

“Was Gandhi a radical?”

7:00 pm to 8:00 pm: December 20, 2011

Y.B Chavan Centre, Cultural Centre, 3rd Floor, Nariman Point, Mumbai



Even decades after his death, Gandhi stands in the history of modern democratic civilisation as one of the most critically acclaimed political thinkers and widely revered political figures. Gandhian political philosophy has proved itself to stand the test of time. To probe further the aspect of continuing relevance of Gandhian Thought, Aspen Institute India organized a public session on **“Was Gandhi a radical?”**

The keynote speaker of this session was Professor Akeel Bilgrami, Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University, USA. The session was moderated by Mr. Anuj Poddar, India Leadership Initiative Fellow of Aspen Institute India and Head – Strategy and Business Development, Viacom 18 Media Pvt. Ltd.

Prof. Akeel Bilgrami discussed about the remarkable depth in Gandhian analysis stemmed from his clear, insightful and visionary thinking. The general question driving Gandhi was – how is it that we have come

to think of the world as a place not merely to live in but also as a place to master and control? The evolution in Gandhian thought is a reflection of man's role in transforming the course of nature and the shift in the concept of knowledge to live by. Another key feature in Gandhi's thinking process is his rejection of western civilization. Gandhi demonstrates a detailed anxiety as to why India should not follow the path that Europe did in the 17th century. Infact, Gandhi anticipated these anxieties in extremely close detail in his work Hind Swaraj.

Following Gandhi's anti-western civilization logic, Prof. Bilgrami explained that Gandhi emphasized the idea that there is much more to a human being than being just a citizen of the state. Thus, Gandhi rejected the 17th century European strategy of creating a feeling of solidarity (the use of political psychology) amongst the people for the new entity of the nation state. He also rejected the hall mark feature of Western Political Thought that what is bad in man can be constrained through good politics, a fine constitution etc. Gandhi was against such kind of centralization of the state.

Further, Gandhi was neutral to the concept of rights. For Gandhi, rights had the same self-centered, screening function as the 17th century European dichotomy between civility that was the prerogative of the elite vs. cruelty that belonged to the brute and barbaric public. Finally, Gandhi believed in democracy as kind of judgment exercised by the people. Democracy could be used to improve the thinking of the people and instill in them a moral sense. It was important to holistically deal with the entire political system by also addressing meanings, notions and values in the system. This will lead to better and more fulfilled human beings in a democracy.

In conclusion, Prof. Bilgrami stated that a politician loses his creativity as soon as he comes to power. However, Gandhi's handling of power was mature and displayed a creative relevance all throughout as proved by the Gandhian political tactic of fasting. In other words, Gandhi had succeeded in raising the bar for all politicians in times to come.

To know more about this public session, click on the video link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXTIKJT4eL4&list=UUlvdd1ncT8Z9OtE6gEXc8HQ&index=2&feature=plcp>