed the suit. Gandhi talked to the young boy about the advantages of eating jiggery in a limit and the boy was convinced. The lady asked that the same advice could have been given a week earlier. Gandhi told her that even he used to eat a lot of jaggery so he had to reduce the intake and get convinced himself. The example shows of experience and conviction first and then communication. Gandhi could understand the people and their mood by experiencing, experimenting and introspecting. He would communicate and connect to the mass armed with this wisdom and knowledge and hence never failed to drive home any point. "In the first few minutes of his talk Gandhi absorbed the feeling of the audience and its needs. His words came slowly and precisely; so like a child was he that it was possible to see his thoughts arise, develop and be articulated in simple but powerful speech". [Easwaran, 1997]

Communication process that comes out from someone who has had similar experiences and who has experimented and thought intensively and extensively carries weight. Moreover, Gandhi used simple language to drive home the logic. Though he was not a literary figure, the only literary device he used in his written or oral communication was the use of examples or similes. He always gave a hypothetical situation or a convincing simile to drive home his points. In the world of literature many great authors have used similes and metaphors to make their point poignant; the greatest of all is of course, Shakespeare.

It is also noteworthy, that the language or simplicity of communication with Gandhi did not change or undergo modification as per the audience. He used the same type of communication or tone while talking addressing to huge crowd in a rural area or talking to G. B. Shaw or even discussing with King George. All of them were equally impressed by the subtlety of communication and indisputable logic and reasoning of the Mahatma. "He that will write in any tongue must follow this counsel of Aristotle, to speak as the common people do, to think as wise men do; so should every man understand him, and the judgement of wise men allows him." [Ascham Roger, 1545].

The main pillars of Gandhi's communication were incessant writing habit, simple speeches and dialogues, use of symbols and self-exemplifying. The public life of Gandhi commenced from South Africa and from there on there was no stopping of this man. The mighty British Empire just had to grope in darkness against the choking movements of this man. He would meet people individually, in groups or in mass meetings. Gandhi was a prolific writer who wrote letters, replies to letters, articles in newspapers and books. He might have connected directly to millions and millions of people across the globe through his speeches and writings. It is enigmatic that without today's fast means of communication and message dissemination how could he communicate and connect with such a large mass. There was no letter unanswered by him or no article incomplete and the message would reach to the length and breadth of the country. "The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi is spread over more than 100 volumes. He could write about 50 letters a day. Collection of his letters reach the magic figure of 1, 00,000." [Sheth, 2008]. It is an enigma for many of us using modern gadgets and matter of learning for CEOs who leave many emails unanswered in their mailbox. Communication is the only means to connect and solve problems and Gandhi firmly believed in it and hence practised it.

The use of language by Gandhi is also interesting and matter of study. Unlike many leaders he did not employ rhetoric techniques and unlike many business leaders of today he did not use sonorous jargons and captions. Clarity was the only thing he aimed while communicating for which he used simplicity of language and logic and used similes and examples. "The results are substantive; not merely cosmetic: improving the quality of writing actually improves the quality of thoughts." [Gopen, 1990]. Gandhi also advised the lawyers and legal professionals who indulge in rhetoric in courtrooms speeches and flowery legalese drafting style. "I do wish as a practised draftsman to warn writers of petition, whether they be pleaders or otherwise, to think of the cause they may be espousing for the time being. I assure them that a bare statement of facts embellished with adjectives is far more eloquent and effective than a narrative glowing with exuberant language. Petition writers must understand that they address busy men, not necessarily sympathetic." [Gandhi, 1962] He also coined new words to change the connotation and mind-set of the people thus invoking the traditional and modern. The use of words like 'Sarvodaya', 'Antyodaya', 'Padyatra', 'Harijan', 'Daridranarayan' etc. shows his insight into the psychological connotation of language. He also used vivid pictures for describing. "At the same time, simplicity and lucidity did not prevent him from constructing vivid, living pictures. He used the word Himalayan instead of the conventional colossal to describe the enormity of his

miscalculation or mistake...Gujarati Jodnikosh is his permanent contribution which standardised Gujarati spellings. [Sheth, 2008]

We must also throw some light on Gandhi's speeches here. The public speakers' forums, soft skills trainers, public speaking trainers and rhetorical techniques talk about the use of impressive and body language, tone and voice modulation, eye contact, confidence and an excellent dress code like James Bond. One must visit the available videos or audio tapes of the original speeches of Gandhi to compare the beliefs and practices of the world about tone, body language and dress with Gandhi's delivery of speeches. Many researchers have tried to compare Gandhi's communication with other great leaders like Lincoln, Churchill, Mao Zedong, Hitler and others. Gandhi's manner of speech may not match the rhetoric, language, dramatic element of these leaders but none can match his clarity, simplicity and habit of walking the talk. His messages were not temporal or class based but permanent and for humanity. He stood for many matters unlike most other leaders who addressed only a few issues and that also for a temporary time targeting some people or their region only. "Brevity of expression, clarity of thought and dynamic delivery of messages- all of this combines a near perfect credibility of source-that was Gandhi. And that was his unique mass-communication that took the world by storm." [Kakadia, 2016]

