

Mahatma Gandhi and Religion

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ABSTRACT:

Gandhian philosophy is not only simultaneously political, moral and religious, it is also traditional and modern, simple and complex. It embodies numerous Western influences to which Gandhi was exposed, but being rooted in ancient Indian culture and harnessing eternal and universal moral and religious principles, there is much in it that is not at all new. This is why Gandhi could say: "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills." Gandhi is concerned even more with the spirit than with the form. If the spirit is consistent with truth and nonviolence, the truthful and nonviolent form will automatically result.

Perhaps the philosophy is best seen as a harmonious blend of the traditional and modern. The multifaceted nature of Gandhi's thought also can easily lead to the view that it is extremely complex. Perhaps in one sense it is. One could easily write volumes in describing it. Yet Gandhi described much of his thought as mere commonsense. The essence of Gandhi's thought can be summed up in a four words; 'truth, nonviolence, Sarvodaya and Satyagraha' and their significance constitute Gandhi and his teaching." These are indeed the four pillars of Gandhian thought.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is held to be a personal matter and a social reality. Thought the history of humankind from the prehistoric times down to the modern times, religion has sought fellowship either by intensifying the existing social fabric, family, clean tribe, caste, local tribe, or natural community or by creating specifically religious communities within, above, or apart from other social and political groupings and institutions.

The Oxford dictionary defines religion as

"The belief in a super human controlling power especially in a personal God or Gods entitled to obedience and worship, the expression of this in worship, a particular system of faith and worship."

Religion ideally embraces all the values and adds the peculiar character of holiness to them.

Religion is manifested as an element of human experience. The institutions traditions, convictions and sacred writings are observable and open for examination. Most of the religions claim to be more than the collection of empirical data. Interior dispositions values, fundamental orientations of life include the religious phenomena. Religion claims to be true. Religion implies an interpretation of the meaning of reality in terms of its value. It is reckoning with the possibility that something at the core of reality does respond and satisfy human demands for life and fulfillment of destiny.

Religion characteristically is man's attempt to relate the disparate elements of his exterior and interior experience into a harmonious vision of the whole that will serve as a guide and a source of meaning for his understanding and his place in the world that enfolds him. Worldviews are composed of all the cultural elements of man-science art philosophy, religion etc.,

The term religion indicates a bond of scruple uniting those who shared it closely to each other. Religion is a feeling of absolute dependence, and it is the organization of life. It is varied in form, completeness and clarifying in accordance with the environing culture. Ecstatic, transic and intense aesthetic experiences are found with in religious framework. The religious experience is religious precisely because it occurs in a religious context of thought, discipline and value.

The development of the inner life in religion does not exclude the lower level of physical and material goods and they remain as the object of perfectly religious hopes to offer prayers for health, rain in the event of drought and sufficiency of food.

Religion is all-pervasive and universal phenomenon in the human societies. Different religions attempt to answer the ultimate human questions in different ways. Religion is a vital force to the human lives. It has become both an individual as well as a social activity. In the human communities, the institutions of social life grow and develop in their own fashion.

Religion and Its Meaning

For many people religion is affair of the heart, so often inexplicable even to themselves, so colored by their own special feeling for the particular beliefs and ceremonies that they consider as sacred through long association. It is difficult of them to assume an objective and scientific stance. Religion is personal and individualistic. Some people focus on the intellectual and emotional aspects of ethics and belief. Religion is conceived as a universal function of human societies. Religion is the recognition of all embracing personality of God, not merely theoretical but inclusive of the practical recognition of right, truth and beauty as of binding authority that is supreme overriding the individual or group interests.

Definitions

Religion is conceived primarily as a social fact as man cannot be abstracted from the society. "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness." If man is not solitary, he can never be religious. In the words of Immanuel Kant "religion is the recognition of all duties as divine commands."

