

An Ethical Interpretation of Gandhi's Views on Religion: A Critical Assessment

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ABSTRACT

As per Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), prevalently known as “the Mahatma”, a man without religion is existence without standards, and existence without standards, resembles a boat without a rudder. His purposeful endeavor to show up at the Truth of all religions made him say, “I believe in the fundamental Truth of all great religions of the world. And believe that if only we could, all of us, read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoints of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom, all one and were all helpful to one another”. In spite of the fact that Gandhi had his say in matter of governmental issues, financial aspects and social issues; hidden all these differentiated domains there was this strict intensity to it. The paper focuses on the significant issues of Gandhi's life and acknowledgment of these issues in commonsense life; and it was totally supported by various religions of the world; be it his developments of Satyagraha, Ahimsa, Sarvodaya, Swadeshi, Swaraj or Civil Disobedience and Non-co-activity. His self-portrayal “The Story of My Experiments with Truth” is an ideal exemplification of his life being guided by Truth and that he showed up at the Truth through various religions of the world, fundamentally by the way of thinking of the Bhagavad Gita, the inborn piece of Hinduism.

Keywords: *Ahimsa, Swadeshi, Swaraj, Gita, Non-violence*

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As indicated by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), prominently known as ‘the Mahatma’. Gandhi gave huge significance to part of religion in one's life. As indicated by K. L. Seshagiri Rao,

Gandhi believed that education without the study of religions is incomplete. Religion, in its varied forms, is not only a legitimate intellectual pursuit but a vital aspect of human culture and civilization.....The study of religions, for Gandhi, was not a purely theoretical or academic matter; it was also a practical and existential necessity. He was, therefore, interested in living religions, not dead ones. (Rao, 1990, p.xv)

Living religions interested Gandhi and that is apt approach as in contemporary times it is desperately needed.

Gandhi was quite sad that he was unable to gain knowledge of religions of the world in his childhood. His deliberate attempt to arrive at the Truth of all religions made him say,

I believe in the fundamental Truth of all great religions of the world. And I believe that if only we could, all of us, read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at the bottom, all one and were all helpful to one another. (Gandhi, 1927)

Religion comes from two words; ‘re’ and ‘ligare’ for example restricting together; it is restricting together of the limited with the endless, that is man with the God. This ‘God’ as a rule is taken to be Creator-God with all mystical ascribes like – transcendence, ubiquity, all-knowing, considerate, Absolute, Eternal, Infinite and the lone character; and moral characteristics like ‘God is Good’, ‘God is Love’, and so on Gandhi's idea of God and religion is very oriental. For him the base of all religions stays same; while the superstructure of all religions differs. This superstructure is upheld by different types of love and customs. This variety of customs stays insignificant as per Gandhi. As far as he might be concerned, it is the basic confidence in ‘God’ that loans backing to all inclusiveness to religions of the world. The obscure and mysterious customs are not given center significance in his idea of ‘dharma’. Gandhi never

conceded one religion however the possibility of 'One' God landed help to the all inclusive stage for all religions of the world. On this Gandhi needed to say,

...religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and pure love for it. (Gandhi, 1927)

Resistance as referenced above isn't enduring treacheries, and living with settles. However, resilience has loaded with positive importance. It implies tolerance shaded with understanding and internal investment in the philosophical and moral part of others' religion. In contemporary occasions the discussion isn't about 'God'; the discussion and no-nonsense talk is on 'religion'. The subject of conversation has moved from 'God' to the subject of 'religion', as God stays uncontroversial and non-clashing idea. Religions with well known idea of God or religions like Jainism and Buddhism without the famous idea of God don't dispose of this godliness. This heavenly nature loans backing to religion making it universalistic in character. To Gandhi religion was a human foundation made by human inventiveness to address down to earth undertakings just as profound issues.

Despite the fact that Gandhi had his say in matter of governmental issues, financial aspects and social issues; basic all these differentiated issues there was this strict enthusiasm to it. For him this 'truth' is only 'God'; this interesting agreement is eventually connected with his outrageous acknowledgment of 'Ahimsa'. He was exceptionally affected by the Sermon on the Mount and the rule of Ahimsa of Jainism; yet the manner in which his explanation could acknowledge Hinduism, nothing could interest him the most. On the off chance that we are to discuss Gandhi's most fundamental politico-social-financial philosophies; the first and the principal; the philosophy of Satyagraha, his idea of Civil Disobedience and Non-co-activity, his optimal State idea; Ramarajya and Swaraj; the base for every one of these was strict way of thinking, particularly Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Christianity. The Bhagavad Gita idea of Nishkamakarma, Jainism's accentuation on peacefulness, Buddhism's center philosophy of peacefulness and sympathy and Christianity's idea of pardon and never revisit standard by Jesus Christ exceptionally intrigued him. These standards outfitted all his political, social and financial changes. The idea of trusteeship found in Judo-Christian and Islamic way of thinking was executed by Gandhi in his way of thinking of 'nature' and monetary strategies.

