

MAHATMA GHANDI : RELIGION, SOCIETY AND STATE

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Abstract

Gandhi Ji came across men of different religion and developed toleration for all faiths. Learning all religion Gandhi came to know that truth and morality are co related. This became his sole objective. Satyagraha remains one of the most potent philosophies in freedom struggles throughout the world today. He was Mahatma in true sense he lived as an ascetic in the ashram. Truth was the highest principle of Gandhi ji. He always followed the path of truth. It is the consummation of all that is spiritual in man. It was with the help of 'swaraj' he wanted to frame the world. He believed in swadeshi, as it is only way that brings development. Upliftment should start from the poor. Socialism was an important approach of Gandhi Ji, it leads to equality. Equality, in all forms: social, educational, financial etc, which can only lead nation to the height of progress.

Key Words: Yajna, Ahimsa, Untouchable, Swaraj, Khadi, Sarvodaya.

Mahatma Gandhi was the primary leader of India's independence movement and also the architect who brought non-violent, civil disobedience that influences the world. Mahatma Gandhi was a man of thoughts and ideas. It can be seen in his books written by Gandhi like; "My Experiments with Truth", "The Voice of Truth", "Path to God", "Hind Swaraj". Through these books we come to know the ideas that shaped Gandhi's life and activities. Gandhi was a member of vegetarian society and made friends with Theosophists. Gandhi had studied Law. Gandhi lived an austere life devoted to prayer, fasting and meditation. He became known as "Mahatma," which means "great soul." Satyagraha remains one of the most potent philosophies in freedom struggles throughout the world today, and Gandhi's actions inspired future human rights movements around the globe, including those of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Gandhi ji's philosophy of life reflected in the vows the he and the Ashram people had adopted and practiced.

First: to speak truth at any circumstance.

Second: Ahimsa, animosity or ill-will against anybody.

Third: celibacy, he was not against marriage but rather he considered it a relationship of strong bond. Sex should be restricted for the reason of procreation.

Fourth; one should eat to live not live to eat.

Fifth: things of necessity for fulfilment of life. He believed in things required for sustenance not extravagance.

Sixth: non-attachment. Ascetic life.

Religion

Religion had a broad meaning for Gandhi ji. He used the term in broad sense. It meant knowledge of self- realization or knowledge of self. Gandhi started reading Ramayana at the tender age. And the preaching's of Ramayana worked for Gandhi throughout his life. It became perfect remedy for him. And Gandhi regarded Ramayana as the greatest devotional book of literature. Gandhi ji came across men of different religion and developed toleration for all faiths. Learning all religion Gandhi came to know that truth and morality are co related. This became his sole objective. He considered religion as a code of moral conduct. Gandhi was influenced by many writers and imbibed their spirit. He was persuaded by the ethics laid in their books. He loved every religion. Every path of morality and virtue leads to same. The Allah of Islam is same as the gods of Christian and Isvara of Hindus. God means equal respect to all religion. He believed in appreciation of all religion. There is no mother God then Truth. Love God and love Mankind. Gandhi made Hinduism refined by making mankind in its centre and self-purification and active service its content. Gandhi paid emphasis to social service. He said that the manual work was an integral part of the cosmic yajna. They are the ones who serve their fellow men and the 'untouchables' are the privilege children of God. Hinduism had some of the greatest moral principles such as; unity of man, life and creation, ahimsa and the indivisibility of humanity and of human salvation. Hinduism should be constructed on a profound system of morality. Gandhi ji tried to secularise Hinduism as much as possible.

He did not compromise with his moral ideals and values. He was Mahatma in true sense he lived as an ascetic in the ashram. He believed in necessity rather than extravagance. Gandhi did not believe in increase of powers. He asked the people to follow the path of Ahimsa. Ahimsa was very familiar concept found in Indian religions and philosophies. He used ahimsa as a tool to fight against the tyrant and arbitrary. He believed in hating the action of a person and not the person. Ahimsa means complete ill will against all that lives, goodwill towards all life i.e. pure love. Gandhi ji said that violent resistance would only increase the aggressor's wrath, and after killing the protectors, the aggressor would wreak his anger upon who be left defenceless. On the other hand if the protectors receive the blows without retaliating, the whole of the anger would be accepted on the protector and those left behind would in all probability be left unscathed. As Gandhi says:

“One person who can express Ahimsa in life exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality.” *¹

The religion of non-violence is not only meant for the Rishis and saints, it is meant for common people as well. Putting, the whole soul against the will of the tyrant. It is advance in ethical march of human thought. As said:

“It is rebirth in life”.