According to Matthew Arnold religion is "Morality touched by emotion". Professor Taylor called religion as "the belief in spiritual beings". In the words of Prof. Ames religion is "The pursuit on the part of the community, or the individual member of the community of what are thought to be the highest social values." Professor Stratton defines it as "man's whole bearing toward what seems to him the Best of greatest". Professor Lowie sees its essence in "sense of something is transcending the expected or natural, a sense of the extraordinary Mysterious or supernatural." Salomon Reinach thinks it as "a sum of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties". Professor Hayden exalts it as "the co-operative quest for a completely satisfying life." According to George Bernard Shaw religion is "that which binds men to one another and irreligion that which sunders."

Religious Theories

The theories formulated to explain the origin and growth of religion are numerous. In the ancient India orthodoxy maintained that there was one inspired religion and all other religions are decadent form of it.

The theory animism is connected with the names of the sociologists – Sir Edward Taylor and Herbert Spencer. Animism is based on facts and inductions. The savage believes that what is active is alive. The living animal or material has within it has the same sort of spirit which man recognizes in himself. So he treats the world with spirit inhabited objects. He thinks that when he dreams, his spirit goes out to perform the acts, which he imagines himself as doing in his dreams. Thereby he acquires the notion of a spirit independent of the body and attributes spirit and spiritual powers to other men, animals and objects as same as his own. When he sees a dead man apparently still alive in dreams, he infers that the spirit of the dead is still alive and that when he dies, he will be still alive. Because, still living spirits may be malicious, the savage pacifies these potential forces by offerings ghostly, spirits are gradually endowed with more super human power. They have been revered as God's.

Evil

The word sin has a specific meaning in religion though widely used for wickedness. It goes beyond the naturalistic concept of immortality. It is not merely biological or with social import. In the religious context it is not to avoid suffering to be happy or to seek biological preservation and social harmony. Sin is man's inability to obey a

categorical imperative. Man is in conflict with the principles and values that are absolute and violation of an order meant to be universal among men. Sin goes beyond the external conduct conditions. Man is deprived of inner spiritual peace and satisfaction because of sin. Moral rules have been famed as instrumental for intrinsic values. Man apprehends the absolute principles and values that are fundamental for religion but not out of the awareness of social mores and rules.

Religion and Primitive People

The religious feeling among the primitive people is expressed primarily in feeling and in action and secondarily in the form of concepts and beliefs. Man attempts to come to grips with the mystery of life through gestures and acts. The beliefs, which explain or rationalize the gestures and acts, emerge later.

Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy of Religion is not an organ of religious teaching. It need not be undertaken from religious standpoint. The atheist who does not believe in the existent of God and the agnostic who is not sure of the existence of God and a theist who believes in the existence of God could philosophize about religion. Philosophy of religion does not constitute a branch of theology, which rationally analysis religious faith, but it is a branch of philosophy. It studies the concepts and propositions related to theology, phenomena of religious experience, and activities of religious worship on which theology rests.

“The philosophy of religion is, among other things an attempt to think critically and comprehensively about these religious beliefs and claims clarity of statements, consistency of claims, adequacy of evidence, validity of argument and comprehensiveness of generalization are matters of primary concern for the philosophy of religion as it seeks to examine the definitions and theories of religion.”

Religion and Reason

Immanuel Kant says that when a person comes to know of something as his duty before accepting it as a divine injection is the natural religion. On the other hand he who interprets the natural religion alone as morally necessary as his duty can be called the rationalist. If he denies the reality of all supernatural divine revelation, he is called a naturalist. If a person recognizes revelation but assets that to know and accept it as real is not a necessary requisite to religion he could be named as pure rationalist. When the person holds that belief is necessary to universal religion, he could be named as the pure super-naturalist in matters of faith.

A rationalist restricts himself with in the limits of human insight. He will not dogmatize. He does not contest either the inner possibility of revelation in general is the necessity of revelation as a divine means for the introduction of a true religion. For the matters of this nature no person could determine through reason.

