

## LEADERSHIP AND SOCIETY

A little lump of salt: Revisiting Dandi- march

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### Dandi march of Mahatma Gandhi

The event described in this article is Mahatma Gandhi's historic Dandi march from Sabarmati ashram to Dandi, a remote, neglected village in Gujarat. In terms of application of the principles of, planning organizing and execution, it not only surpasses the standards of excellence in leadership but also demonstrates the role of values in management practice.

### Incubation: generating the right idea

In 1929, the Viceroy of India had rejected the proposal of a dominion status (autonomy within the foreign rule). India needed a strong movement for protest and resistance. In 1930, poet Rabindranath Tagore went to Sabarmati ashram and asked Gandhi. "What are your plans? What is your next move?" Gandhi was clear about the governing values that would guide his action, but the concrete action plan was nowhere in sight. It was clear to him that only those followers who had deep faith in non-violence would lead the movement and others would follow them. If the movement turns violent, he would terminate it. (Mishra, A. 2009)

### The idea and the symbol

As far as proposal for action was concerned, various ideas were offered by senior Congressmen like Vallabhai Patel, Rajaji and others. Some of the suggestion included, i. formation of a shadow government, ii. marching towards Viceroy's palace, iii.

Agitation against land revenue, and iv. protest before liquor shops. Gandhi listened to all these suggestions but wanted an agenda that would have a profound impact since nation was eager for a decisive action from congress and his leadership. After a few days of churning, a process of incubation in the subconscious, an image of salt appeared on the map of consciousness. He saw it clearly that he would pick up a handful of salt. He knew that this simple act had potential to send multiple messages and interpretations in the context of traditional Indian society where salt had a great symbolic meaning. It is important to recognize the rationale of salt as an agenda for agitation since there were many burning issues before the nation then. Why did he select salt as an agenda of satyagraha?

Gandhi himself had given the explanation

"The most basic needs of man are water, wind and salt, the only ingredient that adds taste to poor man's food is salt. Even cows and bullocks cannot survive without it. We use it in many ways, even as a fertilizer."

There were other reasons as well; If the movement was based on land revenue or taxes, British

government would have taken away the land and live stock of farmers. Salt is freely available in nature and is difficult to confiscate. There would not be any legal or practical difficulty that would submit the satyagrahis (volunteers) to police action. Producing salt, which is manual work, did not need additional resources. Above all, salt

is a product of nature, it surpasses all distinctions based on religion, language, region and gender.”

The Dandi march turned into a movement because it got a broader reference of ecology and equality. Most importantly, human civilization had regarded salt as an auspicious symbol from times immemorial. The folk culture had created sayings, stories, songs around salt that would appeal directly to heart of ordinary men and women.

This was the symbolic potential of a handful of salt.

#### **Preparing the ground and networking**

Once the issue was selected, the next immediate step that Gandhi took was to write a letter to the Viceroy announcing his plan to protest. The letter used strong words and logical arguments. It also reveals determination and courage to act with conviction. The letter begins with statement that British rule is a bane to India and explains it further in following words:

“Endless exploitation of our resources have destroyed the lives of millions of people, the country cannot afford the excessive expenditure on civil and military administration. British rule has made us slaves in a political sense. It has weakened the foundation of our culture, government has taken away our weapons, and it has made us spiritually weak.”

Gandhi mentions the exorbitant salary of the Viceroy in this letter. “Your monthly salary is 21,000 rupees, plus other allowances, and you are paid seven hundred

rupees a day. The percapita income of an Indian is less than two annas, it means that your salary is five thousand times more than the average Indian. I humbly request you to consider the situation in totality. I have referred to a private matter of your salary to make you aware of the painful truth, though I have absolutely no intention to hurt you. I hold you in high esteem, but we have to abandon the present system of governing. Organized non-violence is the only answer to the organized

violence of the British rule; if you do not wish to take any action, I would violate the law about salt on eleventh day of this month with some selected colleagues of mine. In case you wish to discuss the issue with me, I am willing to postpone my plan of self regulated disobedience of the law.”