Ahimsa has nothing to do with physical strength rather it is based on spiritual strength. H.N. Brailford said about Gandhi Ji's Ashram that the Ashram was a place of retreat for the people who came looking for inspirations and learning. It is very rare seen men of refinement and learning leading and adopting a life of simplicity. Not, only of simplicity but of elementary

simplicity. Christian and Buddhist monasteries are embellished with architecture and paintings, but Gandhi's ashram consist of simplest huts and cells; Gandhi's own cell contained nothing meriting special mention, except two three dozen books, on different topics, giving no clue to his mental make-up.

Truth and Morality

Ahimsa is the vehicle for truth. Ahimsa was the means whereas the truth was the end. The two are so entangled that it is impossible to separate them. Truth was the highest principle of Gandhi ji. He always followed the path of truth. It is the consummation of all that is spiritual in man. He wanted the world based on truth, human nature being essentially good. As Gandhi ji said;

“I would certainly retire from the political life if i find that India does not imbibe my message and that India wants a bloody revolution. I should have no part in that movement because I do not believe in its utility either for India or, which is the same thing, for the world.”^{*2}

It was matter to be practiced from the heart. Truth was the highest virtue in mankind. The knowledge can be achieved from morality. Morality is the basic precondition for the knowledge of Truth. Morality is derived from truth through which we can achieve right knowledge and self realization. Truth itself was enough to include all his principles of life. As he states in the book 'My Experiments with Truth', "My uniform experience has conceived me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for realization of Truth of Ahimsa. I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain."^{*3} He further says; "To see the universal and all pervading spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics."^{*4}

Society

Gandhi ji was a man who leaved for the society and country. In the broader sense it can be said that Gandhi ji thought for humanity. He was rightly called the apostle of love and truth. He was who identified himself with the poor and the needy. He dedicated his life for cause of the common men. He raised his voice for the people who were oppressed and subjected to repression and tyranny. He never believed in the sophisticated class. He believed in mankind. He never preferred the city life and the people rather his heart felt for the village and its people. He said India lies in villages. He wanted to bring equality among mankind, and to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the needy. He looked for heaven on earth with eternal freedom.

He believed that be everyone should earn his bread. In one of the letter to Tagore he wrote he was living on the spoliation of his countrymen. He further added that trace the source of every coin that finds its way into the pocket one will realise the truth why gandhiji said that *everyone must spin*

Gandhi says;

‘I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the kingdom of heaven, which is spiritual deliverance. My patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of

eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will see that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They sub serve religion; politics bereft of religion are a depth-trap because they kill the soul.”^{*5} The spiritualism of politics helps the genuine claims of the society and humankind. Gandhi’s religion is ethical religion; his concept of politics is only a spiritualised and moralised form of politics. His society was based on things like; Swaraj, Democracy and Swadeshi.

Swaraj

Swaraj was the term Gandhi used on November 3, 1905. It was meant for politics and society. It was through this word ‘Swaraj’ he wanted to frame the society. Gandhi’s Swaraj had a broader sense than what the Britishers thought about Swaraj. It was not only freedom or independence. Swaraj had four dimensions: political, social, economic and moral facets. These all four should stand properly and co-ordinated. The moral dimension of Swaraj was self- restraint and self-rule. As, Wilfred Wellock observed Gandhian Swaraj: “the small community such as the village and the small market town. Only in such society where politics are local and vital since they have to do with the organisation of the local economic life can there be real political and economic freedom and full personal responsibility.”^{*6}

Democracy

Democracy stands for equality and equal opportunity to all in all fields. All the economics, physical and spiritual resources should be used for the benefit of all sections of people in the society. There should be no gulf between rich and the poor, strong and the weak. Swaraj and democracy meant the same. Each people should learn to rule themselves bringing complete sovereignty. People are the roots and state is the fruit and if roots are sweet the fruit is obvious to be sweet. Self government is the base of internal strength of an individual. Ghandhi ji said that the national government should be attained on the basis of self- government. Further, he paid emphasis to real democracy. By real democracy he meant things coming from within. Democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from the people living in the villages. Best democracy is only if it is based on autonomous village, on service, renunciation and local and individual initiative. Ghandhi ji never favoured centralised government. Gandhi ji’s democracy was on his passionate belief in non-violence, truth, self-sacrifice and individual freedom.

