

Why do Gandhi seminars mostly attract anti-technology participants?

[Anil K Rajvanshi](#)
[Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute \(NARI\)](#)
Phaltan, Maharashtra
anilrajvanshi@gmail.com

Last week I was invited to attend a seminar entitled “Gandhi Returns – Back to Basics”, which was held in [Gujarat Vidyapith](#), Ahmedabad. Gujarat Vidyapith was founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920s and deals with mostly Gandhian subjects.

Three themes were discussed and deliberated in the seminar : Education, Non-violence and constructive sustainable development. About 200 participants took part in the conclave for 2 days. I took part mostly in the session “Value based decentralized production systems and constructive work”, though for a short time also sat in the education panel.

However in both these panels and also in the general session I was very surprised by the anti-technology stance of quite a number of the participants.

One participant who graduated as an engineer (long ago) from one of the IITs even went to the length of telling the group that the worst exploitation of poor people has happened because of technology and suggested that everybody should defecate in the open because sun removes the odor and detoxifies the fecal matter better than sewage treatment !

Similarly another participant suggested that mechanization of agriculture will bankrupt the farmers and will ruin the land. He also suggested that simple pastoral farming is the solution!

Yet these and other anti-technology participants were continuously checking their smart phones and most of them came to the conference in planes, trains and cars!

This is the hypocrisy that I have seen in many such forums and seminars. I think they understand neither Gandhi nor his thoughts.

Gandhi preached what he mostly practiced and was very transparent in his conduct. These anti-technology people who frequent the Gandhi seminars preach one thing (don't use technology) and practice something else (they use the technology all along).

So what makes such "so-called" Gandhians anti-technology? Was it Gandhi himself who knowingly or unknowingly spread the message of simple technology or is it that very few people have really understood Gandhi's ideas on technology. I think the answer lies somewhere in between.

Mahatma Gandhi as the [pujari \(priest\) of nonviolence used its concept for everything including industrialization](#). He rightly thought the industrialization of 1920s to be a violent system with heavy machinery, very inefficient energy and materials conversion technologies and no concern for the environment. Intuitively he revolted against those systems and felt that simple life (with few needs) and most of the daily things to be produced from locally available materials was nonviolent and in tune with the nature.

He also believed in rural-based and economically viable local production and consumption systems. Hence he was against things manufactured in Bombay and shipped to rural areas. Similarly he said that he objected to electricity being produced in Bombay and transmitted to Wardha (where his ashram was). He wanted it produced in Wardha from local resources – again showing his vision since decentralized power production is presently gaining currency.

I also feel that [Gandhiji was not anti-technology or anti-science](#). He was a prisoner of his times. He always said that he was a pujari (priest) of "body-temple" and since it was the most complex machinery in the world, how could he be anti-machinery! Thus he used telephones, typewriters, telegraphs, cars and trains quite frequently. His prized possession was a sophisticated high tech Swiss watch that was always tugged in his dhoti!

Not being a student of science or engineering he could not express his feelings in a scientific way but always talked about his dream village, which he felt will be self-sufficient with its inhabitants living in harmony with nature. Modern technology, which is [following bio-mimicry](#), allows for the first time to have softer and efficient systems to achieve our purposes and for the Gandhian dream becoming reality.

Gandhiji believed in all – inclusive growth and felt that India can only become a great nation when its teeming and impoverished rural masses are better off. He therefore focused on rural development for last 30 years of his life and felt intuitively that future of India is in decentralized rural development. This vision which he stated in 1920's is even more valid today after almost 100 years.

I am sure if Gandhi were alive today he would have felt that his dream village could have taken shape with the availability of internet connectivity, [3D or desktop manufacturing](#) and small renewable energy power packs. His dream of giving employment and decent life to rural population may become possible with the availability of these energy-efficient and high-tech systems.

I therefore think that most people do not understand the deep meaning of Gandhian philosophy and attach themselves to the superficial things that Gandhi wrote and said. Thus they are following the same path that fundamentalists do and thus every word of what Gandhi said or wrote becomes sacrosanct.

Thus, the memory of the Mahatma in India is reduced to mere rituals today. Our youth bred on contemporary ideas of instant gratification and new-age technology neither have neither the patience nor the time to 'turn the other cheek' if they are struck on one.

Therefore not only today's youth need to be educated about how Gandhi's anti-technology image was wrong, but also what exactly made him such a great person that he is still very much relevant in today's greatly changed world.

As a spiritual being and visionary Gandhiji was far ahead of his times and thus if we follow his ideas of holistic living then it will lead to sustainable and emotionally satisfying development.

[HOME](#)

Syndicated by IANS and published in various newspapers and news lines like [Business Standard](#), [Assam Sentinel](#), [Avenue mail](#), etc.