The letter concludes with a phrase, 'Your sincere friend' instead of the conventional 'your most obedient servant.'

Congress leaders were skeptical about the agenda of this movement and the press ridiculed the idea as 'childish and dramatic attempt to challenge the British law that controlled production of salt by Indians'. Pandit Motilal Nehru sent a telegram to the Sabarmati ashram and asked “What would we achieve by picking up a handful of salt?” Gandhi sent a telegram in reply: “Just pick it and see what happens”.

It was a sharp and decisive reply.

#### **Planning and executing:**

After the announcing of the march, Gandhi worked on details of the event. Two of his close colleagues were sent to survey places in

south Gujarat to find a right location for protest march.

Both of them selected Dandi village near Surat and informed Gandhi accordingly. Now the schedule of the historic march was prepared. It would take twenty four days to walk the distance between Dandi and Sabarmati ashram. Daily walk of twelve miles from morning six to evening six. 'Such a walk is a child's play', Gandhi commented with a smile! The division of work among the volunteers was done. To explain the law that denied Indians to produce salt and its implications, Gandhi wrote an article in Young India. He announced the following guidelines to the followers in this article .

#### **Guidelines for Volunteers**

- \*Protest would be peaceful; it's an act in civil disobedience.
- \* If Police indulge in physical violence and firing, we would face it with exceptional courage without violent resistance.
- \*No indulgence in indecent behavior or abusing.
- \*If there is communal violence, volunteers would make active efforts to stop it.
- \*If arrested, do not ask for special concessions; follow rules of the prison meticulously.
- \*If the prison food is of bad quality or the mode of serving the food is insulting, refuse to eat it.
- \*Do not ask for family expenses to Congress, in case of arrest.
- \*Engage in a dialogue with villagers while on march from Sabarmati to Dandi.
- \*Speak to villagers on the topics of prohibition, cleanliness, education, eradication of untouchability and village development.

\*Do not trouble villagers for meals or expect concessions from them.

#### **Clarifying values and purpose: leading**

Gandhi was worried and anxious about eruptions of violence during the march since he had to abandon the non- cooperation protests in the past due to violence. For Dandi march, he personally selected seventy eight followers with extreme care .He explained to them in the best possible way, the principle of non- violence. The principle had moral and pragmatic implications as well.

He asked “If I ask people to use weapons in this movement of freedom, would the government let me remain free? If people challenge the government with violent killing and destruction, would the government remain passive? Has it happened anywhere in the world?

“You would not come here if you are afraid of being fired at ; you have come because you have understood and accepted the concept of voluntary surrender to imprisonment. India has seven lakh villages; even if ten persons in each village decide to violate the law of salt production what would the government do? Even the cruel dictator would not kill those who protest with peaceful disobedience. You have come here is a courageous act; you have understood that British government is confused and in a dilemma.”

Gandhi was right; the British government did not know how to deal with such a move. It did not know the details of the march. Extreme secrecy was maintained about critical details of the march. Only a list of

seventy-eight volunteers was published in Young India. Arresting them or Gandhi was would have been be problematic to the government before the march because of lack of evidence against them.

On 12 March 1930, Gandhi moved out of Ashram and the Dandi march began, with enthusiasm People across the country were waiting to watch what would happen next. All biographers of Gandhi had written fascinating description of this march. The two hundred miles march had numerous villages on the way. Villagers welcomed him with rangoli and garlands. People queued along the path to see him, watered the roads to settle the dust and showered flowers on the path towards Dandi

#### **Communication and capability building**

Gandhi would speak to villagers in simple language on various themes: cleanliness, law that prohibited them from salt production, un-touchability. In the evenings, he would go back to his daily routine that was unique: writing letters and articles for Navajivan and Young India, spinning of charkha ,and writing dairy. Even on the last day of the march, after the much publicized act of picking handful of salt, he returned to his daily routine as if nothing had happened. In a way it was a refusal to be carried away by publicity or the fame. During the march, he insisted that the volunteers write a diary and note all the details of each village, in terms of population , gender and communities, livestock, revenue, the requirement of salt, schools, number of boys and girls in schools, availability of free land in the village. It was

kind of a survey and rich data was collected in twenty four days of march.