Religion and Humanism

Among all the ideologies underlying the modern world, the principle of secularism seems to be more universal secularism is not atheism. Its framework does not prevent the possibility of contact between man and God. It does not prevent the possibility of contact between man and God and it does not obviate the possibility of a religious belief. It is not the Daniel of the existence of God, but rather the denial of his central role as a constructive factor in human reality that characterizes the secular attitude.

No religion can afford to deny the worth and dignity of man nor sever nor deprecate the indissoluble bonds between man, his fellow man and mankind that became the seat of the intrinsic value of life. Humanism in the modern age that upholds human dignity, rights and values could not ignore human transcendence. Humanism is stated to be a polite term of atheism. It is a religion of humanity.

Humanistic Religion

The religious humanists regard the universe as self existing but not created. Man as a part of nature has emerged as the result of the continuous process. Religious humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the

fulfillment of life. The humanists hold fast to the principle that the truest religion is that which issues and fosters the best life. Some humanists hold that humanism as religion. But Black ham denies humanism as religion and says that humanism is not religion but it is more than morals without religion. A humanist holds religion conditionally on rational grounds retaining his primary faith in reason.

Religion and Agnosticism

Religion insists on an organic connection between the world of nature and the world of values and delivers mankind from isolation and transience. It takes deeper than intellect and reestablishes the vital relationship in operation between man and nature.

Agnosticism is a doctrine that denies completely or partially the possibility of knowing the Universe. An agnostic accepts that there is a reality behind the phenomena. He holds that there is something behind the phenomena though one cannot be certain of its nature. One cannot be certain that he could not know any more if that of which he admittedly knows so much that it is unknowable. While to be ignorant is not the special prerogative of man but to know that he is ignorant is his special privilege. It sets limits to ones ignorance and knowledge. It is vain to urge men to turn away from the pursuit of the real.

Religion and mysticism

Mysticism is a religious and idealistic view of the world based on the belief in the supernatural. It owes its origin in secret rites conducted by the religious societies of ancient orient and occident. It is a secret hidden or inexplicable matter. It is conceived as a religious truth divinely revealed transcending human reason. The rituals conducted are to establish contact between man and God or some other mysterious being. Communion with God is established through the experience of ecstasy or revelation. It is a belief in intuitive apprehension of God.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON GANDHI

Philosophy of Gandhi exists on several planes, the spiritual or religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. The twin cardinal principles of Gandhi's thought are truth and nonviolence. For Gandhi, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth, the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality, the moral laws and code as its basis. Ahimsā, is understood by Gandhi to denote active love, the quite opposite of violence, or "himsā", in every sense. The ultimate station Gandhi assigns nonviolence stems from two main points. First, if according to the Divine Reality all life is one, then all violence committed towards another is violence towards oneself, towards the collective, whole self, and thus "self"-destructive and counter to the universal law of life, which is love. Second, Gandhi believed that Ahimsā is the most powerful force in existence. Had himsā been superior to Ahimsā, humankind would long ago have succeeded in destroying itself. The human race certainly could not have progressed as far as it has, even if universal justice remains far off the horizon. From both viewpoints, nonviolence or love is regarded as the highest law of humankind.

In Gandhi's thought the emphasis is on idealism, but on practical idealism. It is rooted in the highest religious idealism, but is thoroughly practical. One label (and almost the only one) Gandhi was happy to have pinned on him was that of "practical idealist". The important principle of compromise is relevant here, as is the acknowledgement that perfect truth and perfect nonviolence can never be attained while the spirit is embodied.

The Influence of Jainism on Gandhi:

Gandhi learnt the popular Indian maxim "There is nothing higher than Truth". He also learnt from his mother "Ahimsā Paramodharmah". That the practice of harmlessness or non-violence was the highest virtue or Ahimsā is universally acknowledged and rigidly practiced especially by the Jainas and Vaishnavas and Gandhi grew in that atmosphere. Jainism exerted profound influence on Gandhi which has been great living force in Gujarat. He thinks that the Jaina system of thought has influenced him to the utmost.

