“RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES”

S. R. SARANYA KUMAR
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Rashtriya Sanskrit University, Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi is considered to be one of the greatest sons of India. As a man of action, he practiced what is moral, truthful and non-violence after thorough examination of those values. The entire gamut of his philosophical thought is based on two moral cardinal values, namely, truth, non-violence which are more relevant today than before. Gandhian concepts such as, social equality, universal love, non-possession, purity of means, value oriented education, satyagraha, classless society, removal of untouchability, global peace are having great relevance and significance in modern times. The modern society has become more aggressive, acquisitive, exploitative and violent due to the imperfection in the human institution. There is no other alternative than to adopt the ethics of Gandhi to get rid of evils of the modern society. Whatever may be a problem, however complex-modern-ultra modern, Gandhism had always a remedy. Gandhi’s social philosophy became more and more relevant in the establishment of new peaceful world-order.

KEY WORDS: Relevance of Ethics, Satyagraha, Global Peace, Classless Society and Love

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is one of the most important enterprises of our times of all the factors that account for the peculiar shape of culture and the outlook of its people upon themselves and upon the world around them. Religion and Ethics must be taken as among the most down to the present. Gandhiji believed that morality without religion is incomplete. The reason is that we cannot divide Gandhian philosophy into water tight compartments. Gandhian views of the individual and the society, in a holistic perspective, and the moral law as understood.

The root meaning of religion is “that which binds” the root meaning of its Sanskrit equivalent, dharma, is “that which holds” In Indian thought dharma means both religion and morality, dharma sustains the individual as well as society when morality incarnates as the most important feature of religion life. n this paper I would like to dwell upon two aspects.

First is to understand and analyses Gandhiji’s views on religion and morality in general and secondly I would like to describe Gandhiji’s views on cardinal vows as the basis of his ethics and its relevance to contemporary times.

The word religion is used by different people in different ways. It is a belief in ultimate values which are in harmony with the structure of the universe. “Religion, is almost an universal phenomenon in human societies”¹ Sri Radhakrishnan says, “The religion is an insight into a reality, and though inaccessible to reason, is consistent with it”² A religious man transcends all limitations imposed on him by his material nature and enlarges the creative purpose. Thus Religions is a dynamic process aiming to uplift mankind to a new level³.
GANDHIJI AND RELIGION

Gandhiji defined religion as a belief in the ordered and the moral Government of the universe. To him, religion is not sectarianism but binds indissolubly to truth which is a permanent element present in human nature.

Morality

Morality is the basis of human life. In fact, the real progress of society depends on morality. In other words, it contributes to peace, happiness and progress and creates an atmospheres for an ideal evolution of society. In mundane world, moral values determine the way of life to be led. For Gandhiji, Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Gandhiji took every aspect of human life only from moral stand point. He even suspended non-cooperation movement in 1921 as he believed that people are not morally qualified to conduct the movement. He believed that morality is not possible without religion. He declared emphatically that there is no religion higher than Truth & Righteousness. He further opined that if we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. His humanism believes in doing good to others as the way of highest moral life. He pointed out that as long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. He expressed his feelings clearly in Harijan.

“For me, morals, ethics and religions are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is like ‘sounding brass’ good only for making noise and breaking heads”

Cardinal Virtues

Gandhiji advocated some cardinal virtues of life which are essential to lead a pious and moral life. Indian tradition emphasizes the observation of cardinal virtues by individuals for the good of the society. Indian ethics speaks of five virtues: ahimsa (nonviolence), satya (truthfulness), aparigraha (non- possession) and celibacy (brahmacharya). Gandhi added Abhaya (fearlessness). In understanding the social implications of the Gandhian view of cardinal virtues, it is absolutely necessary not merely to define his cardinal vows and establish proper relation between them, but also to focus on the nature of peace he has preached and practiced.

Ahimsa (Non- Violence)

Literally speaking non-violence means non-injury and non-killing. Gandhiji gave a new interpretation to the concept of non-violence According to Gandhiji, non-violence is the law of human nature & race. He held that non-violence as a moral virtue is a law of being. One may not harbour any evil thought. His concept denies enmity. The doctrine of ahimsa, according to Gandhi, tells us that ahimsa requires far greater physical and mental courage than that required for delivering physical blows. Physical power has obvious limitations. He clearly stated.

“Ahimsa is a positive state of love, doing good even to the evil doer ... ... it requires you to resist the wrong doer by disassociating yourself from him ... ...”

Gandhiji opined that non-violence is not only for the rishis and saints but it also meant for common people. Real harmony in the society lies in Ahimsa but not in Himsa.

Thus, the Concept of Ahimsa emphasized by the Father of the Nation contributes to the highest good of mankind not only in present times but also in future. Good derived out of violence is temporary and the evil it does is permanent.
Relevance of Gandhian Ethics in Contemporary Times

Satya (Truthfulness)

Gandhiji held highest regard for Truth. His life was a series of experiments with Truth. To him, Truth is not merely truthfulness in word, but in thought and deed. He identified Absolute Truth with God. The word Satya comes from Sat, which means to be and to exist. He worshipped God not as Brahma but as Truth only. He stated that lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and falsehood are to be avoided to practice truth.

Asteya (Non-Stealing)

Jainism and Buddhism bestows more importance to Asteya. these two religions exerted much influence on Gandhiji. Asteya means not taking away the property or anything belonging to anybody unless it is given by the person concerned. Gandhiji believed that people are not always aware of their real and many multiply their wants and thus unconsciously became thieves of themselves. He stated that people must reduce their wants. This change could alleviate the property to the possible extent. He described those people as thieves who irrationally acquires more than what they need to survive. He emphasized that person is qualified to follow this virtue only if he leads simple life.