Gandhi said for nationalism and patriotism;

"My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or exploitation of other nationalities. The conception of my patriotism is nothing if it is not always, in every case without exception, consistent with the broadest good of humanity at large."⁷

"My nationalism, fierce though it is, is not exclusive, is not devised to harm any nation or individual. Legal maxims are not so legal as they are moral. I believe in the external truth of 'sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas'. (Use thy own property so as not to injure thy neighbour's)."⁸ - .

Swadeshi

Swadeshi was meant for unity. Swa means one's own and desh the total culture and environment. Desh did not mean a state or polity it should be inhabited and culturally appropriated by a community of men sharing common way of life. It is the way an individual responds to its desh. Only the spirit of swadeshi develops the want of flourishing and developing potential within the desh. He wanted to develop love among men and women living in the same society and state. As Gandhiji says; "We are too much obsessed by the glamour of the West. We forget that what may be perfectly good for certain conditions in the West is not necessarily good for certain other, and often diametrically opposite, conditions in the East. Free trade, which may have been good enough for England, would certainly have ruined Germany. Germany prospered only because her thinkers, instead of slavishly following, England took note of the special conditions of their own land, and devised economics suited to them."⁹

"Had we not abandoned Swadeshi, we need not have been in the present fallen state. If we would get rid of the economic slavery, we must manufacture our own cloth and, at the present moment, only by hand-spinning and hand-weaving."¹⁰

State

Mahatma Gandhi was an economist of his own kind. He wanted to eradicate poverty and bring equality. He wanted to eradicate poverty and find ways to uplift the condition of poor and deprived. As he was aware that India lies in villages, so the upliftment should start from village itself. Then only permanent action can be brought to abate the misery. Indian economy should be village-oriented. He believed in self-employment. Therefore he suggested cottage industries in every village, which would help in providing employment to large number of people.

Gandhi ji was influenced by the pattern of village republics of Greece. And from he started the panchayati raj as an administration or smallest form of government. As Pt. Jawaher Lal Nehru had said about Ghandhi ji that above all he is shocked at the vast gulf that stretches between the rich and the poor, in their ways of living, and their opportunities of growth. For his personal and psychological satisfaction, he crossed that gulf went over to the side of the poor themselves could afford. This vast difference between the few rich and the poverty stricken messes seemed to him.

He believed in non-violent, happy and prosperous society. He was against capitalism and brought the principle of Trusteeship. The state that Gandhi recommends was constitutionally liberal state, neutral towards religion but not hostile to it. His secular state is sui generis; it is unlike any in the West or elsewhere. The major functions of the state are the protection and promotion of human rights, and the securing of internal order and external secularity.

State was a system of institutionalised cooperation sustained by the acts of its citizens. Each citizen was partly responsible for what the state did in their names. The state should foster a statist manner of thinking and appropriated man's moral and social powers. The main concern was to reduce the society to a pliable and homogenous material amenable to uniform rules and bureaucratic management. Gandhi believed that violence is a concentrated and organised form and could never be weaned away from violence to which it owes its very existence. He preferred enlightened anarchy under which socially responsible and morally disciplined men and women never harmed one another and did not need any kind of polity. The ideal society for Gandhi was the sarvodaya society, the stateless democracy. Sarvodaya implies welfare for all living in a

community. The greatest good of greatest number. The ideal society for Gandhi was the development of self-governing village communities, decision of local issues. Everyone is his own rule. Gandhi was very much moved by Shelley's 'Masque of Anarchy' and would often quote the following line;

With folded arms and steady eyes'
And little fear and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay,
Till their rage has died away
Then they will turn with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak,
In hot blushes on their cheek.

Socialism

Gandhi could not think state without socialism. He had a different view on socialism. He believed in village socialism. He said nature produces enough that no man will have to starve. Each man should only take to the requirement. He only wanted that the poor should not be ousted. They should get the proper position as the rich. He wanted economic equality. He did not believe in destruction of capitalist rather he talked about the consciousness of the poor. They should to be taught for non-co-operation with the exploitation. Gandhi's ideas were based on non-possession, trusteeship, non-violence, human equality and the service of the poor. His ideal was equal distribution. His picture of economic equality conveyed the ideas that everyone must have a balance diet, a decent house to live, facility for education and adequate medical relief. Khadi and village industries represent the symbol of economic freedom. Socialism should not be thrust from above but it should come from below.

Conclusion

Gandhi ji was a man of faith. He wanted new world with social justice. His ultimate believe was Truth is God, God is love and Ahimsa is a means to pursue Truth.

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