The Influence of Buddhism on Gandhi:

From a young age Gandhi made was determined to act in accordance with truth and non-violence. He preached equal respect for all faiths. He disavowed any new message and claimed what he said was as old as the hills. It is said he made heroes out of dust. Viscount Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, was quoted as saying; "Gandhi will go down in history on a par with Buddha and Jesus Christ" Buddhists respected this man of peace highly. He has been viewed in the same light as the Buddha. This great man stripped himself of all worldly goods and vowed to live a simple life, often fasting in his struggle for peace and Indian independence from British rule. He encouraged a boycott of British goods, urging Indians to spin their own cloth. Gandhi himself set an example, no matter how busy his life was or what his daily commitments were, he never slept without having spun some cloth. In the 1920s, Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed himself a Buddhist, saying that Buddhism was rooted in Hinduism and represented its essence. During his visit to Sri Lanka in 1927, Gandhi had no hesitation in declaring that he was a "Buddhist" because he saw Buddhism as cleansed Hinduism.

The influence of Gitā on Gandhi:

Gitā can be ranked first among the books that influenced Gandhi's thought and ideas. It has become an infallible guide of conduct and the dictionary of daily reference.

According to Mahadeva Desai:

"The Gitā performs the unique function of making what was an esoteric doctrine a living reality for the unlettered, the lowly and the lost and present the highest form of practical religion to enable each and all to realize his or her purpose in life".

The Bhagavad-Gitā or the sacred song, is a Hindu poem with deep philosophy, spirituality and divinity embodied in it. It primarily is a wartime counsel between Krishna and his disciple/relative warrior Arjuna. Gandhi has often acknowledged its profound effect on his life.

Gandhi on Fasting:

Mahatma Gandhi used fasting as a potent weapon in his "Satyāgraha", the first ever non-violent resistance movement in modern history against oppression and injustice. It is doubly significant that a century ago, in October 1906, Gandhi commenced his Satyāgraha movement in South Africa and first used fasting as a form of civil disobedience there. Gandhi himself adopted a simple, ascetic way of life, dressing only in a loincloth of hand-woven cloth and sandals. He was jailed several times and went on hunger strikes to focus attention on his cause.

Gandhi and Christianity:

Gandhi learnt the essence of Christianity from his friends. He strongly believes that Jesus was one of the greatest teachers that the humanity has ever produced. He held that Jesus does not belong solely to Christianity alone, but to his entire world and all races and people. Gandhi wondered at the non-violent character of Christ and called him "The Prince of Satyagrahis" In England Gandhi renewed the study of the Bible and admitted that Jesus played a great role in his life. He felt the beauty of the Sermon on the Mount by reading it. He chose several words from the Bible and referred to the Bible many times in his talks. New Testament, especially The Sermon on the Mount, went straight into his heart. Gandhi compared the Sermon on the Mount with the Gitā and referred to Jesus' saying written in the New Testament- Mathew 5th Chapter 39th, 40th verses:

"But I say unto you. That ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right, cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also".

RELIGION ACCORDING TO GANDHI

Indian philosophy and religious thoughts constitute the background of the idealist framework of Gandhi in his attitudes towards his social and religious values. In Gandhi we find an enlightening eclecticism of a characteristic type in which idealism, naturalism and pragmatism has found a place. Gandhi's aim was not to develop a professed school or tenet of philosophy. He was responding in his own characteristic manner, to the educational needs of his

time and he attempted at the same time to evolve a workable system to meet this need and to develop a rationale necessary for such a system. Idealism became the very foundation of the Gandhian system of education into which other tenets of thoughts have also found their way. Gandhi is above all an idealist, not realist; he leaps far a head in the moral consciousness of humanity. Gandhi was not a visionary but he claimed to be a practical idealist.

Ishwara Topa writes:

“It was the idealist that made him function as a practical man. This peculiar combination of the idealist and the practical in his person gave him a unique place among the great thinkers of the world. He always strove after the real, knowing fully the shallowness of the unreal. His realism had a strong tinge of idealism.”

