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RELIGION AND POLITICS: ACCORDING TO GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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India is a multi-religious society with a majority of Hindus, followed by Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and others. Indian history is replete with inter religious conflicts. Religion mobilizes religious sensibilities of people in order to get their support to capture power; while politics uses intrigue, diplomacy and makes attempt to win public opinion either democratically, if the system allows it, or usurps power with the help of army, if the society is under-developed and backward. Now in this article I want to address, what is the traditional relation of religion and politics in India. Our country has no official state religion, but religion plays a central role in Indian daily life through its temple ceremonies, festivals, pilgrimages, family religious traditions etc. According to Mahatma Gandhi, there can be “no politics without religion”. In contrast to the liberal political tradition, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) articulated a politics organised around dharma or religion- not this or that religion, but around religion as a concept. Religion provides him with another way of thinking freedom and equality. His religion thus requires him to ask: how might a subaltern politics not only refuse subordination, but do so by relinquishing autonomy and even sovereignty- which is to say, by becoming minor? Such a religion must strive for an equality that does not make the minor into a major that remains minor. Religion also teaches people that it is pointless striving for a revolution to bring about social change in this life. According to the 2011 census, 79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism, 14.2% adheres to Islam, 2.3% adheres to Christianity, 1.7% adheres to Buddhism, and 4% adheres to Jainism

In this article I want to discuss what religion Gandhiji professed, taking religion as such a handy label, we can reach our goal very easily by quoting a question that was once put to him and the answer that he gave. The question was “what is your religion?” the first question sent to him by Professor Radhakrishnan in 1935. Gandhiji answered this question, “My religion is Hinduism”. And he also said “Hinduism for me is the religion of humanity and includes the best of all religions known to me”. He declared that he called himself a *Sanatani Hindu*, because he believes in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures. He also said that he believes in *Varnashrama Dharma* was a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. He believed in Cow protection in a much larger sense than the popular belief. Cow protection had become a symbol of national patriotism. Professor Radhakrishnan had sent him more two questions: “How are you led to it, that is, your religion?” and “What is its bearing on social life?” Gandhiji answered “I am led to my religion through Truth and Non-violence, i.e., love in its broadest sense”, and “the bearing of this religion on social life, is...to be seen in one’s daily social conduct. To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself I continuous and continuing service to all life”. Gandhi’s religion was simply an ethical framework for the conduct of daily life. In his autobiography Gandhi clarifies that without religion the idea of politics is quite unimaginable.

To go back to his assertion that he was a Sanatani Hindu. Worshipping of idols is the first thing that would catch the eyes of an outsider about the religious practices of the Hindus. Gandhi put his view of the matter in negative words that he didn't disbelieve in idol worship. Gandhi's perhaps never seen in the act of worshipping an icon. He practised austerity, self-suffering and renunciation, - but if *Brahman* is *ananda* (bliss), he seems to have tasted this *ananda*, for he affirmed, "mine is a life full of joy in the midst of incessant work", and also assured others that "one who looks upon the things in the universe as various facets of God will certainly have the beatific vision of God"¹. The value of an ethical framework in domestic and social spheres, question its feasibility in politics. For most politicians politics is a game which they must play, and play to win; what is expedient takes precedence over what is moral. The moderate leader was Gokhale, whom Gandhi hailed as his 'political mentor', who first talked of 'spiritualising politics'. For centuries, India had her bands of *sanyasins* who had turned their backs upon worldly ambitions, and consecrated themselves to the service of God and man. The idea is that Indians of the present day can bind themselves together and putting aside all thoughts of worldly interest which we generally find in the sphere of religion alone.

Gandhi once remarked that the Indian civilisation "is a mingling of the cultures represented by different faiths and influenced by the geographic and other environment in which cultures have met."² For him, any civilization is not wholly Hindu, Muslim or Christian but a blend of them all. India has been characterised by certain unique qualities of tolerance and synthesis which have evolved into an integrated way of life. Religion in India is a process of assimilation involving an amazing dialectic. In India religion was never exclusive and was prepared to shed its dogmatism and rigidity in order to work out a new synthesis. Gandhi had convinced by Hinduism emerged stronger and richer with the historical interactions with the alien religions, like as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