#### **Operations: day to day maintenance**

The day- to- day administration of the campaign was done by a group of eighteen students of Gujarat University. When the volunteers had settled in a village for the evening, this group would move to the next village and select the location for rest, eating, and prayer. They would clean the place, arrange for water, and fuel, dig pits for temporary toilets, and move to the next village. It made life much easier for the other volunteers in the march.

On 6th April, Gandhi went to the seashore in the early morning with his followers. They dipped into the sea water. After prayer, Gandhi lifted a handful of salt gathered on the shore, others followed him. And the rest that followed is history. People in coastal villages, cities and towns participated in great numbers in act of nonviolent disobedience of the law.

It happened in many states and cities, Bihar, Bengal, Peshawar and Chittagaon. After Gandhi's arrest, the movement spread like wildfire and brute force was used by the British government. Negative news about police repression was reported in international press. The Viceroy made a proposal for discussion with the Congress and it closed an important chapter in the history of freedom movement. It concluded in a pact between Gandhi and the Viceroy.

The representative of weaponless masses and the Viceroy of British Empire came on a common platform for negotiation. Today, one

can understand the bitterness and anger of Lord Churchill when he described Gandhi as 'naked fakir climbing the steps of Viceroy's Palace!'

#### **Review and reflections on the event:**

Let us synthesize the points that emerge about the connection between Leadership and Society from the historic case of Dandi march and its relevance to the contemporary Indian context.

##### **1 Communication :**

At the level of mass communication, it used the emotive and cultural significance of a traditional symbol. The object of salt was elevated to the level a metaphor and an ideal. The Indian masses who revered their ancient folk traditions, were illiterate and half-starved, reiterated their faith in this symbol. Gandhi paved the way of integrating the masses with this cultural symbol that was connected with our day today living. It mobilized them for a spontaneous action at a national scale. Importantly, the Dandi march distinguished itself by absence of violence.

##### **2. Moral center of the movement and leadership :**

The principle of non violence was vindicated as a viable instrument with moral and pragmatic potential . In fact, it reinforced the moral center in the leadership of Indian freedom struggle.

As mentioned earlier in this article, we have seen political events of protests in post independent India our leaders have

used cultural, religious and social symbols with combination of modern technology and managerial skills. More recent examples are political campaigns on Ram Mandir and Mandal Commission issues. Invariably, they failed to hold moral center of the campaign by integrating values of means and end. The important connection between the end and means values was ignored and principle of personal integrity was violated. The Mandir campaign disregarded the sanctity of means and focused on the results and indulged in realpolitik. Similarly , Mandal campaign overemphasized means and lost sight of the end and purpose. Leaders of these campaigns had failed to anchor the value based politics that Gandhi could do so well.

The case is equally relevant for the students of management. The mainstream knowledge in management has not come to grips with the basic difference between results oriented leadership and it also silent on impact of leadership on collectivity. Value based leadership distinguishes itself form the conventional model of corporate leadership on this dimension . In case of Dandi march, the way it was conceptualized, communicated, organized and delivered reveal a close connection between means and ends; process and outcomes, individual and collectivity, leadership and society. Let us understand these finer distinctions in more detail.

##### **3. Personal integrity and value based leadership**

Communication with the help of symbols has a power to touch the imagination, feelings and actions of the people. The interpretation of the symbol is based of the meanings

created and held in the mind of the followers. The leader can intuitively anticipate it but has no direct control over it. Hence a culturally powerful symbol is a double edged weapon. It can go beyond the agenda set by the leader. Hence, there is a need for cultural/emotional meanings to be moderated by rationality or viveka. Gandhi focused on non violent means to moderate the energy triggered by the symbol. Moreover he practiced it to perfection and allowed only those of his followers who believed and practiced nonviolence. The guidelines for the followers in terms of conduct and action reveal his concern for the sanctity of the process and not merely the concern for impact and outcome.