He was not the least embarrassed to defend his moral and spiritual foundations in a more materialistic world of twentieth century which wanted education nothing to do with the world of religion and spirituality. For Gandhi the values related to the ultimate goals of education are absolute and unchanging. Man is expected to understand, accept and live these values to the best of his ability. Man’s conscience is to be shaped accordingly, and not to shape the values to the satisfaction of the individual’s relative conscience.

Culture and Civilization:

Man cannot live and survive without culture. His awakening is the result of human achievements in the domain of culture. According to Gandhi, culture is a living phenomenon. It is not conceived in terms of brick and mortar or in the form of huge tomes which can be eaten by moths. Culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of the people. It is this living culture, not a dead culture as a relic of inherited past, Gandhi’s belief lies hidden. He also knows the significance of civilization factors in the life of man. But his conception of civilization differs from what the Western civilization connotes.

Religious philosophy of Gandhi:

All religions refer to man’s alienation from his deeper being. They teach that man is a dual being, participating in two worlds - the higher, the divine, the free world and the lower, the natural, the one in shackles of bondage. The highest task which man has to fulfil in life, says Gandhi, is to liberate his spirit from those shackles and to affirm spiritual purity. The aim of education should be initiation into the higher life of the spirit.

In Gandhi’s life religion was an important element and therefore it was a great living force for him. In his view, religion is related to every aspect of life. Just as politics is not divorced from religion, so also education is not divorced from it. In his scheme of things a liberal education to all should include a reverent study of other faiths. He did not regard any of the great religions of the world as false or inferior. According to him, culture of the mind must be subservient to the culture of the heart and that should be the basis of all sound education. In his philosophy of education, spiritual training is far more important than mere training of the intellect.

Values of life:

Humanistic education through awareness of human values is what Gandhi greatly pines for in the welfare of global humanity. The best of individuality should have its manifestation through education.

As Gandhi observes:

“Real education consists in drawing the best out of yourself. What better book can there be than the book of humanity?”

Man is often times weak-minded enough to be caught in the snare of greed and honeyed words. This is of daily happening. Thus Gandhi teaches to offer resistance to temptation and not to fall a prey to it. The strength of character lies in not yielding but in conquering temptation. The weak-minded takes the easy road of temptation. It is the disciplined mind that stands in good stead to resist temptation. Otherwise it is a lost battle in which man is engaged.

TRUTH AND GOD

India is a country where people are predominantly religious. Religion and spirituality are firmly rooted in the minds of the Indian people. Some countries are well known for their political institutions, others for their economic prosperity while some others for their social advancement. India is well known for her philosophy and religion. According to Max Muller the study of religion is incomplete unless it is studied with reference to India.

To quote him:

Take religion and where can you study its true origin, its natural growth, and its inevitable decay better than in India, the home of Brahmanism, the birth place of Buddhism and the refuge of zoroastrianism even now the matter of new superstitions - and why not, in the future the regenerate child of the purest faith, if only purified from the dust of nineteen centuries?

To others, Religion is one condition among so many other countries, but to the Indian people it is one great sustaining force, pertaining to all the spheres of their lives. Mahatma Gandhi who was born and brought up in India could not escape this strong influence of religion in all his activities.

In India the word 'Dharma' is used to mean 'religion'. But it should be noted, that the word 'Dharma' in Hinduism has a much wider connotation than what we ordinarily mean by the word religion. The word 'Dharma' comes from the root 'Dhre' which means to 'sustain'. 'Dharma' is thus the greatest sustaining force or the binding force of the society. The goal of 'Dharma' is to create mental and spiritual fellowship among all men and to regulate its relation with all living entities. It thus tries to keep the world in perfect equilibrium. It is thus clear that the word 'Dharma' was not used in connection with any particular religion. Any religion, any custom, any creed could be brought under its fold and was thus out secular. Gandhi's concept of religion, therefore, brought under its fold people belonging to different religions.

