

Relevance of Gandhian Secularism in Modern India

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ABSTRACT

The idea of Secularism as given by Gandhi is really fascinating because in the modern India, there is a conflict between religions. The political leaders in these days in India make conspiracy over religion. They create chaos and distortion on the name of religion only which is in result of depletion of peace from the society. Every day they used to fight on religion and also try to make their religion more superior and don't even consider that religion is a private concern or personal judgement. They don't consider that Religion and Politics are different entity. There are lots of things to do which make our society developed and peaceful.

Key Words

Gandhi, Secularism, Hinduism, Religion

INTRODUCTION

Gandhi was born at a time when India was passing through a big social and political crisis. They were dark days for India. The country found in him a Great Saviour, it fell him to provide leadership to lead Political Salvation. It was not easy task to provide leadership to such a big population. It was characterized by Diversity (numerous religions and traditions). He introduced the concept of 'Sarvodaya' along with the political leadership. He was concerned with political affairs, developed philosophy to fight against darkness and injustice.

According to Gandhi-

1. No State Religion, even if the entire nation practiced one single religion.
2. Religion is purely a personal matter.
3. Teaching of denominational religion is a private concern. State should remain neutral in this.
4. No discrimination on the basis of man's religion.
5. State should be secular and democratic not theocratic.

There are ingredients of Gandhi's secularism

1. Religion should be the personal affair of the individual.
2. The state should have no religion.
3. All religion should enjoy equal status in the society.

GANDHI'S INTERPRETATION ON RELIGION

According to Gandhi, Religion doesn't mean any particular religion or Hindu religion. He actually wanted to scrutinize the inherent goodness of every religion. He considered that religion which harmonises every Religions. Religion to him meant the recognition of the superiority of moral values or promises and a religious life meant dedication to pursuit these vows. He criticized that religion which doesn't spread harmony and demolishes the morality but applied to reason.

To Gandhi religion is identical with morality and truth is the substance of morality. He confessed that from the external side he wore the guise of a politician but from heart, he was a religious man. Infact Gandhi became a political leader by necessity. His religious views admired his politics. Actually his religious views supported his politics, which don't have relation with any particular religion. His religion was the service of the whole humanity. Religion to him meant a passion for love which visualized everything in itself whether it is human, animal or plant. For him, love God is to love his creation. He admired the gospel of love with Christ and the gospel of brotherhood, equality and oneness of man with the great Mohammad. Hence, he started to love even with the lowest creature. The noble part of his view made him love even with enemies or evil doers. He hadn't a feeling of hatred with the people who commmits evil things. Even he didn't have a feeling of hatred for Imperialists who ruled over Indians and exploited them brutally or we can say mercilessly. For Gandhi, religion is a personal encounter with the Divine. He struggled hard to get this very situation into reality for over 40 years. In the spirit of Hindu religion, he looked upon the Divine not as a Transcendental, Absolute but as a personal God..... Gandhi doesn't favour the feeling of fear, guilt and faith by force. He only tried to make religion a vital part of his life and applied it to different problems that he faced in his life.

He believes that his devotion to Truth has drawn me into field of politics and I can say without the slightest hesitation and yet in all humility that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.

He once remarked, "I reject any religion and doctrine that doesn't apply to reason and is in conflict with morality."

GANDHI AND HINDUISM

Though Gandhi was inspired by all the religions of the world. Although Hinduism had profound influence on his mind. According to Gandhi, Hinduism is essentially the religion of truth which doesn't see any difference between Truth and Religion and Truth and God. Hence, Gandhi said, "Truth is God and there is no God other than Truth." Gandhi accepted the spiritual and moral extract

(essence) of Hinduism which is greatly universal. He had intense love for Gita and Ramayana which is evident. He was also not a theologian or a systematic religious thinker. His political vision and practice was rooted in his understanding of sacred scriptures from many of the world's religions especially Hinduism's Bhagvada Gita and Christianity's New Testament.

His intense love for Gita and Ramayana is evident from the remarks, nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know.

The result of these many influences in Gandhi's life was a political vision of achieving justice by revealing the truth of oppression to the oppressor. Non-violent resistance tried to demonstrate in powerful and authentic way the oppressor's own brutality.

Gandhi didn't accept every words of Hindu Scriptures neither accepted any interpretation of scripture which was obnoxious and disagreeable to reason or moral sense. Gandhi's Humanistic outlook led him to revolt against Untouchability. According to Gandhi, Hinduism is not a missionary religion. Hinduism asserts everyone to worship God according to his own faith or Dharma and therefore it lives in harmony with all religions.

In the words of Gandhi, "The Hindu Religion is replete with illustration of great men, lifting their unfortunate brethren from their miseries. Will not the modern Hindus copy their own great men and once for all rule out the blot of untouchability that so defiles Hinduism."

Gandhi called his philosophy Satyagraha. A term that meant grasping forth and holding on the truth. It might also mean "grasping forth and holding on to God." Because for Gandhi God is Truth. Gandhi believed that Truth is more important than political convenience. While others in the Independence Movement argued that India's freedom from Britain should be gained through armed conflict or other means. Gandhi maintained that just ends could never be attained through evil means.

He said, "I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Quran and the Zend Avesta to be as divinely inspired as the Vedas."