On Satyagraha and Non-violence having co-connection to Hinduism, Gandhi's perspectives is all around put by M. V. Nadkarni, ...Gandhian view of Hinduism put primacy on personal conduct and ethics, it did not eschew faith in God. But truth was God for him, and seeking truth was religion. Hinduism for him was a process of search after truth. As such, rituals found no place in his religion, though he did not object to others following rituals of worship, provided it was non-violent. Non-violence was basic means of search for truth. It needed no ritual. But bhajans or prayers with bhakti without any sectarian bias were encouraged by him as the means of purifying mind, and strengthening one's resolve to pursue truth. (Nadkarni, 2006, p.xv)

Gandhi's belief in Swadeshi that is 'self-sufficiency' or 'economic independence' also was religious as 'on the ground that it originally meant the soul's final emancipation and freedom from earthly bonds.' Sarvodaya is one such principle accepted by Gandhi that also has a religious back-bone.

Gandhi believed in practice first and precept later. But from the above statement by Gandhi, it seems that he only believed in practice and his practice was his precept. In this way Gandhi is a hard-core practitioner. Well explained by Manisha Barua,

...Gandhi cannot be regarded as originating any new system of philosophy or any new religion in the academic sense of the term. He learned simply the principles or eternal truths from the greatest traditional philosophical and religious teachers of the world. But Gandhi's contribution lies in the fact that he tried to assimilate in his own way the teachings that appealed to him and to apply these not only in his personal life but also to social, political and economic problems. In this sense Gandhi could be called an applied philosopher. (Barua, 2002, p.23)

Indeed we show up to the point that Gandhi was a 'logical logician.' This inference is additionally a result of his firm faith in the hypothesis of Karma and his confidence in the idea of Nishkamakarma, for example performing activities without anticipating products of the activities, that is obligation for the wellbeing of obligation. This caused him to partake in monetary, political, social reconstruction as it is one's obligation to do as such. Religion for him was not a disconnected way from our normal life. Despite the fact that profound in nature religion needs to wrap up entire of humankind and all strolls of human existence. Along these lines, one can say that he needed to spiritualize the political domain moreover. Since Gandhi proposed to spiritualize governmental issues, it was legislative issues, however all strolls of human existence. As indicated by him there are various religions verifiably talking, however they are completely

called 'religion' as one fundamental religion associates them all. This principal religion is the base for all religions that achieves congruity and harmony among every single recorded religion. Indeed, he considered himself a 'Hindu' yet he had risen above those orthodoxal obstructions and took the best from all religions. This basic base of all verifiable religions he implied was a 'widespread religion'. What's more, no individual religion clashed or crashed into this general thought, all things considered.

Things being what they are, was Gandhi just a disciple supporter of Hinduism and consequently a genuine Hindu? All around clarified by Ms. Barua,

...formative period of his life he was exposed to all kinds of influences. In his childhood days he was influenced by the Vaishnava and Jaina ideas. He was also exposed to missionary work done by the Christians. During his stay in England and South Africa he was strongly influenced by the doctrines of Christianity. But these influences only helped him to take more interest in understanding his own religious tradition. Gandhi realized that in essence all religions are one and it is better to practice sincerely one's own religion than follow the religion of a different tradition. Gandhi remained a staunch Hindu but kept an open mind. Enabling ideas from other religion to come he only reinforced his beliefs, and helped him to be a better Hindu. (Barua, 2002, pp.28-29)

This can be confirmed by his affections for different religions. He was extremely clear in his philosophies of set up religions of the world and never opposed to condemn any religion – be it Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Judaism. A portion of the practices that were adjusted in Hindu portfolio were 'distance' which he accepted was a revile on mankind. Indeed he went to the degree of calling the dalits as "Harijans" – "Godly men". He was deflecting to visit sanctuaries as the Harijans were not permitted to visit sanctuaries; he removed his heavenly string as it intended to him nothing on the off chance that it was not permitted to Harijans. 'Jihad' in Islam – he didn't believe it to be a 'physical' blessed war however a positive factor like his own ardent faith in 'Satyagraha', a peaceful battle and a battle inside oneself between the powers of the 'great' and the 'malevolent', battling inside oneself, the battle among obligations and corruption, where dharma needs to win. Gandhi's religion consolidated 'supplication gatherings', this was absolutely to absorb pluralism and achieve solidarity in variety, particularly of various religions.

