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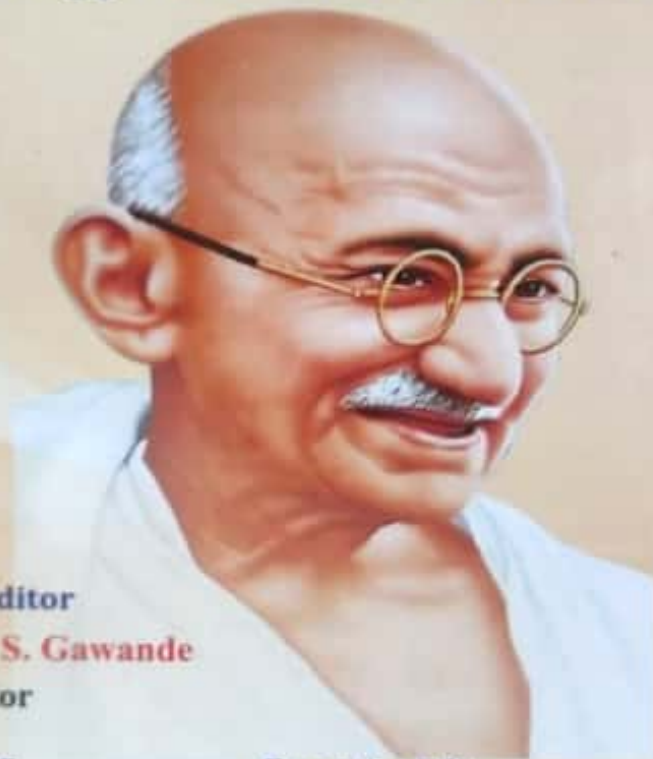
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MAHATMA GANDHI: VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

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If we want to cultivate a true
Spirit of democracy, we
cannot afford to be intolerant.
(MAHATMA GANDHI)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar in Gujarat, on October 2, 1869. His father was the Dewan of the Porbandar State. He married Kasturba when he was only thirteen. He was very truthful from his boyhood days. He went to England to be a barrister. He did not do well as a lawyer. In South Africa he began a movement against the British rulers. In India too he led the freedom movement and at last won independence in 1947. Gandhi believed in tolerance, nonviolence and humanity. He never favored untouchability. Throughout his life he stood against injustice. He fought for the human rights of marginalized people. He was the harbinger of democracy. He had full faith in democratic principles.

Had Mahatma Gandhi been alive in this current Indian socio-cultural and political scenario, he would have been very nervous. The significance of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi about democracy has been pertinent and has huge potential to solve the burning issues causing threat to Indian democracy.

Today, India is going through tough times and Indian democracy is being challenged by certain anti-democratic forces. There is a dire need to understand core characteristics of Indian life. India has been a multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious country. There have always been diverse thoughts and traditions in India, but there is still unity. Some political and religious groups are trying to dismantle this greatness of India by dividing Indians into different socio-cultural and religious fragmentations, but they won't be successful. According to Gandhi, intolerance is the enemy of democracy. Tolerance is one of the fundamental foundations of democracy without which no country can ever afford democracy; it is the true spirit of democracy. Unless there is national integration and internal mutual respect and understanding for each other, the possibility of prosperity of democracy is impossible. Therefore, the philosophy of tolerance propounded by Mahatma Gandhi can be the best lesson for all those, who believe in the philosophy of intolerance.

Mahatma Gandhi has expressed a great amount of fear pertaining to the peaceful co-existence of Indians in a democratic socio-cultural set up due to those people, who don't believe in tolerance and try to impose their monolithic ideology upon people. They must understand that India was, is and will be a country having multiplicity of thoughts and ideas and we as a nation must learn to respect all these diverse ideologies. His following observation is worth-mentioning.

"I have repeatedly observed that no school of thought can claim a monopoly of right judgment. We are all liable to err and are often obliged to revise our judgments. In a vast country like this, there must be room for all schools of honest thought. And the least, therefore, that we owe to ourselves as to others is to try to understand the opponent's view-point and, if we cannot accept it, respect is as fully as we expect him to respect ours. It is one of the indispensable tests of a healthy public life and, therefore fitness for Swaraj. If we have no charity, and no tolerance, we shall never settle our differences amicably and must, therefore, always submit to the arbitration of a third party, i.e., to foreign domination." (YI, 17-4-1924, p. 130)