

Gandhi and health- celebrating 150 years

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It is the health that is real wealth not the pieces of gold or silver – M. K. Gandhi.

Gandhiji is a prophet of health. His words on nutrition, sanitation and waste disposal stays staunch, even in the modern era at the surge of communicable and non-communicable diseases persistently reminding us prevention is better than cure.

In his book 'key to health' he defined " Health means body ease. He is a healthy man whose body is free from all disease, carries his normal activities without fatigue, such man should be able with ease to walk 10 to 20 miles a day and perform ordinary physical labour without getting tired. He can digest ordinary simple food. His mind and senses are in the state of harmony and peace" which is proximate to WHO definition of health.

Diet and nutrition

Gandhiji always emphasised on mixed diet as it provides substance for energy, tissues building and tissue repair. He was an exemplary health educator and compiled his ideas in the book ' Diet and Diet reforms'.

Likewise, in 2014 a research by Bangalore Boston Nutrition Collaborative also focused the importance of health education in nutrition.

Gandhiji's diet in Sabarmati Ashram was healthy and all rounded. He advised skimmed milk over whole milk and specified the importance of unpolished cereals over the polished one. He suggested to avoid consumption of tea and coffee and also to reduce the usage of sugar, oil, ghee and condiments except salt of required quantity. A recent research by Indian Council of

Medical Research (ICMR) on ‘ Impact of community based dietary salt restriction in the reduction of blood pressure among tea garden workers of Assam’ showed considerable reduction in blood pressure on salt restriction.

Even when I begin to earn money, I kept the practice of walking to and from the office, and I’m still reaping the benefits of that practice – M. K. Gandhi.

Gandhiji encouraged physical activity by all means. In his Ashram at Sevagram, he committed himself to walk for about 5km in the morning and involved in cleaning, cooking, wheat grinding, vegetable cutting etc., in his daily routine. Today obesity is the known precursor of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). And an Epidemiological study published in Indian journal of medical research also showed overweight and obesity rates in children and adolescents are increasing not just among the higher socio-economic groups but also in the lower income groups where underweight still remain as a major concern.

On October 2nd, 2010 Arise India Foundation organized Mahatma Gandhi Health and Peace Walk in Marcus Garvey Park, New York to encourage people to walk regularly following the example of Mahatma Gandhi and enhance wellness to fight against diabetes, heart disease and obesity in a cost-effective manner.

Gandhi an experimental scientist

Gandhi was influenced by the book ‘ Return to Nature’ by Adolf Just, a German Naturopath and became a firm believer of naturopathy. He wrote articles in favour of Naturopathy and did several experiments by himself, on

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his family and the members of ashram. He had a routine of tub bath under sunlight, a form of Naturopathy treatment to get relief from constipation and found to be effective. Gandhiji stayed in Dr. Dinshaw Mehta's Nature cure clinic, Pune for about 156 days which was then called as Bapu Bhavan now transformed into National institute of Naturopathy in his remembrance.

Taking intoxicating liquors is almost like committing suicide. It kills his or her soul, for the time being. Surely death of the soul is worse than death of the body". – M. K. Gandhi.

On 21st September 1947, Gandhiji in his weekly journal Harijan stated that alcohol affects one physically, morally, intellectually and economically. He voiced against government spending the income from the sale of intoxicants for the Nation building purposes. He said the physical and moral gain of the abstainer is more important than the loss of this tainted revenue and advised government to convert liquor dens into restaurants for supplying clean and wholesome refreshments.

The burden of alcohol use on the community is being stressed in recent times. A research paper published in 2014 under the title ' Excessive Alcohol Consumption and Related Consequences Among College Students' revealed excessive drinking results in a wide range of consequences, including injuries, assaults, car crashes, memory blackouts, lower grades, sexual assaults etc.,

Cleanliness is next to godliness – M. K. Gandhi.

Gandhiji prioritised cleanliness of the individual and community over everything and believed sanitation is more important than independence. When he visited India in 1893 after three years of stay from South Africa, there was a plague outbreak in Mumbai. During which he inducted himself in the sanitary committee of Rajkot and visited every households. He was quite disturbed by the untidy sights and understood sanitation as major problem of our country. On seeing the filthy lavatories in the conference hall in 1901 during the Congress Session at Calcutta, he started cleaning it himself. Later when he had control over congress he organised a party of 2000 volunteers of men and women of all castes for doing scavenging work in Haripura Congress Session where he sowed the seed of SWACHH BHARAT.

He said, “ Everyone must be his own scavenger, so long as you do not take the broom and the bucket in your hands, you cannot make your towns and cities clean”. It was propagated, insisted and practised by Gandhi himself.

Today, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, clean India mission was launched in October 2nd 2014 Rajkot by the Government of India in an aim to provide sanitation facilities, solid and liquid waste disposal systems, safe and adequate drinking water to every Indian by October 2nd 2019.

A clean body cannot reside in an unclean city – M. K. Gandhi.

Gandhiji travelled far and wide to understand people and to connect with them. He made observations by himself rather than what he read or heard. Once he was invited to speak at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi on 4th February 1916, quite embarrassed by the tarnished look of the holy city,