Gandhi never at any point peered downward on any single religion. Furthermore, simultaneously Gandhi never under any circumstance maintained any one religion in a special position. In spite of the fact that he asserted consistently to be a Hindu, as seen prior, the standing framework or unapproachability; whenever joined as a component of Hindu framework; he transparently condemned it. In spite of the fact that he searched out all inclusiveness in religions by saying that all religions have the basic stage for example God on which all religions are based; he was never with the consent to the possibility that one religion can be allowed a place of 'widespread religion'. He went to the degree by saying that the religions with 'divine inception' in type of sacred texts either through the sages or prophets like the Vedas, the Qur'an, the Ten Commandments or the Bible are not faultless; almost certainly the Medium through which they are been uncovered isn't questioned however the media through whom we have gotten these sacred writings are questioned as people are limited and can give us just a brief look at every bit of relevant information. In this way, any one religion in that issue can't be a Universal Religion. Persuasions or reason can be utilized to extricate the best from all religions and be acknowledged.

Once more, Gandhi's monetary strategy likewise had the base of religion. He never had faith in a pyramid design of financial framework, where one is on the summit and the others down underneath. Like pantheistic methodology, where everything is One and One is all, Gandhi had faith in co-driven circles, one circle urges different circles to come to front line. This is the reason his arrangement of Swadeshi and giving gigantic significance to Khadi and 'house industry'. This thought appears to work in a nation like India where individuals work at home; and sex correspondence can likewise be kept up as ladies also can partake in creating natively constructed items and handiwork work in their extra time. Through the different phases of his turn of events and movement the otherworldly factor of his being was bit by bit getting increasingly self-assured, till it turned into the most predominant trait of his later accomplishments. Petition and applause were related with his political and social exercises.

Along these lines, in general, we find that Gandhi focused on different social issues to achieve conscious social changes with the assistance of bhakti or commitment or otherworldly way. To finish up, in his collection of memoirs 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth', he says,

What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pinning to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit to this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end. But as I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value. There are some things which are known

only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual or rather moral; for the essence of religion is morality. (Gandhi, 1927)

From the above conversations on the Gandhi's thoughts on Philosophy of Religion one thing that comes out strikingly is he was never twisted to conventional or systematized religion. Despite the fact that condemned of utilizing terms like God, Soul, Self, Truth reciprocally and thusly his philosophical talks on religion had clashing methods of argumentations; he actually kept up his position that was profound quality or morals being natural for religion. So he doesn't appear of considering religion in a standardized structure on the grounds that each individual religion will have its fixed form, which Gandhi couldn't acknowledge. So for Truth and in that issue profound quality is his second name for religion. In this manner the analysis isn't supported. As indicated by Bhikhu Parekh, three significant concerns are found in the contemporary occasions; the requirement for interreligious discourse, the requirement for between strict exchange and the requirement for discourse on clashes between strict gatherings having complex causes say political or monetary interests. These worries should be tended to. Not many have attempted to address these worries as they can in any case prompt perilous results.

Gandhi is one such individual, however disputable in certain issues, had attempted it, start the exchange and address these delicate and mind boggling matters. As Bhikhu Parekh composes,

...Gandhi reason and experience are the most reliable source of knowledge and guides to human life. Not all areas of life, however, are equally within their reach, including those that involve non-reproducible and...forms of experience. Gandhi argues that in these cases we have no choice but to go beyond reason and experience, and make a leap of faith. Since faith can easily open doors to all manner of dubious belief, it must be rational, not blind. While both types of faith go beyond reason and experience, the former, unlike the latter, does not 'contradict' or 'go against' them. It is 'allowed' or 'permitted' by them, goes beyond them only when they are silent, and continues to be guided by them. In Gandhi's view this is the case with the belief in God. (Cf., Douglas, 2008, p.3)

To finish up I might want to say that, Gandhi's strict way of thinking attempts to set this worldview where clashes are settled and conceivable exchange can happen. So Gandhi can be known as a 'strict reformer'. He endeavors to filter religion from against reasonable and deceptive variables. He accepts that the primary point of religion is to guide people to stroll on profound way and an ethical life. Taking the best from religions of the world, he expected to introduce a religion not cleansed with unbending thoughts, however purging it of its orthodoxies and pulling moral strength from religions of the world. This can address the current day emergency. Gandhi trusted it isn't just enduring a religion that is significant, it is similarly imperative to regard different religions. In *Young India*, Gandhi says,

...came to the conclusion long ago...that all religions were true and also that all had some error in them, and whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism, not that a Christian should become a Hindu...But our innermost prayer should be a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Christian a better Christian. (Gandhi, *Young India*)

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