

Gandhian Spirituality and its Relevance in Present Era

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Abstract:

Mahatma Gandhi is a prominent theist of Satya, Ahimsa and Satyagraha. The philosophy of Gandhiji, which covers various aspects of human life based on universal humanitarianism, religious ethics and moral values are quite significant. All things in the universe including the sun and the moon and the stars obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single movement. The laws of nature are nothing but the will which maintains the world in harmony and order. This will for Gandhi is nothing but God. God is the perfect one, the ultimate ideal of everything. Thus, God is the beginning of the world and also its end. This gives to the world its reality. Gandhi accepts that every individual is a mixture of the bodily and the spiritual. There is an element of Divinity present in every man. The presence of reason, conscience, free-will etc. is an evidence of the presence of this element in man. Gandhi asserts that if, these Divine element are used in the right manner, man can bring heaven on earth. This belief in the essential spirituality and goodness of every man leads Gandhi to believe further in the essential unity of mankind. Every individual is born in a cultural environment, the traditions of which become important and significant for him.

Keywords: Divinity, Humanitarianism, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Non-violence, Self-Sacrifice etc.

Gandhi called himself a Practical Idealist. He believes in an Ideal that is through and through spiritual. But, he is a practical philosopher because he always tries to put his ideas into practice. He shows that society and state can very well be shaped in accordance with his philosophical and religious views. His analysis of social and political problems are 'normative', they always suggest an 'ought', they invariably refer to an 'ideal' - to the same basic ideal of Truth and Non-violence around which the entire thought-system of Gandhi is built. The origin of society lies in man's realization that complete selfishness has no place in life. The basis of society consists in Non-violence and self-sacrifice. It naturally follows that in a society there cannot remain any opposition between 'individual good' and 'social good'.

In order to develop proper understanding about Gandhian order of things, one must appreciate the specific context in which he wrote or observed something. Gandhiji, was not an utopia - builder but a man of action, practicing the art of the possible. He was not interested in filling in details in his picture of the ideal society. He was concerned with the first step that men today could take in that direction. Looking at the traditional Indian society facing the challenges of his times, challenges generated by the confrontation of an alien, and aggressive political authority and a relentless colonial economy on the one hand, and an old, weak, poor, disunited and stratified social order on the other, and involving himself in the tensions and turmoil our society has been experiencing, Gandhiji felt compelled to ponder, long and deep, over the situation, going to their very roots and ramification through time. As he did so, he developed, slowly but surely, a world view of humanity and human affairs, and his thinking about human society.

Gandhiji coined a new term---'sarvodaya'. Gandhian perception of sarvodaya is a considerably broader one that encompasses within its purview all efforts aiming at the overall welfare of all. Sarvodaya has indeed been the very basic idea of the Gandhian way of life, even from the days when he wrote his 'Hind Swaraj', long before he made his appearance on the Indian public scene as the great leader of Indian people towards the end of the First World War.

Sarvodaya is a total view of life and human society, comprising individual and collective life as much as in social, economic and political affairs as in moral, religious and spiritual. With Gandhiji's sarvodaya could not be conceived without its moral-spiritual base, spiritual not in any metaphysical sense. Since Sarvodaya stood for the welfare of all, one who subscribed to its ideology was expected to pledge himself to all kinds of sacrifices, even unto death, should that be necessary so that others may live. Sarvodaya, therefore, presupposed acceptance of a moral code based on the essential purity of means for achieving an end, allegiance to one's duties rather than insistence on one's right, absolute adherence to truth and 'ahimsa', supremacy of renunciation and sacrifice, cultivation of absolute fearlessness, and finally and most importantly, recognition and practice of 'bread labour' which meant that one must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, which, Gandhiji considered, was the divine law.

It is on the basis of these moral values that he sought to evolve a social, economic and political order

for the poor and hitherto despised and neglected teeming millions of India, who were his first and foremost consideration and to whom he felt morally obligated. He firmly believed that the humblest, poorest, and lowliest Indian as 'being equally the ruler of Indian with the tallest in the land'. This is the most important point to bear in mind in any consideration of Gandhiji's thoughts and ideas, arguments and activities. He was all the time working towards the effective articulation of a total social order in which the lowest and lowliest of the land will have the biggest say and their needs and requirements, hopes and aspirations will have the fullest way.

One pertinent point that needs to be mentioned is that researchers and analysts have more often than not tried to classify Gandhiji's ideas and activities under quite many heads such as social philosophy, economic philosophy, political philosophy and so on. However, this method of analysis seems to be grossly unfair to Gandhiji. One must not forget that he was all the time thinking and acting in terms of a total social order of his vision in which the moral, social, economic, political, creative and intellectual orders were all but parts of one integrated whole. The traditional Indian social order was based on the principles or system of varna and ashram, and Gandhiji upheld the social validity of this order, since he thought, this order has avoided all unworthy and heartless competition, restricted man's material ambition and defined in a socially healthy manner man's ambition in life. He regarded untouchability as a blot on Hinduism, and described it as a plague and a curse, and waged a non-violent battle against it all his life. Gandhiji extended the physical boundaries of our social life, and enriched our social content, a thing which was never attended to and attempted before in the overall national perspective.

Gandhiji appeared on the Indian socio political scene at a time when an aggressive sometimes even militant Hindu nationalism on the one hand and equally aggressive Muslim Communalism on the other hand had been raging for several decades, dividing Indian Socio political life into two. Gandhiji convinced that if he was to bring about a concretization of the socio political order of his vision, he must bring all the religious communities together into the same arena of work and struggle, whatever the cost. He wanted a unity based on the union of hearts. In order to ensure that no coercion is found at any stage, non-violence occupies a centre stage in Gandhian thought.

In today's social setup, we are facing multi facet problems in every sphere. This is the high time, when we tried to search the solution of these problems in Gandhian thought and philosophy. Although he expressed his views long back in 18th and 19th century, they are much relevant in today's scenario.

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