



Mahatma Gandhi's Perspectives on Religion and Hinduism

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Abstract

Religion has the potential to transform humanity from isolated societies into vast, complex, and urbanized ones. Human society undergoes constant change with the evolution of religion, which can lead to an increase in the number of religions. So, the conflict of religions is created not due to the multiplicity of religions but due to egoism and the false notion of man. Due to egoism, religion becomes utterly perverted, and it deviates from its essentials into non-essentials, from the observance of ethical virtues and the experience of spirituality to rites and rituals, sacraments, and ceremonies. This trend of religion is diverse in Mahatma Gandhi's view, and he believes that all religions are true, have some errors, and are almost as dear to him as his own Hinduism. His statements may sound somewhat contradictory, but the spirit behind them is that the universal, ethical, and spiritual principles of religions are great truths. However, the long traditions of religion, as well as some dogmatism, orthodoxies, and cruelties associated with the religion, cannot be defended. Therefore, Gandhi asserts that there is no religion higher than truth and righteousness. He rejects any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and conflicts with morality. This article will focus on the extent of his understanding of religion and discuss his views on Hinduism from a religious perspective.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Religion, Hinduism, God, Truth.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was born in a religious Vaishnavite Hindu family in Kathiawad. He accepts the teachings of the Gita as a means to emancipation from all selfish attitudes in his religious views. The religion accelerates the eternal march of man towards perfection, the ascent of man as spiritualism stands for. One lesson from true religion is how to overcome oneself or one's ego, which awaits emancipation through altruism. Gandhi strongly advocates that eliminating the ego is the way to perfection, the way every human being should always strive to realize Truth, which is God. The spiritual vision of God as a living force that draws upon man is the only prized religion that man must aim at to become one in unison with the all-beautiful. In the Gita, worldly desires are instrumental in achieving God's purposes. It shows that to be in harmony with God's purposes, the seeker of Truth must give up attachments to earthly desires, including the desire to continue physical life and serve Truth and God. In this way, freedom will be achieved, and the person will no longer be paralyzed by fear, allowing them to take action.

Gandhi's Perspectives on Religion

The Vaishnava teachers greatly influenced Gandhiji, who believed that *"God is the creator; the Ruler and the Lord of the Universe and not a blade of grass moves but by his will."* Vaishnavas accept the world and God's creation as real and agree that liberation can be attained only through the mercy of God, propitiated by devotion and self-surrender. Though Gandhiji opposed fatalism and firmly believed that man can shape his destiny through his actions, he also believed that man's perfection and liberation can come only through self-surrender and grace. Perfection or freedom from error comes only from grace, without unreserved surrender to this grace, complete mastery over thought is impossible. He wants to express God as Truth and Love, Ethics and Morality, Fearlessness and conscience, and the source of light and life. God is conceived as a benign power struggling against an opposite principle or principles responsible for the world's evils. God regards all as being all-inclusive and ultimately capable of overcoming the evils of Satan (Dhiman, 1988).

Religion means to accept God for life. Acceptance of God means allowing love, truth, and reason to govern the heart, and removing selfishness, ill will, ignorance, unreason, and all passions, such as anger, greed, and lust. By religion, Gandhiji means not any creed but one that underlies and harmonizes all religions, that which changes one's nature, that which binds one to the truth within, and that which purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature that counts no cost too great to find full expression. It leaves the soul utterly restless unless it has found itself, known its maker, and appreciated the true correspondence between the maker and itself (Andrews, 1922). Gandhiji says that religions are different roads leading to the same point, that is Truth. His opinion on the fellowship of different religions that all religions are true and have some errors in them, and religions are almost as dear to him as his own Hinduism, since all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. His own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for his own faith, therefore, no thought of conversion is possible. The aim of the fellowship should be to help a Hindu become a better Hindu, a Muslim become a better Muslim, and a Christian become a better Christian (M. Gandhi, 1928).

According to Gandhi, a true religion makes man liberal and purifies the mind and heart. Religion provides a path to a higher life throughout the world. It has a direct relation with our inner life. Lord Rama, Rahim, Allah, Christ, and

Guru Nanak are different names; their teachings are no different. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians are the different means to reach the supreme power of God or Truth. A man's religious life is purified and chastened, and bound to have an immense social and political impact. Religions are means to tame our savage nature and bind man to God and man to man. They aim to suppress the beastly in man and to enshrine his rational and moral will. A harmonious attitude of man towards all religions is a great reality for the world's suffering people (Prasad, 1991).

