

THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S VIEW ON RELIGION **IN THE 21ST CENTAURY**

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Introduction

The word religion derives from the word Religare which means binding, person to God and binding of Person to person who follow the same God .This means religion is essentially a principle of practical life. It is unquestionable that Gandhi's concept on religion is a significant concept for social cohesion and equality. For Gandhi religion and morality are the two sides of a same coin i.e. one cannot be religious if he is not moral and vice versa. However, since Gandhi thought that the term 'God 'implied a being or a person, he preferred to use such terms as eternal principle, supreme consciousness or intelligence, cosmic power, energy, spirit, or shakti . Later in life he preferred to speak of satya (ultimate reality or Truth), and regarded this as the 'only correct and fully significant' description of God. Following Indian philosophical traditions, he used the term satya to refer to the ultimate ground of being, to what alone persists unchanged in the midst of change and holds the universe together. For a long time he had said, 'God is Truth', implying both that Truth was one of God's many properties and that the concept of God was logically prior to that of Truth. In 1926 he reversed the proposition and said, 'Truth is God'. He described this as one of his most important discoveries. Gandhi believed in one God. Belief in one or single God is the subject matter of all religions. However, we cannot predict a time when there would be only one

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religion on earth. Even it is true to say that there is one single God according to theory. As a matter of fact there can be one religion without a second, but in practice it is totally different from one individual person to another individual person. Now the question arises: how is it possible? At this juncture it can be said that there may always be possibility of different religions for different conceptions of God. For example, the tree has a single trunk and a number branches and leaves. In the same vein of tree, there is one and only one kind of religion. For him, the one real religion is beyond all speech and imperfect men describe and interpret it differently. Gandhi ruthlessly tries to find out a universal character of religion. Thus, he developed the concept of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava*. His conception of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* is very near to Swami Vivekananda's religion and Tagore's religion of man. Gandhi's love for Hinduism is unique. However, it is not Hindu religion which he certainly prized above all other religions, but he was never shy of calling himself a Hindu, a *sanatani* Hindu. His feeling for Hinduism is of its own kind. To quote that "I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my wife, an indissoluble bond is there-even so I feel about Hinduism with all its faults and limitation. I am a reformer through and through." He further says, "Hinduism is like the Ganges, pure and unsullied. It is the Hindu system of philosophy which has taught Gandhi "to regard all religions as containing the element of truth and enjoin an attitude of respect and reverence towards them all." Though Gandhi does not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas, yet such a liberal belief is the result of Hindu tradition. Hinduism provided Gandhi with strong moral and spiritual base and abundant openness and rational outlook.

Aims and Objectives

This particular paper is an attempt to prove that there is quiet relevance of Gandhi's concept of religion in the present world.

Methodology

For writing this paper I am using a theoretical methodology while reading various books regarding my topic.

Relevance of religion in the 21st Centaury

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my houses as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” For Gandhi, the main concern of religion is how one lived not what one believed. By applying this principle we can fought from religious intolerance which creates a lot of conflict now a days. Religious Tolerance is the attitude that the other must not remain other. This religious intolerance is the most burning problem of the 21st century.

Quiet a limit Gandhi's views on tolerance are similar with J S Mill. According to Mill as well as Gandhi truth is never something we are sure we have attained. WE must therefore be modest when we hold our present opinions and we must not impose our own conception of truth on others. In today's world the choice is not between non violence and violence rather it is between non violence and denial of human existence.

Gandhi's dispute with his critics highlighted two very different approaches to religion and religious truth. For him religion was a resource, a body of insights to

be extracted, combined, and interpreted in the way he thought proper. His approach to religion was therefore profoundly a historical, uninhibited, anti-traditionalist and liberal, and did not involve understanding religious traditions in their own terms. For his critics a religion was uniquely grounded in a particular historical event, possessed moral and spiritual authority, formed the basis of the relevant community, and required a careful and faithful study of its basic texts. Each approach had its merits and weaknesses. Gandhi's view placed the individual at the centre of the religious search, liberated religion from the stranglehold of traditionalism and literalism, encouraged fresh readings of scriptures, and made space for an interreligious dialogue. However, it also violated the historical integrity of the religious tradition, de-institutionalized religion, and encouraged in less competent hands an attitude of shallow cosmopolitanism. His critics' approach had the opposite virtues and vices.

Conclusion

By carefully observing the above views we can say that Gandhi does not believe in sectarian religion. According to him all religions are imperfect since they are propagated by humans which are imperfect so one should not claim that his /her religion is perfect. By religion he means that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our maker, which binds one dissoluble to the truth within. But it is a misfortune for us that we the people of the 21st century world understand religion no more than that of limits on food and drink and formal rites and rituals, not otherwise. Hence it has been discredited. According to Gandhi, religion is more relevant today than before

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