

# Understanding M. K. Gandhi's Strategies of Communication through the Lens of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication: A Study of Young India

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**Abstract:** This article presents a study of *Young India* in order to understand Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's strategies of communication. Using Adhikary's Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC) as a theoretical framework, it is focussed on understanding Mahatma Gandhi as a communicator. He communicated with a large number of masses in a very effective way even at a time when the concept of mass media was not established in Indian society. Gandhi's communication strategy is assessed by analysing his writings in *Young India*. It is observed that the communication strategy of Gandhi was dependent on India's own culture and heritage.

**Keywords:** Bharathvarshiya View on communication, Mahatma Gandhi, Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, *Young India*.

## **Introduction**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) was associated with total four numbers of newspapers during his entire life. The first of these four was *Indian Opinion* what was published while he residing in South Africa. The other three were *Young India*, *Satyagraha*, and *Harijan* respectively. Of these three, *Satyagraha* was not a registered one. For the purpose of this article, selected articles he wrote in *Young India* comprise the study corpus.

It is necessary to put some light on few subjects before discussing on his communication strategy. He had already become a prominent political figure when he returned to India. His success in Satyagraha movement in South Africa earned prominence for him. However, there lied a huge difference between the condition of Indians in South Africa and that in India (Bhattacharya, 1956).

He travelled a vast swathe of land in India under the direction and patronage of his political guru Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His prime objective was to understand India and her people. All of the movements steered by him like Civil Disobedience movement, Non-violence movement, Satyagraha, Salt-Satyagraha were well-known for the participation of a huge mass. “Gandhi’s role as a political leader and mass communicator whose political strategy and techniques of struggle moved millions to political action needs to be inter-alia understood in this larger contest” (Chandra, 1988). None but a good orator can stir millions of people. Not only that the reason behind the Pan-India acceptance of Congress was none other than Gandhi himself.

Prior to the advent of Gandhi in Indian politics or rather Congress politics, Congress was a political party of the educated elite of India. Gandhi and his charisma made it possible for Congress to attain support from the terminal people (Guha, 2018). That means Gandhi was good orator and a skilled communicator what made it possible for him to get support of millions for his movements. Here

comes a question to our fore and that is what his communication strategy was. No manifesto was put forward by Gandhi from where the concept of his ideals can be understood. His ideals are not in codified form anywhere rather are reflected in his actions written in the pages of history. He did various experiments throughout his life and society was his laboratory for his experiment. He conducted experiment on various subjects for the attainment of truth (Appadorai, 1965). His life was his message.

This research work tries to find how he propagated his message to the larger section of the society. Indian communication study is influenced by the North-American and European scholars in terms of flow of knowledge. The communication model and theories studied and followed in India is entirely alien without any indigenous touch (Das, 2020). On the other hand, Gandhi did mass communication successfully when the concept of mass media was not in vogue. Time has come to find out his communication strategy and that will further enrich the discipline of Indian communication study.

India has been invaded and ruled by various external forces through the ages. They have made rules and social order as per their own choices. Indian society was always driven by the rules of Sanatana Hindu Dharma. Dharma and Danda were two mainstays of society in ancient India. What was Dharma? Dharma was defined by the Vedas and was enforced by the royalty. The concept of dharma underwent changes with various foreign invasions (Parekh, 2016). It was not possible to bind such a culturally fragmented, socially diversified and ethnically heterogeneous in a single thread. This diverse society cannot be theorized through unidirectional communication process and if done would be wrong. Information must reach all the strata of the society in order to make communication effective. That is why Gandhi, in his articles of *Young India*, has addressed not only educated people of the society but the peasants and labour class also. Gandhi constructed his writings in a

very skilful manner and referred to various conspicuous personalities whenever and wherever needed. He wanted to reach to the entire nation through the pages of his newspaper.

Gandhi was an able communication strategist who knew the importance of forming popular opinion for the sake of the nation. Ancient Hindu culture has been referred to several times in his communication praxis. “Gandhi fused ancient Indian moral and cultural values with pragmatic politics, subscribing to the ancient Hindu notion of being a Karmayoga” (Singhal, 2014). A concept of an alternative paradigm always existed in Gandhi’s communication process and that was totally indigenous. The cornerstone of that was ancient Indian culture and society.

The communication process of Gandhi has already been theorized through the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication – SMC (Adhikary, 2014a). This is to note that the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC) was first put forward in the year 2003, and it has been further developed over the years (Adhikary, 2003, 2009, 2014b). In the present study, the SMC has been taken as a theoretical framework to analyse selected articles by Mahatma Gandhi that were published in *Young India*. Gandhi wrote on several issues and subjects in *Young India* while editing the newspaper during the period from 1919 to 1931. His writings have been considered as a reliable source to theorize his communication ideals.