GANDHI AND SOCIETY

Gandhi's great concern for all the oppressed and depressed made him committed to serve these through his motherland. His immediate task was to release India from the foreign yoke and to safeguard the freedom thus won through the implementation of his constructive programmes. He desired to establish 'Sarvodaya Samaj' through granting power to the people at the grassroots so that they could enjoy Gram Swaraj for ever. Sarvodaya is a term meaning 'Universal Uplift' or 'Progress of All'. The term was first coined by Gandhi as the title of his 1908 translation of John Ruskin's tract on political economy, 'Unto This Last', and Gandhi came to use the term for the ideal of his own political philosophy. Later Gandhian, like the Indian nonviolence activist Vinoba Bhave, embraced the term as a name for the social movement in post-independence India which strove to ensure that self-determination and equality reached all strata of India society.

Objects of Sarvodaya Movement:

The Sarvodaya Movement has as its target the establishment of a whole network of such self-supporting village communities. The family relationships which are confined at present to the blood group will be extended to cover the whole village where distinctions based on race, creed, caste, language and so forth will completely be eliminated. Agriculture will be so planned that all the people will have enough to consume. Industry will be conducted on a cottage basis till all the people in the village are gainfully employed. The needs of the village will be determined by the people of the village themselves, through Village Council, representative of the whole village.

Swaraj and Swadeshi:

Swaraj for Gandhi was not simply a question of ousting the British from India and declaring independence. He wanted the value system and life style of the British Raj to be done away with and totally replaced by a simpler, more spiritual, communal life. This new type of society, reflecting the old values of pre-colonial days, was to be based on the village. He stated that Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic ... having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours

or from the world... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom.”

PHILOSOPHY OF NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi was both religious and open-minded, and saw all religions as paths to reach the same goal. He was inspired by the teachings of Jesus, in particular the emphasis on love for everyone, even one's enemies, and the need to strive for justice. He also took from Hinduism the importance of action in one's life, without concern for success. Gandhi's God was an immanent and his general philosophy of Hinduism becomes an ethic of political action. Gandhi's approach to reality is religious rather than philosophical. He approached reality through non-violence. Non-violence is an integral part of every religion. He says that: “Non-Violence is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam. If non-violence disappears, Hindu Dharma disappears. Islam does not forbid its followers from following non-violence as a policy.

After having studied the Bhagavad-Gīta against the background of Indian culture and tradition, he has come to the conclusion that the central teaching of the Gīta is to follow truth and non-violence. When there is no desire for truth, there is no temptation for untruth or violence but it may be freely admitted that the Gīta was not written to establish non-violence. That the central teaching of the Gīta is not violence but non-violence is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the second chapter and summarized in the concluding 18th Chapter. The treatment of it in other chapters supports the position. Violence is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the Gīta strives to carry us to the state beyond sattva, rajās and tamas, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc., to one who reads the spirit of Gīta, it teaches the secret of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body.

Gandhi as a man of action:

Gandhi was not a visionary but he claimed to be a practical idealist. He was a man of action. It was the idealist that made him function as a practical man. He was also an irrepressible optimist. His optimism was based on the belief that man is endowed with infinite possibilities of development. His belief in the Law as the ideal is unquestionable. It matters whether individuals fall short of the ideal. Though he was aware of the reality, his striving was always to reach the idea. He elucidates the point thus “Euclid's straight line exists only in our conception but we have to postulate it. We have always to strive to draw a true line corresponding to Euclid's imaginary line. Ideals can never be completely embodied in practice. And yet it is never to be forgotten that ideals do exist; that if they be not approximated at all, the whole matter goes to wreck.”

Gandhi never practiced violence and above all never permitted violence. The only thing lawful in his estimation is non-violence. Violence can never be lawful, i.e., not according to man-made law but according to the law made by Nature for man. Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defence or for the defence of the defenceless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission.