Mahatma Gandhi often describes his religion as the Religion of Truth, suggesting that Truth is God, rather than stating that God is Truth. In the Upanishads, the Supreme is said to be Truth, Knowledge, and Eternity. God is the Lord of Truth, *Satyanarayana*. Gandhiji, as a seeker of Truth, claims to have found its way and made a ceaseless effort to see it. Truth entirely is to realize oneself and one's destiny to become perfect. He wears the same corruptible flesh as the weakest of his fellow beings. Through prayers, fasts, and practice of love, he tried to overcome his flesh's inconsistencies and his nature's discursiveness and make himself a fitter instrument of God's work. He convinced that all religions aim at the same goal and discipline for man's fulfillment. The accessories of religion are not of religion itself, not of the temple of God in the human spirit, but of the props and buttresses we have built around the temple for fear that it should fall. He practiced religion with courage and consistency and had an unusual sense of humour, a certain light-heartedness, and even gaiety, which we do not associate with ardent religious souls (Radhakrishnan, 1980).

Gandhi's religion is a religion of love and human service. He identified Ahimsa as a soul force within us, and to the extent it becomes God-like. He spoke of it as the cohesive force among animate beings. It is infinite love, which involves the capacity of self-suffering and can be done by service to all. A true devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation. Self-realization is impossible without serving and identifying with the poorest. (Maharajan, 1996). The right manner of humans is characterized by piety, forgiveness, humility, and universal tolerance. Gandhi wanted here to understand what he actually meant by religion; he meant religion is not in the sense of subscription to dogmas or conformity to rituals, but a religion in the sense of an abiding faith in the absolute values of truth, love and justice, and a persistent endeavor to realize them on earth. All the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. He says that every religion is as precious to him as his own, and religions are not meant to separate men from one another but to unite them (Sreedhar, 2000).

Gandhi's Perspectives on Hinduism

In Hinduism, the performance of Vedic rituals became a concept of great importance in the development of the Hindu tradition. The Vedic ritual term "*Dharma*" might be loosely translated as the English word "*Religion*". Dharma is the obligation to perform the ritual acts presented in the Veda and fulfil duties owing to an individual's social group and family. This concept encompasses not only ritual but also moral behavior. Dharma came to have wider applications, focusing particularly on caste duty and maintaining the social status quo. It offers the prospect of a reward and the means for the purification of sin (Flood, 2002).

According to Gandhi, religion is not the Hindu religion he prizes above all other religions, but the religion that transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, binding one indissolubly to the truth within and whatever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature that counts no cost too great to find full expression. It leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker, and appreciated the true correspondence between

the Maker and itself (M. K. Gandhi, 1920). Dharma is a religion that appeals to the heart and is prescribed by the sacred texts, followed by the sages, and interpreted by the learned. Rigorous observance of harmlessness, non-enmity, and renunciation are the first requisites for a person to entitle him to lay down the supreme law, i.e., dharma (M. K. Gandhi, 1946).

Gandhiji found Hinduism to be the most tolerant of all the religions he was familiar with. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to him as much as it gives the votary the most significant scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables followers of that faith to respect all other religions and admire and assimilate whatever is good in the different faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. It believes in the oneness of all human life and the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in his opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and sacredness of all life. Hinduism also emphasizes the ceaseless search for truth, rather than being an exclusive religion. There is room for the worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has undoubtedly absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism instructs everyone to worship God according to their faith or dharma, thereby living in peace with all religions (Murti, 1970).

The chief value of Hinduism lies in its fundamental belief that all life, not only human beings but also all sentient beings, is one; i.e., all life originates from the one universal source, which can be referred to as Allah, God, or Parameshwara, and so on. Hinduism is not sectarian. It encompasses all that is considered the best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Truth is Gandhi's religion, and ahimsa is the only way to realize it. He has rejected once and for all the doctrine of the sword (M.K Gandhi, 1938).

Conclusion.

The above context shows that Gandhiji believed in religious pluralism and was mostly inclined towards Hinduism. His spiritual thinking bears the stamp of his pilgrimage and a confessional character, and at the same time, he is infused with a splendid vision that he believes could be a beacon for all men everywhere. His personal experience of living in a society where the distinction between sacred and profane was somewhat unnatural, and where people of very different ethnic types and ways of life coexisted, gave him a unique advantage in envisioning the shape of a future community. He was a passionate believer in spiritual power and the life of contemplation as such, smacked of spiritual luxury, as much out of tune with reality as the palaces of marble and concrete that stand cheek by jowl alongside the hovels of the poor. His spiritualism was the source of religion, morality its base, and social forms and actions in its superstructure. He compared all formal religions and faiths, borrowing the most sublime elements from each to arrive at an integrated theosophical-cum-theological system. All his doctrines and precepts had a distinctly Hindu-religious flavor with a holistic emphasis. He sought truth and found it identical with love, non-injury, or non-violence. There is no religion other than truth; truth is absolute, all-pervading, and spiritual. He aims to realize God through serving humanity. The services rendered to the poor, untouchables, disinherited, and forlorn are indirect services rendered to God.

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