

Gandhian Philosophy- Religion and Politics

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Abstract

Gandhi's religion is essentially a universal religion, devoid of customs, superstitions and irrational givings. For him, truth and non-violence were the ultimate forms of unity of mankind. He denied being christened as 'saint', 'yogi' or 'ascetic' and described himself as a seeker of truth, the ultimate eternal truth. It had nothing to do with theology, as Bhikhu Parekh put it, which over-intellectualised religion. True or pure religion, to him, transcends but does not supersede organised religions, and constitutes their common basis and connecting link. In today's world of religious disharmony, it is apt to recollect Gandhi's words: 'the need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts.

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“TO me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these, God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live.”

- Gandhi

Gandhi was following an ancient tradition of using spirituality as a basis of social change. The Buddha and Jesus Christ had used them effectively. Gandhi's unique discourse on the subject was the result of his having discovered the East and the West at about the same time, the one through the other. Thus he incorporated Christian notions of love, forgiveness, and uncomplaining suffering into his philosophy while rejecting the idea that salvation could come only through Christ; and he embraced Islam's emphasis on equality. Jainism's *anekantavada* (the many-sidedness of truth) made him tolerant to all religions.

Injustices could be eliminated if *ahimsa* (non-violence) was practiced. But he found the Hindu idea of *ahimsa* too passive, and the Christian notion of love too attached. Thus he combined *ahimsa* and love, and added the Hindu concept of *anaskati* (detachment) to arrive at his activist philosophy. For Gandhi the world was ordered on moral principles and brute force had no place in it. He added fasting as a tool in his armoury. Fasting was not hunger strike designed to extract submission or evoke self-pity. Rather it was a way of atoning vicariously for the misdeeds of others. This “vicarious suffering” like “voluntary crucifixion” is an essentially Christian idea.

Gandhi was a career politician, with a long and interesting career. And like many politicians (in America and Muslim countries), his religious views drove his policies. But Gandhi was truly different. He was an unfailing idealist and used religion to unite and create rather than divide and destroy. Ultimately, his politics were about equality. Gandhi was deeply affected by poor treatment he received as a brown person in the white man's world—particularly in South Africa and in his home country of India, both colonies of the British Empire at the time. And though the tradition still persists in India, Gandhi attempted to emancipate the lowest caste in Indian society, the untouchables, from their inherited fate of near-slaves to the rest of India.

Gandhi serves as a beacon for those craving radical social change. He not only inspires us to realize that it can be done, but he inspires us to realize that it can be done peacefully. Gandhi's Political Philosophy Introduction Political philosophy is the study of human social organization. It deals with the nature of people in the society. Political philosophy tries to present the consequences in relation to the fundamental cosmological, ontological and epistemological issues. They articulate

the views of human nature. This helps in linking the cosmological with the political. Political philosophy investigates political implications of particular argument. It strives to make the sense of what we do and what prescribes and what we ought to do. Political philosophy seeks a rationale for politics and public administration, which examines the practice of governance. It always strives to answer the following questions like: What is the ideal form of government?

Religion And Politics:

Gandhi was basically religious as well as the ethical personality. He maintained highest moral standards in politics. As the most crucial strategist in politics he evolved the political methods and campaigned the movements to capture the state's power through the prolonged mass movement. Gandhi declared on politics that, "For me there is no politics without religion, not the religion of the superstitious and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration. Politics without morality is a thing to avoided." He thought that the politics is the one of means to open the door of service to public and not for misusing the power for one's selfish purpose. In addition to that he said, "For me politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words a seeker after God and truth. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven." Gandhi has described about the nature of power, that is "Possession of power makes men blind and deaf; they cannot see things which are under their very nose and cannot hear things which invade their ears. There is thus no knowing what power-intoxicated government may not do. So...patriotic men ought to be prepared for death, imprisonment and similar eventualities." Gandhi said that he did not divide life into watertight compartments. The life of a nation like that of individuals is an indivisible whole. Politics comprises the whole of socio-economic and moral factors of the state, which aimed at promoting the public life. It has the power to activate the state through those representatives which is gained from the individuals of the state in a collective way. He said that the power can be gained through the service to the people and also through the majority of votes. According to Gandhi power is of two kinds, the first one is captured through the fear of punishment, another one is gaining through love, kindness and tolerance.

:Politics And Power

Gandhi said that, "to me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their conditions in every department of life. Political power means the capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national

life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation become necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor.” According to him politics is the game to attain power, to regain power and to retain power. It is a fact that there is no scope for morality and value in the western concept of politics, because till today politics remain as the power politics. The present condition is affirmative towards Gandhian philosophy of moral values and its relevance in politics, whereas from the very beginning, starting from Gandhi, politics was all pervading and hence, his war of Indian Independence had to be fought with the twin weapons of Truth and Non-violence, which ultimately became a movement and he called it as satyagraha. Gandhi conceived politics as a moral problem of value. It is the need of the hour is to revolutionize politics by ethics. “Unless the moral and spiritual qualities of the people are appropriate, the best of political system and constitutions will not work.”

