"Do or Die"- Learning Science Diplomacy from the Father of our Nation

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On 8th August 1942, on the eve of the launch of the Quit India movement, Mahatma Gandhi made a historic statement, "Here is a Mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or Die'". By this, he voiced the need for commitment to the cause at hand- to win freedom from colonial rule. Even today, this Gandhian philosophy is still the guiding light in our fight against various enemies. Currently, our nation is confronted with pandemic-induced health crises, agrarian catastrophes, water scarcity and many more challenges. While we struggle against these, we need to hear the frail lingering voice still saying "**Do or Die**". Yes! We have to take action, or we shall all die. We have reached a time when holistic, international collaborative efforts are the only means to stop the damage caused to our planet. It is just one of the many examples where the dire need for science diplomats comes to the fore. Gandhian philosophy is apt to foster genuine partnerships between policymakers, diplomats and scientists.

By cautioning, "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind", he stressed the need for establishing concrete diplomatic ties to foster friendship and prevent war among nations, along with his concept of **Sarvodaya and Trusteeship**. Let's look at how this man, not directly associated with science, whose name never appeared in any of India's science policies, is still capable of being the patron of Indian Science Diplomacy. Although there is a difference in opinion about Gandhiji's views on science, he is that scientist who performed 'Experiments with Truth'. These experiments have given India and the world breakthrough results that can guide science diplomats and policymakers in a multitude of dimensions. His philosophy embodies many elements of successful diplomacy, which includes building trust among all sections of society through a Cosmo-centric approach to humans.

In 1925, Gandhi wrote in '*Young India*'- "It is impossible for one to be an internationalist without being a nationalist. Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, i.e., when people belonging to different countries have organised themselves and are able to act as one man. It is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations which is evil." - an apt message for Indian Science diplomats who can uphold the true spirit of science for mankind as they forge new ties. His ability to portray India's economic growth and self-reliance by internationalising an object as trivial as the *charkha* (a cotton gin or spinning wheel) is a powerful lesson in diplomacy. Gandhiji's slogan,

"Khadi is the sun of the village solar system" is apt today when nations are grappling to handle microplastics entering water resources from synthetic clothing and threatening aquatic life. The IPCC special reports have warned that environment-related issues can threaten international relations. Recently, Sri Lanka correlated their air quality deterioration in Colombo to the pollution episode in India. While India struggles amidst its embarrassing air pollution levels, we remember Gandhiji's words- "We suffer much because we do not realise the value of pure air". Gandhiji gave the practical meaning of sustainability when he said, "The earth, the air, the land, and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So we have to hand over to them at least as it was handed over to us".

While we celebrated 150 years of Gandhiji's birth, Prime Minister Modi gave a call to spread Gandhian ideas through innovation. It was apt that India donated a 50 kilowatt 'Gandhi Solar Park' to the Headquarters of the United Nations - A gesture of achieving diplomacy through science going beyond mere talk on climate change. The Swachh Bharat campaign and India's Solar mission have been used rightly as powerful tools in Indian diplomacy. Our engineering and innovation policies have a word of caution from Gandhiji who expressed in '*Young India*' that "Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour".[2] Valiant women played an essential role during the Satyagraha and it reminds Indian leaders of the need for gender parity. This effort should be taken seriously by science diplomats, especially when India is struggling to better its disappointing rank of 140 in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index.

Indian Science diplomacy undeniably has in many ways been in sync with the vows of Gandhiji. The true essence of Science can be equated to Gandhiji's hymn **'Vaishnava Jana To',** which means that a true human being can feel the pain of another. Real science diplomacy has to work in this direction. India's efforts towards collaboration in developing climate-resilient crops, supply of generic medicines to African and other needy nations are guided by this principle. Hence, diplomacy's main goal is '**Ahimsa**', which is easier to be achieved through a true scientific spirit. One that searches for '**Satya**' or the truth. Gandhiji guides our environmental policy by '**Asteya**' or non-stealing, warning us that "We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves". His broad idea of '**Brahmacharya**' or self-discipline is apt for every world leader. '**Aparigraha**' or non-possession can guide science diplomats' work against unnecessary 'hoarding' of essential commodities. Above all, Indian foreign policy is slowly leaving behind its fears of disapprobation by taking significant stands on world issues. Gandhiji termed it '**Sarvatra Bhayavarjana'** (Fearlessness). We are now strongly projecting '**Swadeshi**' goods and resources as our soft power by promoting traditional medicines, Himalayan herbs, Ayurveda, and Yoga to the world.

PM Modi rightly said, "World is eager to know Mahatma Gandhi and hence, it becomes India's responsibility to keep reminding (the) world of the abiding relevance of Mahatma and his vision". Let Science diplomacy be used to establish Sarva Dharma Samantva (Equality of the religions) as science knows no religion. This way science-backed diplomacy can work towards the eradication of '**Sparshbhavna'** (untouchability) among nations making Science, Technology and Innovation available for all.

Even today Gandhiji continues to be the epitome of India's soft power. Currently, when India is vying to get onto the bandwagon of becoming a powerful force 'in Science and through Science', he tells us, "*The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems*". His admiration by the scientific community is testified by Albert Einstein's most famous quote: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth". That is why, I believe we still have a lot to gain and learn from Gandhiji, who adds that 'pinch of salt' to Indian Science diplomacy.