2.3 Gandhi's Insight into Human Psyche

Gandhi was endowed, or he developed, with a tremendous insight into psychology and sound wisdom. This was also because of his in-depth involvement in various movements and travelling the expansive Sub-Continent wherein he could grasp the nerves of the people, economic strains and cultural connotations. Gandhi also made use of symbols in his movements against the British Empire and social as well as economic reforms. Many business leaders employ symbols, logos, captions and develop some unique styles to communicate to the people at various levels. Gandhi used it long before it became a strategy and was preached by management gurus. "No other leader before Gandhi had such a clear and complete strategy of action. None possessed either his poise or his uniquely different organizational and communication skills. Gandhi evolved a distinct mode of discourse. He appealed to the emotions of the lowest common denominator by judiciously selecting culturally significant symbols drawn from the daily lives of ordinary Indians. It worked like magic when these everyday objects suddenly transformed into objects of reverence and started representing the collective will of a nation, the most prominent ones being khadi, the loincloth, the Gandhi cap and the spinning

wheel.” [Kakadia, 2016]. These symbols were so effectively and timely imbibed into the national movement that people recognized it as symbols of a nation. The logic that he gave was again as crystal clear that can drain down any throat. The use of Gandhi cap saves long cloth used in turbans, the spinning wheel gives employment to thousands of people in rural and urban areas and thus reducing the import of British made cloths; the spinning wheel also gave a person time to think, introspect and peace of mind while his hands wove self-reliance for his country. It became easier for the soldiers of freedom and Swaraj to explain to the people by practising simple traits and giving lucid logic.

2.4 Gandhi’s Soul Communication

Gandhi was perhaps the first exponent of ‘Soul Force’ or ‘Soul Communication’. People even today are not much aware about this concept which does not seem tangible or plausible in action or results. Gandhi believed in the inherent Hindu philosophy of the spirit or the soul that transcends ages and is timeless. He knew that cleansing the soul and evoking the soul force is vital for the development of an individual. His goal in life was to seek truth, cleanse soul, be fearless, pursuit of spirituality and God. The people were mesmerized by the truthfulness and holiness of his soul. Soul was an integral and active part of human life according to Gandhi and not just an abstract thing which is remembered when the body dies and soul departs or addressed to in religious texts. Narayanbhai who was the son of Gandhiji’s secretary Mahdevbhai Desai said in one interview, “I don’t believe that Gandhiji always addressed only to the soul. In fact he addressed to the mind and to the intellect also. But more deeply he addressed to the soul. So he used to address to all three and not any one. Sometimes it is seen that the mind has not liked something and intellect has not been convinced but has pinched the heart and thus caused a change. Therefore Gandhiji considered all three interwoven. Gandhiji, though, never underestimated the role of mind and the intellect however he tried more emphatically to convey the message by entering into the listener’s soul. I see and regard this as the best method of communication towards which students of communication have normally paid less attention so far.”[Kakadia, 2016]. Many famous books today like ‘The Alchemist’ and ‘The Secret’ have talked about the soul language or universal soul and Gandhi not only knew about it but had experienced and experimented effectively.

Understanding others is a very important and vital component of communication process. There cannot be a common platform of communication without understanding. If one wants to communicate effectively it is very vital to understand the intellect, emotions, and beliefs etc. of

the other persons. Gandhi began his process of public life by first understanding the oppressed and the oppressor. His experiences and deliberate travel enabled him to understand even the deep rooted and sub-conscious psychology of various classes including the British. He observed a lot, read a lot to understand the British laws, listened to the people attentively and thus understood what they have to say and even what they do not say. “Gandhi explored new fields of communication. He would sit and sway and say nothing and then he would smile and touch his palms together in greeting. He had communicated. In interviews, Gandhi did not merely make statements or answer questions. His chief purpose was to establish a close relationship with the other person because that contributed more to understanding than his words.” [Fischer, 1992]. There are many such examples of Gandhi talking to great leaders like Rajaji or Deshbandhu where the other person was not able to explain or write and Gandhi would intervene and say, “Perhaps you want to say this,” and the other stalwart would be taken aback agreeing and wondering how Gandhi entered their mind and understood.

The discussion, evidences and examples of Gandhi as a great communicator covering all the aspects of communication from speaking to writing from listening to reading from observing to soul communication can go on and on giving the magnanimous work and activities carried out by him in one lifetime. It is important for us here what lessons can be learnt by today’s professionals, individuals and leaders on communication from such a great man. Gandhi’s communication does not seem to be Rocket Science on the contrary he never wanted it to be such but very simple.

