

GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF SELF – REALIZATION: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Every individual has to have a spiritual goal in life and this self-realization leads to salvation (Moksha). Self-realization is not a just vague religious concept for Gandhi rather the highest development of man. It is a process as natural as a seed growing into a full tree. Gandhiji's concept of self-realization occupies an important place in the Indian philosophy.

Key Words: Moksha, Self-realization, Truth, Karmayoga

Introduction:

Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi is an influential figure in the history of India. He is a philosopher, pragmatist, socialist, educationalist and a humanist. His ideas and ideals have a perennial value in the modern world. His concept of self-realisation occupies an important place in the Indian philosophy. Gandhi declared in his autobiography that self-realisation was the ultimate goal of his life. It occupies a pivotal place in Gandhiji's world view.

While writing an introduction to his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* Gandhiji said, that he likes to narrate his experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to himself and from which he has derived such power as he possessed for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual then there can be and room for self-praise. The very purpose of life is self-realisation and to see God face to face to attain moksha. This is possible only through spirituality. He lived and moved to this goal. All his activities in life were directed to the same.

Gandhiji's Perception of self-realisation

In the introduction, Gandhiji acknowledges that the true purpose of his autobiography is self-realisation. Then What was Gandhiji's perception of self-realisation in order to understand his self-realisation, it is essential to analyse his concept of God. He did not believe that God is a person. To him God is the force among all the forces. Truth for him was God.

According to Gandhi self-realisation is seeking God face to face. To cite Gandhiji's own words, I am but a humble seeker after truth and bent up on finding it. I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical is directed to that end.

Gandhi had developed a scientist's attitude of detachment in his search for truth. He called his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* – experiments that lead to the understanding of absolute truth which is God. His laboratory was his own conscience and the psychology of the people.

Way to self-realisation

Gandhi believed that self-realisation meant the sense of oneness with the universe, with existence. The chief source that guided him to identify himself with the universe was the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita enunciates a three-fold Sadhana for achieving self-realisation. They are Jnana Yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma Yoga.

Gandhi believed that for self-realisation all the three yogas are required. Karma Yoga, however is the base of the other two because Jnana and Bhakti, to be genuine and true should stand the test of Karma. Thus Gandhi shaped his means for self-realisation – love in action.

Love in Action – the Effective way To self – realisation

Gandhi chose action of the way towards self – realisation. One who choose the path of action (Karma Yoga) should develop detachment. In order to attain true freedom from the fruits of Karma (actions) one should renounce one’s attachment to the finite ego and its prejudices. As water does not stick to the lotus petals, so deeds do not affect a Karma yogi. He has to act as an instrument of eternal truth.

According to Gandhi, a religious spirit is achieved through service to humanity. For Gandhi, the only way to find God is to see him in his creation and be one with it. Gandhi equated the service of God with the service of the humanity. One cannot find God apart from Humanity. For Gandhi, the love of God was not something abstract. He loved God by loving God’s creation. To love God and to reach God, the path chosen by Gandhi was service. He considered service as his dharma. Hence, service was the way to attain Salvation. He believed that in order to see universal and all pervading spirit of truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself.

Self – realisation is freedom from violence

Gandhi identified violence to be one of the major obstacles in the realisation of the ideal of salvation, and therefore, considered the freedom from violence essential for realising truth. That is why Gandhi says, ahimsa means moksha and moksha is the realisation of truth.

Truth as a means of self – realisation

According to Gandhi, mans ultimate aim is God realisation. Realization of God means realisation of one’s own self. So all the activities of man should be guided by this ultimate aim. Gandhi truly believed that without truth, it is impossible to observe any other principles or rules in life. So one must observe the law of truth in thoughts, words and deeds to realise one’s own self.

To Gandhi, truth is the very path to self – realisation and further, towards the attainment of liberation. Since truth and non violence are as old as the hills, it is necessary that man realise this and constantly strive to tread the path of truth. Non violence or ahimsa is a means in this process. Self realisation is the process of discovering one’s real nature and potential and realising that potential as fully as possible. The highest goal of the human being therefore is self realisation or truth realisation.

Conclusion

Self – realisation is a unique contribution of Mahatma Gandhi. It is the central concern in Gandhian philosophy and is the ultimate goal of human life. Through love and servicetowards the living and non living being we can attain this self – realisation. Hence Gandhi teaches that self – realisation is the realisation of oneness with absolute truth as well as identification with all men through loving service. Our political, social, economic and all other activities should lead to this self – realisation.

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