Aparigraha (Non-Possession)

Gautama Buddha and Mahavir Jam gave more importance to Aparigraha, Both spiritual personalities impressed Gandhiji. To Gandhiji also, Aparigraha is contentment. He also stressed that pursuance of this principal resulted in harmonious society. Rich have a store of things which they do not need. millions are starved to death for want of sustenance.

Aparigraha requires that like birds man must have no stock of food for tomorrow. But, in reality, it may be impossible to observe it in life, but, this need to be extent. This alone promotes real happiness. He emphasizes that love and aparigraha go together. Without perfect love aparigraha is not possible.

Celibacy (Brahmacharya)

All Indian spiritual works gave more importance to celibacy. It has been practiced as a cardinal virtue. Etymologically speaking, this virtue is a way of life for the realization of Brahma. All kinds of restraint have been associated with it. Gandhiji says that Brahmacharya means control in thought, word and action of all the senses at all times in all places. An individual who practices brahmacharya is free from all passion. A person who appears to have control over body but entertains evil thoughts in his mind cannot be described as brahmachari. In the words of Mahatma.

“Brahmacharya means control of all organs of senses. He who attempt to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his efforts futile… … … control of all senses will be scientific and possible of success.”

Abhaya (Fearlessness)

Gandhiji added another virtue, Abhaya. Fearless mess. According to him, a seeker can not seek truth without fearlessness. Moral bravery is the highest heroism. A seeker is ready to sacrifice, patiently and fearlessly everything including life for the sake of good of other people. He is very clear that fearlessness is essential for the growth of the other noble qualities. He says that this is possible only to those people who realized the supreme. “It is by hearing God could one cease to fear man”, says Gandhiji.
Universal Religion

The study of great religious scriptures helped Gandhiji for attaining religious and moral life. A study of religion is essential for the understanding of ones own and ones general culture to him, all religions are true & God-given. They seems to be imperfect due to imperfect interpretations. Religion is marked by discipline and moral practice. He observed religious ideas of different religions by observing persons who adopted them. He wanted that people should have proper picture of what they want before they could have something to achieve. He believed that religion “binds man to God and man to man” (Harijan, 4.5.1940, p. 17). He concluded that religion divided people instead of binding them together. The religious conflicts have been generated because of the misunderstanding of religious teachings many use the religion for the social & political growth. Gandhiji opposed this trend and stated that religions must be used for the growth of society and politics.

According to Gandhiji:

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed

Gandhiji evaluated every religions by judging the lives and experiences of those who adopted them. He never subscribed to the fanatical view that there must be one religion. He believed in the equality of all religions. The basic objective of very religion is binding man to god and man to man. He arrived at the following conclusions after a long study of all great religions of the world.

1. All religions are true
2. All religions have some error in them.
3. All religions are almost as dear to me as my

In the modern context, religions divided people instead of binding the together. The religious conflicts have been generated because of misunderstanding of religious teaching. He believed in The Vedas, the Bible, the Koran and Zend Avesta.

“Who so even shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the concept of renunciation is present in all major religions.

Ends and Means

The relevance and significance of Gandhian philosophy lies in the application of moral principles, viz., Truth and Non-violence. If the means adopted is not moral, the end can not be moral, some people give undue importance only to the end, but this was not acceptable to Gandhiji. According to him means must be moral as the end. He stated that “for me it is enough to know the means. Means and ends are convertible terms in my philosophy of life”

Gandhiji stated that, if the means are taken care of, the goal could be reached sooner if means adopted are wrong, end even it is pure, cannot be reached. He never accepted violent means to achieve goal. He did not like to bring independence of India by violent means.

“Religion and Politics”

Politicians generally do not take religion seriously in regard to the methods they adopt for the control of people, by another. The economic exploitation of the poor and weaker sections of the community. But to Gandhi religion
and politics are inseparable. In fact, he made it a mission in life to revolutions politics. Gopalkrishna Gakhale influenced Gandhi profoundly who taught him to spiritualize politics. Gandhi says.

Gokhale taught me...to spiritualize the political life of the country and political institutions of the country...I’ve dedicated myself to the ideal20

Gandhiji was compelled to enter into political field as he felt that he could not do the minimum social service without entering into politics. He made politics as means to achieve his desire, minimum social service the Central principle of Gandhian political philosophy is that the religious and ethical values, common to all great religions, have to be incorporated in the political philosophy he said

“Politics divorced from religions has absolutely no meaning...politics are part of our being. we ought to understand our national institutions”21

Gandhiji believed that religious base politics apart from the evils such as corruption, injustice & expediency. His political thought is based on supreme moral law. His political philosophy upholds religious tolerance and inter-religious understanding. In contemporary times, we need a religion which promotes national integration and peace-keeping politics for serving the mankind.

CONCLUSIONS

Many opined that Gandhiji as a professional politician. He himself stated categorically that he is essentially politician inspired to serve humanity. He dreamed that he desired to build India of tomorrow without poverty and unemployment and without wars and bloodshed. He preached those ethical values, common to all great religions, have to be incorporated in the political philosophy. He said that “Politics divorced from religion has absolutely no meaning. Politics are a part of our being”23. Thus, the religion based politics of Gandhiji laid utmost stress on moral values to set his politics on right action with the object to set his politics apart from evils such as corruption, injustice and expediency. He felt that we need a religion which contributes to the national integration and peace-keeping politics aimed at the service of mankind.

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