### **Analyzing the Gandhian Communication from the Perspective of the Sadharanikaran Model**

There persists a complex hierarchy in Indian society on the basis of caste, culture, religions etc. An asymmetrical relationship always exists between two parties of communication process when they engage in communication in such a diversified and heterogeneous society. Sadharanikaran coordinates between these two parties with asymmetric relationship and thus make

communication effective. The core concept of Sadharanikaran is Sahridayata meaning to establish common orientation, commonality or oneness among the parties. Adhikary (2009, 2010, 2014b) has interpreted Sadharanikaran as the attainment of sahridayata by communicating parties. “Communicating parties become *Sahridayas* with the completion of the process of *Sadharanikaran*” (Adhikary, 2014, p. 320). Sadharanikaran wants to form a mutual understanding among the parties participating in the communication so that the two-way communication would be a continuous one and the parties become sahridayata to each other.

Mahatma Gandhi endeavoured to establish this ‘Sahridayata’ with his reader through his writings in *Young India*. As per sadharanikaran sahridayata person never tries to persuade his reader through his message rather it is a process of sharing information. On the other hand, this process creates a hierarchical relationship of domination and subordination. This mutual relationship is based on mutual respect. “The source is held in high esteem by the receiver of information, a relationship idealized and romanticized in the guruchela tradition” (Yadava, 1984). The clear reflection of this concept propagated by Yadav can be seen on the articles written by Gandhi in *Young India*. Gandhi extended instruction to the Indian through *Young India* about what to do on various subjects like ill effect of modern civilization, health and raw food diet, sanitization, language issue, liberty of press.

According to Misra (2008),

Sadharanikaran is not generalization, but is the expansion of the self at the cost of the self itself, and it is death of all mental states in which one’s mental state is merged. This expansion or this merger is brought out by certain known and yet unrealized forms, by words, gestures, melodies patterns, figures or structures, whatever they may be. (p. 143)

It can be easily understood when Gandhi's writings are analysed through the lens of Sadharanikaran that Gandhi was a Sahridaya who wanted to propagate Sahridayata among his readers.

The success of communication according to the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication depends on being sahridaya of both communicating parties (Adhikary, 2014, pp. 320-321). As Yadav stated that a hierarchical relationship based on mutual respect is established through the participation of both sender and receiver during the attainment of Sadharanikaran. The article titled 'The Great Sentinel' published on 13th October 1921 in Young India support the opinion of Yadav. Gandhi recommended the use of Charkha for the economic development of the nation. On the other hand, poet Rabindranath Tagore criticized his movement and wrote a letter from Shantiniketan. "The poet tells us summarily to reject anything and everything that does not appeal to our reason or heart". Gandhi totally appreciated that critique and wrote that he would be aggrieved if someone followed his creed blindfold and not pondered on that. A blind surrender to love is more mischievous than blind surrender to the cruelty of the whip of the dictator. This article clearly speaks that he was truly a Sahridaya and used to demonstrate respect to receiver. "A reformer who is enraged because his message is not accepted must retire to the forest to learn how to watch, wait and pray" (Gandhi, 1921).

The SMC is standing on the strong base of Ancient Traditional Hindu culture. Gandhi mentioned about ancient Indian civilization several times. "It is my faith in our ancient civilization- it was my faith in our simplicity- it was my in the inborn religious instincts of every Indian- be he a Hindu or be he a Mohamedan, Christian, Parsi or a Jew- it is that faith in my which has sustained me throughout all the dark day of scoffing, of scepticism, and of opposition" (Gandhi, 1921, 2nd February, YI). He also wrote an article to uphold the generosity of Varnashramadharma of Hinduism.

“The whole conception of Hinduism is to make man better than he is and draw him nearer to his maker. But I have no doubt whatsoever that this (Varnashrama) is the secret of the great success of Hinduism” (Gandhi, 1927, 20th October, YI).

Gandhi strongly opposed modern civilization and their immoral living. To make people aware of that he wrote *Hind Swaraj* in the year 1908. The book was banned by then Bombay government on sedition charge. Despite that he continued writing in *Young India* in order to keep Indians away from the harmful effect of western civilization. He proposed to the Indians in his article ‘*Hind Swaraj or the Indian home rule*’ to adopt higher and mightier weapons to fight against violence and those are self-protection, self-sacrifice. Misra (2008) mentioned the expansion of self while explaining *Sahridayata*. The three dimension of life should be understood in order to understand the concept of self. The SMC has explained these three dimensions of life for the success of communication and talked about the attainment of the following things physical (*adhibhautika*), mental (*adhidaivika*) and spiritual (*adhyatmika*) (Adhikary, 2014).