3. A Few Lessons on Communication from Gandhi’s Style and Method

3.1 Self and Communication

Communication starts from within i.e. one’s life, experiences and experiments. It is important to walk the talk. Many professionals or leaders today cannot make that long lasting impact because they themselves do not practice what they preach. Gandhi first practised and then preached after conviction. A CEO who talks about cost cutting leads a luxurious life or squanders company money only to take away a few jobs in the name of cost cutting or a political leader talking about ideals and soon found in some scandal or a so-called management Guru who has never worked in practical field or faced practical problems fail to have a lasting impact because the communication is just outward and jargons or quotes of famous people. “Gandhi spoke in low voice, and in a monotonous tone. And yet the Indians who heard him listened,

because even if the tone was unvaried the words carried conviction. Gandhi inspired devotion not so much by his articles or speeches as by the exemplary nature of his life and conduct.” [Guha, 2014]

3.2 Lucid Language and Reasoning

It is very important to be simple and to the point or clear in what you want to convey. In a few words the message can be transmitted to the masses and understood. Many people especially in the legal field today [without any prejudice] employ high-sounding language, labyrinth of sentences and booming jargons to show their erudition or to market their scholarship. “Be short, be simple, be human.” [Sir Gowers, 1987]. This timeless wisdom is lost in the complexity of language like the message. If the professionals of today can convey in the language that the other persons understand, many of the problems and hassles can be avoided. It is not easy to be simple. People waste a lot of time and energy in complicated communication, booming speeches and rhetorical drafts and over-communication. Today the concept of Plain Language has caught up among the governments as well as the law courts across the globe and sardonically it was practised by a man from a slave and illiterate country called India.

3.3 Timeliness of Gandhi’s Communication

Gandhi was also mindful of timeliness of the communication. The people who have lived with him or who had the habit of correspondence with him always admired his timeliness. He would not leave any article unfinished for publication, any letter be it from a child or the Viceroy unanswered immediately. His correspondence was so vast that and varied that a renowned American journalist once wrote a letter from US addressing ‘To Mahatma Gandhi, wherever he is in India’. The letter travelled from Mumbai to Sabarmati Ashram and then to Wardha where Gandhi was stationed then. The journalist of course got a reply sooner than expected. He was an incredible writer who found time for writing God knows from where and all his writings are relevant and marvelled even today in the world. “According to John Haynes Holmes ‘Gandhiji’s writings are more than literature. These writings of the Mahatma are the documents of an age, the media of a political and spiritual connotation the instrument of one of the supreme personalities of all time...Every stroke of Gandhi’s pen, like every tone of his voice, was fraught with destiny.’ He adds, ‘So each word he wrote and said will be remembered forever.’ [Sheth, 2008]

3.4 Gandhi’s Wit and Humour for Effective Communication

Gandhi was also known for his sense of humour that he practised sometimes on himself and sometimes on the situation. His sarcasm was quite humorous and subtle that even the

Viceroy or the King of British Empire understood and marvelled. They agreed to it but never took it to heart. Sense of humour can dispel bitterness, ease tense situations and it breaks the ice between two persons or groups. Many people use it naturally and many invent a joke. It is an effective tool of communication again advocated by experts that Gandhi used it with ease.

4. Conclusion

There are many lessons one can learn from this Mahatma of communication from one to one conversation to speeches, correspondence to document drafting and negotiations to speeches; communication to mass communication. Certain aspects of Gandhian communication style and methods may not be befitting to all the aspects of contemporary workplace or social spheres but there are universal tips for honing skills like communication begins from within first use of language and reasoning which is understandable etc. “Mahatma Gandhi used extra-ordinary ways to communicate his messages to millions of people. He thus was one of the greatest all time mass communicators of the world. He used extra-sensory perceptions to build bridges with common people at large. The immortality of his messages made Mahatma Gandhi a unique mass communicator of the class of his own.” [Kakadia, 2016]. Gandhi has always been a subject of research in various fields but very little has been done in the field of communication. There is a good amount of future research in this field of Gandhian Communication for which this article has modestly just paved the path. The emerging avenues of corporate communication, business communication, communication management which is a vital module in Project Management study and legal and official drafting are the fields of further research in Gandhian Communication. The further research can enhance the study of communication and management and it may also help the drafters, journalists and managers in honing their skills of communication. This article, as all other research articles across disciplines, has its limitations. There has not been any substantial measurement of the communication skills of Gandhi or any comparative study or case with any of his contemporary leader. The article also does not show how Gandhi’s communication skills can be imbibed or practised in the modern work place with tangible results, this is not in the scope of this study.

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