Nonviolence as a World-force:

Gandhi says, ‘You might of course say that there can be no nonviolent rebellion and there has been none known to history. Well, it is my ambition to provide an instance, and it is my dream that my country may win its freedom through non-violence. And, I would like to repeat to the world times without number, that I will not purchase my country's freedom at the cost of nonviolence. My marriage to nonviolence is such an absolute thing that I would rather commit suicide than be deflected from my position. I have not mentioned truth in this connection, simply because truth cannot be expressed excepting by nonviolence.’

Science of war leads one to dictatorship pure and simple. Science of nonviolence alone can lead one to pure democracy. England, France and America have to make their choice. That is the challenge of the two dictators. True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of

the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated Ahimsā.

Satyāgraha:

Gandhi developed Satyāgraha as the practical extension of Ahimsā and love. It meant standing firmly behind one's ideals, but without hatred. Satyāgraha took the form of civil disobedience and non-cooperation with evil. Civil disobedience involved breaking a specific law if it was believed to be unjust, and then facing the consequences. The Salt March of 1930 was one of Gandhi's greatest successes in civil disobedience. Salt was necessary to the life of Indian farmers' cattle, and the British monopoly on salt production had led to massive taxes on the vital substance.

The other element of Satyāgraha, non-cooperation with evil, consisted of pulling out all support for an unjust system, such as the British rule of India. This approach need not break any law, but might include boycotting British products, refusing to work for British employers, pulling one's children out of British schools, refusing to supply the British with services, and not paying taxes. In 1920, after the British army massacred 400 unarmed demonstrators, Gandhi organized a nation-wide Satyāgraha which used non-cooperation techniques such as the ones above, as well as public demonstrations, in order to "withdraw Indian support from the vast, monstrous Machine of Empire until it ground to a halt." Although this nation-wide strike hit the British hard, and led to thousands of Indians being jailed, in 1922, it erupted into violence. A mob of "Satyagrahis" lit fire to a police station, killing two dozen police officers trapped inside. Gandhi called off the entire Satyāgraha and apologized for his "Himalayan blunder"; he had mistakenly believed that his followers truly understood non-violence."

The Essence of Nonviolence

Nonviolence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force. In the last resort it does not avail to those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love. Nonviolence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Nonviolence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.

Individuals and nations who would practise nonviolence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all except honour. It is therefore inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e. modern imperialism which is frankly based on force for its defence. Nonviolence is a power which can be wielded equally by all-children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals it is not for masses of mankind.

SUMMARY

Gandhi lived an austere life, practiced strict vegetarianism and abstained from alcoholic drinks, tobacco and even the milder stimulants like coffee and tea. His attachment to simple natural remedies against illness and disease and his radical ideas on education find expression in the system of governance. Village economy and village self-rule are being followed in the running of the Panchayati Raj system. His stress on basic education finds expression in the universalisation of elementary education. His fight for women's rights and emancipation also find expression in the current efforts to give them a place of importance in political decision-making. "Gandhi's relevance today was acknowledged globally when the UN General Assembly observed, for the first time, the Mahatma's birth anniversary as the International Day of Non-Violence on October 2 last year. The day now forms a significant occasion in the calendar of the world body.

The world has changed drastically since the passing away of the "Father of the Nation" sixty years ago. Political and social tensions have increased. Of course, war and violence were not unfamiliar to the world during Gandhi's lifetime. But the menace of terror is a phenomenon that came much later. Acts of violence during his time were not targeted at innocent people and soft targets. Even those acts he did not approve of as he preached non-violence. Today, acts of

terror are being committed and brazenly justified as means to political, social and economic ends. Worse, they are sometimes being given a religious dimension.

For Gandhi Ahimsā was a Dharma. It never bothered him if it was a plant of slow growth. Satyagraha, the pursuit of Truth, fully imbued with Ahimsa, was the only weapon he used to fight his political battles with the British. Though he faced many trials and tribulations all along, he finally won freedom for India. It was possible because he was brave and humble at the same time. Above all, the Mahatma was free from hatred. Herein lies the solution to the world's many conflicts today. If people are free from hatred, they can find answers to any question, political, economic and social.

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