Gandhi mentioned several times the terms like spirituality, love, self-realization while communicate with people through *Young India*. He wrote in his article ‘*What of the West*’ about the downfall of western society and its remedy. The reason for the degradation of western culture is its limitless demand. This limitless demand drove them to adopt the shelter of violence and provoked them to attack other countries to exploit the people and their natural resources. Gandhi wrote about the remedy in this article “It occurs to me that it ought not to be difficult to make a successful appeal to the masses of Europe in terms of economies and a fairly successful working of such an experiment must lead to immense and unconscious spiritual results. I do not believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life” (Gandhi, 1925, 3rd September, YI).

Gandhi was a believer and tried to find the truth throughout his life. Truth was God to him. What was truth? Gandhi wrote in the article named 'Truth and God' published on 31st December 1931 for the explanation of truth "A difficult question, But I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you". Human mind is driven and evaluated by various issues. What is truth to someone is not same to others. Those who are trying to find this truth have to fulfil few conditions. Success of scientific experiment depends on various indispensable scientific course of instruction. In the same way one has to qualify by undergoing preliminary discipline for conducting experiment of spiritual realm. Human morality can be developed by developing religious sense. Three fundamental disciplines must be fulfilled for the realization of self. Those three disciplines are observance of truth, love for others and to practice Brahmacharya (Gandhi, 1920, 5th May, YI).

Gandhi wrote in the article 'Vegetarianism' published on 7th October, 1926 "Vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of Hinduism". On the other hand, he informed in the article titled 'Unfired Food Experiment' that having vegetarian food in raw condition for day in and day out he fell ill. He attached raw food diet with the concept of Ahimsa. He opined that the process of having raw vegetarian food would take more time and for that reason man will have less food. As a result of that they will not engage in violence with one another. In this way he tried to make his readers informed about the importance of Hinduism and the concept of Ahimsa through his texts (Gandhi, 1928, 15th November, YI).

Two components namely Abhivyanjana and Rasaswadana have been mentioned as decisive juncture of Sadharanikaran (Adhikary, 2014). Gandhi successfully established Abhivyanjana through his writings. Gandhi used to receive letters from his readers regarding Hindu-Muslim unity, civilization. He published those letters in Young India. He used to receive letters from citizens of



other countries like America, Germany, and Japan from which he came to know about the socio-economic condition of those countries and tried to aware people to shun the ideal of west. Gandhi's concept of Non-violence was criticized in the article 'My Inconsistency' published on 17th November, 1921. One of the correspondents asked him why he had helped the British in Zulu Rebellion, Boer War and the Great War despite being a champion of non-violence. Gandhi answered that it was his duty to help the British government as he was a resident of the British Empire. He later expressed his regret for this. Gandhi always responded to his critique and endeavoured to form commonality or oneness with the critique as well as his readers through his articles in the pages of Young India.

### **The Sadharanikaran Model and Gandhian Philosophy**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a multidimensional character and it is very much needed to know him to understand his doctrine of life. The ideals of his life can be understood through the analysis of his vows like Satya, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Khadi, Charkha etc. When communication discipline was burdened with western theory and model, Nirmal Mani Adhikary has illustrated the Bharatvarshiya perspective of communication through his communication model (Adhikary, 2003, 2009, 2014b). Few features of the SMC have been discussed in this part. And, the communication strategy of Gandhi is also discussed here.

As M.K. Gandhi was such a person who did mass communication successfully without the presence of so-called mass media. It is to be mentioned here that the readers of his newspaper Young India was primarily the educated elite class. Amid such circumstances Gandhi's Sahrdayata made him acceptable to all. Once a woman came to Gandhi at his Sevagram Ashrama and requested him to ask her child not to have much sugar. Gandhi then asked that woman to come to him a week later. In this situation

that woman left that place being puzzled and returned after a week. Then Gandhi requested her son not to take so much sugar as it was not good for his health. The woman then asked why Gandhi did not tell that a week ago. Gandhi replied that he also used to have much sugar. First, he experimented whether it was possible or not to have a little quantity of sugar (Easwaran, 1997).

Gandhi was such a person who first experimented in his own life what he asked his followers and readers to do. In this way he used to emotionally engage with the person remained at the other end of communication through *Sahridayata*. Moreover, he wrote on various subjects besides this and tried to establish *Sahridayata*. He upheld his belief and conviction on raw food diet in the article titled 'Unfired Food Experiment' published on 18th of July, 1929. It also becomes clear that he was considerate about national worker and concerned about their food habit and practice. He wrote in this article "It has for me a value not merely sanitary but also economic and moral or spiritual. It is of great importance to national workers who have to work in different parts of the country often in trying circumstances. This food surmounts all the difficulty arising from the different food habits of the different provinces."