Democracy And Decentralization:

Gandhi opposed the power concentration in a few or single hand. He thought that the concentration of political power leads to the exploitation, inequality and promote the hierarchal society. So equal power possession in the hands of public is necessary to make true democracy. He said that “When people come into possession of political power, the interference with the freedom of the people is reduced to a minimum. In other words, a nation that runs its affairs smoothly and effectively without such State interference is truly democratic. Where such a condition is absent, the form of government is democratic in name.” Gandhi was considered as the combination of prophet and a politician by several political theorists as well as the activists around the world in a highest caliber. In democratic governance, the principle of majority plays the key role; the scale of the establishment of democracy is the decision of the majority. In such a situation whatever majority decides, should it be accepted? Gandhi said that to some extent the decision of large amount of people should be definitely taken for approved; one should yield to the majority in matters of details. The individual’s liberty should be carefully protected in democracy. If the liberty of the person is not protected or if it is violated then, Gandhi believed that “Minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority.” Despite the principle of majority applied in democracy of the day, Gandhi wished for the society, which is free from exploitation with the co-operation of majority and minority. For the establishment of his ideal society he suggested that “Let us not push the mandate theory to ridiculous extreme and become slaves to resolution of majorities. That would be a revival of

brute force in a more virulent form. If rights of minorities are to be respected, the majority must tolerate and respect their opinion and action... It will be the duty of the majority to see to that the minorities receive a proper hearing and are not otherwise exposed to insult.

State:

Gandhi wanted the state to be free from its violent elements and sought to inculcate fearlessness in the minds of people. In his concept of Swaraj, there is decentralization of political power and India was to be a confederation of thousands of self-governing and self-reliant villages: innumerable circles of village republics. But these village republics were not to be hierarchically organized; instead they would be 'oceanic circle' of structure in organization. In the ocean, all waves maintain similar levels and no one dominates over others; similarly, to prevent oppression, In the Gandhian concept of Swaraj, Ramrajya or the kingdom of God ought to be established first in our own souls, then only it can be extended to the villages. Swadeshi, the use of homemade materials in the industry and the refuse of foreign goods was a means to attain Swaraj. It is not possible for a modern State which is based on force of non-violence to oppose the forces of chaos, whether peripheral or domestic. According to Gandhi the state has to be democratic based on non-violence and without much interference of individual freedom. He said that "The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but the state is a soul-less machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence." To him violence is the biggest obstacle to the natural development of individual and social life of the state. Gandhi opposed the increasing power of the state; because it leads the state as coercive. He said that, "I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress." Gandhi described his ideal state as per his following words, "If national life becomes as perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized.

Man:

According to Gandhi, human beings are essentially moral and spiritual beings sanctified with the divine gift of reasoning or thinking. The union with God is the

main concern of the spiritual aspect of man. He considered that giving birth to all great cultures of the world as human achievement. The necessary activities of the world are selected or stimulated to act by the moral aspect of man for the good of others or to the common good. This must be based on the courageous sacrifice and selflessness at every stage of life. The rational character of man is the special faculty of human being over other beings by which we can think about the nature and infinities of God or Truth and also think over the meaning of life, its insinuations and creative application of universal values such as good, right and justice in certain circumstances. From this standpoint, "Gandhi would have agreed with Mohammed's distinction between angels, men and animals. Angels have intellect, but no sensual nature. Animals have a sensual nature but no intellect. Man has both an intellect and a sensual nature. He is less than an animal when he subordinates his intelligence to his sensual nature, but greater than the angels when he subordinates his animal passions to his reason. The primary agent of 'universal welfare' or 'universal uplift' then is the self consciously individual. He or she is the key and the keystone to all considerations of spiritual, moral and material progress.

Ends And Means:

Gandhi described this as, "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. Gandhi believed that, to achieve the truthful and positive end, man should take the truthful and positive means because to him means do not serve ends, rather means create ends. It is summing up by the following way as the means are the ends in the making. While means are creating the ends, they have two inspiring insinuations. First, it is not possible to any one who describes a just, non-violent end by using the unjust and violent means to attain it, the selection of means should be based on what end in character we need. It is the vision that prevents actions based on the philosophical concept of the ends justify the means

Village Swaraj:

Village Swaraj Therefore Gandhi suggested decentralization of political power to all. He says that mere transfer of political power is not swaraj, we must establish our own style of governing body with well disciplined representatives and non-violent moral based principles. According to Gandhi economic swaraj means self-sufficient individual, village and national economic freedom and also that means decentralized economic power to all. By his teachings of swaraj he wanted to eradicate the sect of haves and have nots and try to establish economy based on self-reliance. That's

why Gandhi preached khadi, spinning wheel and trusteeship for self-dependent economic power. Gandhi has wished-for our own tradition, culture and moral principles instead of western coercion culture and machinery principles. Gram Swaraj or village self-rule is an essential thought in Gandhi's thinking. The villages and the villagers are the centres of Gandhi's thinking. As far as India's social and political institutions were concerned, he dreamt for this kind of social and political institutions for India. With all his ideas, Gram Swaraj should be understood and viewed within the context of the twin beacons of Truth and nonviolence. In 1942 Gandhi wrote, the basic tenet of Gram Swaraj. Every village should be its own republic and then there should be both independence and inter-dependence. Independence should be with its vital wants and needs, at that same time there should be interdependence among the villages for other needs and desires. Each village should be fundamentally self-sufficient, making stipulation for all necessities of life - foodstuff, clothes, clean water, hygiene, accommodation and education etc, including the government and selfdefence and all socially useful facilities required by a community. For example: a theatre and a public hall. For complete nation, full independence would mean that each village of India must be a republic with full powers.

Conclusion

Gandhi ji said that the religious values and non violence should be adopted by politics. The means of acquiring power in politics should be fair. Decentralization and democracy should be adopted. State should not use violence against its people and there should be no need of state interference in village. In village Swaraj should be established like Ram Raj. India was to be a confederation of thousands of self-governing and self-reliant villages. Gandhi ji said power can be gained through the service of the people and also through majority of votes. Power can be gained through love, kindness and tolerance.

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