This value based or process based leadership is a rare phenomenon in politics and business as well. The reason for the absence of such leaders is obvious: a lack of personal integrity. Such a leader who shows equal concern for processes and outcomes is tested in times of failures. The later events , during partition and post –independence period in life of Gandhi show that he did not give up the value-base even when his trusted followers and the masses disowned him and his agenda. He listened to his conscience and carried out processes anchored in non violence though it was politically disadvantageous to the Congress. (Kripalani K 2000 )This distinguishes him from other leaders in all political parties then and now. In spite of possessing the best talent for organizing, managing, communicating and executing, Gandhi remained free from the trappings of success and the larger than life image and remained true to himself and his inner voice. The

biographers have pointed out how such a leader would be an embarrassment to those who lead for results and success. This is the strength and risk in value based leadership

#### 4. Revisiting theory of Value based leadership

Let us return to our reference to the theoretical framework of values to appreciate the case of Gandhi's leadership in the context of post independent India and the world. (Argyris C 1993)

When we say that values are ideas or ideals, they refer to abstract concepts like peace, equality, freedom, prosperity (though it is possible to measure them by reducing it to operational , behavioral descriptions that is called the process of reductionism.) Moreover, these values or abstract ideas are not static qualities or property of objects and persons but are manifested in transactions between the person and the situation. Therefore, it is the individual who deploys certain personal qualities and properties like self reliance, honesty, self control as means to achieve the ideal end value. Hence it is set of values that includes both end and means held together in a coherent way. This coherence emerge from personal integrity of the individual. Without personal integrity human values would be inversion and distortion of values.

#### 5 Contemporary leadership and Gandhi

To appreciate the point that values are ideals sustained only by individuals with integrity the Society that sustains them, let us compare the values of Dandi march with

those prevalent in the later political campaigns in the country. In the campaigns of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and Mandal Commissions, the inversion of values was covertly accepted and held by the leaders and the followers jointly. Therefore, it is important to recognize the role of personal integrity and choice making in the discussion of these campaigns which were used for mass mobilization in post independence era.

These cases in leadership also highlight the importance of volition or choice making. In case of Mandir campaign, the Hindu identity and self esteem was the end value but the means value were the inversion and distortion of honesty, truthfulness and self-control. Manipulation of information, deceit, violence were used. In Mandal campaign, the end value projected was equality and opportunity for all but the means of reservation for education and employment were elevated to the position as end in itself. It confused the masses for short term political gains. In short, the Mandir campaign damaged Hindu identity based on long tradition of tolerance, wisdom and synthesis. Similarly, Mandal by over-focusing on means of reservation could not strengthen the underprivileged castes since they lost sight of the ultimate purpose or end value of equal opportunity for all through development of all. The personal integrity of the leaders in this campaigns was not questioned because we do not have a coherent framework for analyzing leadership in wider context of society.

### Conclusion

After seventy years we live in a context

where leaders in political and corporate spheres have deployed inverted or distorted means- values to achieve the so-called end values (espoused ends). They have rarely shown the use personal integrity and coherence of means and end to influence people.. In the absence of moral center that include integrity and coherence in values, leaders in corporate sector are regulated by legal means and the in the field of politics both moral and legal centers are missing.

Perhaps we can begin by generating and spreading knowledge that deals with the success and failure of value based leadership in our educational institutions. Education and specifically professional education (it includes management) is for the development of individual and society and that is its primary goal. The growth of economy and Industries are secondary goals. Studies in leadership, in social, political or corporate fields require a focus on much needed ethical and societal dimension to correct the imbalance caused by the inverted values that pervade our institutions. The case of Gandhi's Dandi march vindicates the value of such leadership. References

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