Another important feature of the SMC is that it gives same importance to both sender and receiver of the communication process. Gandhi not only propagated his beliefs and opinions in *Young India* but also published the letters of the correspondents and readers written to him from abroad. Those letters not only reflected the contemporary social condition but also contained the critique and different opinions of the readers. Few of those letters published in the form of articles in the *Young India* are as follows- 'Neither A Saint Nor A Politician' published on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1920, 'Introspection' published on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1921, 'God and Congress' published on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1925, 'What of The West' published on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1925, 'Choice Before Us' on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1927, 'What Has Hinduism

Done For Us' on 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1927, 'Superstitions Die Hard' on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1931. Besides all these he also gave places to the opinions of various receivers in various articles. He endeavoured to practice two-way communication through his publication.

Gandhi wrote "My life is my message" in his autobiography. It is clear from this message of Gandhi that the events and actions of his life would reflect his message to his followers. Once Gandhi was criticised by Winston Churchill as 'half naked fakir' for his attire. Gandhi wrote in his article titled 'The Loin-Cloth' on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1931 that it would not be wise to compare Indian civilization with loin-cloth. Loin-cloth actually reflected the simplicity of Indian civilization. Common people of India were influenced by his simple life. The loin-cloth can be defined as a code of his simplicity. Moreover, it is known from his article 'To Journalist Friends' published on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1926 that he used to communicate through his various acts. In this article he wrote that it was not possible for him to write on all the issues of the society and he did not have expertise for that. He wrote in this article "I know that often the unwritten word is more forcible and truer than the written or the spoken word. Let the sum of our acts-speak". All the ideals and philosophy reflected on these articles support the Abhivyanjana concept of SMC model. Simultaneously several feedback letters to Gandhi helps to conclude that Rasawadana has produced at the receivers end through his acts or texts.

Gandhi was of the opinion that the standard of morality of Indians must be developed, the knowledge of self must be gained by them and to enter the spiritual realm through prayer for fighting against the Britishers. Then only self-restrain through self-imposed compulsion was possible (Gandhi, 1926, 14<sup>th</sup> October, YI). Several times he urged the Indians to enliven their will power by using the words like self-purification, self-help etc. in his newspaper for the attainment of Swaraj. "My opinion is becoming daily more and

more confirmed that we shall achieve our real freedom only by effort from within *i.e.* by self-purification and self-help and therefore by the strictest adherence to truth and non-violence” (Gandhi, 1926, 1<sup>st</sup> April, YI). Gandhi gave importance to both, communication with self and communication with others in his communication strategy.

Each of his articles was written on a specific context. It was not that he criticized western civilization without any reason and only on the basis of his own discretion. The extraction of the letters written to him from Europe and America he mentioned in the support of his opinion regarding western civilization. The article named ‘A Cry from Germany’ published on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1925 was such an example. In his communication strategy messages were always centred around specific context or ‘Sandarbha’. One of the most important vows of his life was Satyagraha meaning soul force. The necessary things for the attainment of knowledge of self were tough self-control and practice of spiritual realm. Truth can be obtained by human beings only through this. It can be said that quest and attainment of truth is related to the concept of moksha of the SMC.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A study of the writings of Gandhi published in *Young India* during the period from 1919 to 1931 clearly shows that he touched a varied social issue. He not only wrote about the socio-political issues of contemporary time but also informed his readers about how to solve all those. He mentioned greatness of ancient Aryan tradition and ancient Indian culture (1927, 11<sup>th</sup> August, YI) time and again in his writings while communicating with his readers. India has always been able to protect his culture and identity against various foreign invasion only because of his strong faith on Hinduism and spiritual line (1927, 24<sup>th</sup> November, YI).

It can easily be understood from his texts written on the pages of *Young India* that he was influenced by ancient Hindu

culture and tradition. The idea 'God is truth' grew in him during his childhood. A very well-known chant among North Indians was 'Ram Naam Satya Hai'. His childhood nurse used to chant poems from the 'Ramayana' for him. These things helped him realizing 'God is truth' (Basan, 2010). His communication strategy always reflected his ideals, philosophy and actions while communicating with his followers.

It is pertinent to view Gandhi's communication strategy through the lens of Adhikary's Sadharanikaran Model. The origin of SMC is rooted to the Bharatvarshiya or Hindu or indigenous sources like *Natyashastra* and *Vakyapadiya*. A deep reverence to Dharma, ancient civilization, and culture was always reflected on Gandhi's communication act too. There is no doubt that Gandhi was a great communicator along with his other characteristics.

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