GANDHI - A SECULARIST

Gandhi had a deep respect for Hinduism but it doesn't mean that he was a staunch Hindu or we can say that he was a loyal and committed Hindu and had a hatred towards other religions. Secularism according to Gandhi means no interference of supernatural power with the affairs of the world. He had faith on the inherent goodness of every religion. He had inspiration from all the religions of the world. He had no prejudiced attitude towards a particular religion. He opposed to this idea of partisan attitude and coercive behavior for particular faith. He was against the embracement and possession

of a particular creed. He pleaded for, leaving every individual to follow that form of religion which best appealed to him without any interference from the state.” Gandhi opposed the inclination of an individual towards a particular belief. He was pleased with the very idea of that religion which is to uplift the state and/or all-round development of the state. Everybody is to be equally treated. There was a concept of secularism in the state of Gandhi after Independence of our country on August 15, 1947. According to Gandhi, religion basically is meant for direction towards knowledge of the good, disciplined life and formulation of the good society. Everybody is free to choose any religion from his own will. An individual has the choice of religion which is best for him and also which can shape his life in a positive aspect. That religion which embrace him to make a better society without any interference from the state or society. For a secular state, there is no interference of state in once belief or faith.

He said, “He didn’t believe in State Religion even though the whole community had one Religion. The state interference would probably always be unwelcome. Religion was purely a personal matter” In this context, Gandhi didn’t advocate ‘State Religion.’ He was in the support of welcoming all the religion even though the state admires only one particular religion. According to Gandhi, Religion is purely a personal matter. There is no discrimination on the basis of religion. A state should be secular and democratic not theocratic. There is no interference of state on anyone’s beliefs and practices. Everybody has freedom of religion which makes their life healthy and ethical. It is silly and fatuous to interfere in the practices or faith of any individual or to create chaos and disorder in the society on the name of religion. Gandhi unwelcomed that state which considers a particular Religion or which interferes in the practices of Religion. According to Gandhi, Religion is a private concern. It should be the personal affair of the individual. A state is said to be secular when all religions should enjoy equal status in the society.

He was opposed the religious institutions and those who was in favour of these religions institutions. He was against the repetitive idea of denominational and sectarian teachings in state institutions. He was considered Religion as a matter of private judgement. Gandhi was essentially a Man of Religion. As we know that Gandhi was not once an advocate of State Religion. He assured to die for his religion but he regarded it as his personal affair. The state has nothing to do with Religion. Thus, Gandhi’s religious- mindedness didn’t deviate his concept or theory of secularism. Gandhi’s advocacy of secularism and non- advocacy of State Religion became the cornerstone of the Indian Constitution. Right to Religion and Cultural and Educational Rights the two fundamental Rights give tangible and visible form to the Gandhi’s ideas which were widely appreciated by the Indian Leaders and the architects of Indian Constitution. Gandhi stood for communal amity and unity. Therefore, at a large

scale, the word secular was incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Hence, he strongly urged the congress to adopt the ideal of secular state. Even the worst communal riots didn't detract Gandhi from holding faith in secularism and humanity.

On August 19, 1947, he addressed to Raj Kumari Amrit Kumar, "You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean. If the few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean doesn't become dirty." According to Gandhi, Humanity is an ocean which doesn't become dirty even if the few drops of the ocean are dirty. Gandhi reminded Indians to constitute one nation with diversity of religions. Mutual understanding and mutual tolerance are considered as the base of a secular state.

GANDHI, RELIGION AND POLITICS

Gandhi was not a politician in the Machiavellian sense. Religion is unfamiliar to the politicians. They both are different entities. Politics actually cherish the materialistic values and are imbued with the ideas of domination and control over economically challenged people. Religion consists of spirituality in itself. Gandhi spiritualized politics. He didn't separate religion from politics.

In the words of Dhawan, "His political philosophy and political technique are only two corollaries of his religious and moral principles.....without the moral basis supplied by the religion, life would be mere maze of sound and fury signifying nothing." He made successful attempt to provide a synthesis of Religion and Politics. He defines all the social and political doctrines and based all his doctrines on spiritual and religious view of life. In his opinion, if politics is getting devoid of religion is a death trap because it kills the soul. Gandhi considered it the pathways to the service of God.

In the words of Rolland, "To understand Gandhi's activity, it should be realized that his doctrine is like a huge edifice composed of two different floors or grades. Below is the solid ground work the basic foundations of religion."

Gandhi's political Guru Gokhale was considered the politics not as a past time. He considered it as a pathway to the service of God. Gandhi said, "Religion is a thing not alien to us, it has to be evolved out of us, It is always within us." Such an interpretation of Gandhi about Religion and avoidance of dichotomy between religion and politics didn't vitiate politics on communal lines. He considered dynamic, strenuous and morally active life. This life evolved the goodness of one's soul and mankind and the eradication of wrong and injustice. It was clear that Gandhi didn't believe in the Theocratic Dogmatism nor he believed in the alliance between secular and temporal powers. Also he didn't advocate the mingling of the sphere of Caesar and the sphere of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi was a secular person. After reading all the instances of his secularist idea, it is clear that he didn't support any particular religion but there is a contradiction in his views that in one sense he denied any particular religion and on the other hand he was ready to die for his religion. At this point contradiction occurs because being a nationalist and political leader of India, there should be no preference to any particular belief. The whole Indian considers him as 'Father of Nation' and here he created a contradiction by his dual concepts on religion. At one place he is considered as a religious-minded man and on the other side he denied to advocate the State Religion. This is somehow contradictory. Even he gave his views about Hinduism. It shows that he had more respect for Hinduism than other religions of the world. I admire him as he was the revolutionist of our pious land and also the reason to make it free from the imperialists. But I criticize him also on this dual idea of religion. Being a Nationalist, he should not favour any one religion which he had given more emphasis that is Hinduism. From this point of view, he showed that he admired the Hinduism most than any other Religion.

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