Professor C.F.Andrews told Gandhi's position with regard to one's love for religion. It is not necessary for an Islam to identify himself with Islam orthodoxy; rather he should transcend the narrow religious commitments. Gandhiji has clarified that Hinduism satisfied, his soul, filled his solace in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Upanishads* that he missed even on Sermon on the Mount. It is worth nothing that there was no contradiction in Gandhi with his immense love for Hinduism and his equal regard for other religions. Gandhi's point of view to Hinduism was not its religious views of the rituals, but its propensity to accommodate the positives and eliminate the negatives of different religious persuasions. While spiritualism and renunciation are supposed to be the core of Hindu religion, Gandhi would not undermine the importance of these concepts, but he always emphasised more on its ethical components. Rather than being one cohesive religion, Hinduism is the melting pot of various religions. But according to Mahatma Gandhi, religion did not mean Hindu religion alone. He clarified very clearly religion means not offering one's Namaz or going to the temple visit. According to Gandhi, religion means knowledge of oneself and knowledge of God.

The principal aim of all religion is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that pupils can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and way of living. Gandhi perceived religion in a very broad sense. "Man without religion is a man without roots. Therefore, religion is the basis on which all structure has to be erected if life is to be real".³ Religion embraces the totality of man's activities and personality into artificial compartments like political, economic and religious, would in the Gandhian sense be erroneous. He thought religion and morality to be the basis of politics. The origins of Gandhi's political philosophy are traceable to his religious background. His political actions followed from his religious world view.

A Hindu by belief and convictions, for him Ramayana from the Ramayana of Tulsidas was his infallible guide. He judged "words like *Aparigraha* (non-possession) and *Sambhava* (equality)" gripped me. He studied Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy, stimulated in him to make deeper studies of Hinduism. He also read out Christianity and Islam when in South Africa. The New Testament apprised him of the former religion, while he became well-versed with by reading Carlyle and Washington Irvine's, the life of the Prophet Mohammad. He also studied Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God is within you and Ruskin's Unto This Last, being of Christian inspiration. In the Christian tradition God is defined as love. In the Hindu traditions, the search for Truth becomes the search for God. Gandhi said, "God is Truth" and "Truth is God", because an atheist may deny the existence of God but nobody will deny Truth. But tradition of the Christian we can see God is defined as love. These are equivalents for the term God, Truth and Love is not contradictory but they are complementary to each other.

Gandhi's philosophy is related to concept of God and Concept of soul. He said the service of mankind is service to God. According to him, God is *Paramatma*, is a big soul. Even we all are part and parcel of the great soul that is the meaning of our existence. His aim was the realisation of God through service of mankind. The service is to be given to the poor, untouchables and indirectly services rendered to God. He emphasised the spirit of service, dedication and detachment. Gandhi was highly devotee of Karma, a Karma-Yogi. He told prayer as an infallible source of strength and inspiration for guidance of man. Gandhi's viewed prayer as the most potent instrument of action which gives to us a new version of the efficacy of prayer. Gandhi believed in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Puranas* in the Hindu scriptures. One another aspect of *Varna Ashrama Dharma* was inherent in human nature but his belief was strictly *Vedic*. In his life, Gandhi practised *Brahmacharya*, *Asvada*, i.e., control of the palate, *Asteya*, i.e., non-stealing, *Aparigraha*, i.e., non-accumulation, *Abhayam*, i.e., fearlessness, *Svadharma*, i.e., voluntary acceptance, *Sarvadharma Sambhava* which means not only toleration of the religious of the other people.

Gandhi was a deeply religious person and he accepted the fundamental tenets of Hindu religion. His innate faith in Hinduism, he wanted always for a universal humanistic religion which will be the best elements of all religions. He wished every religion to be a specific road to the same divine goal. He said all religion is valid and none exclusive. He observed, "I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the *Vedas*, I believe in the *Bible*, *Quran* and the *Zend Avesta*, to be as much divinely inspired as the *Vedas*".⁴ He was a Hindu as a Buddhist for he didn't practiced the philosophy of Nirvana, Moksha or salvation, the aim of his life. He emphasis on truth is as part of his borrowing from Hinduism as embodied in Confucianism and Taoism.

In England, when Gandhi came in touch with the Bible, he wanted to establish some positive ingredients of Christianity. The tradition of Christianity of Western added a new feature to Gandhi's view to religion of his Hindu roots. He decided a *Satyagraha* as a means of self purification and not a method of compulsion. Gandhi wanted the best from every religion and at the same time believed that the salvation for him was possible only through Hinduism. He identified, "The *Gita* contains the gospel of *Karma* or work, the gospel of *Bhakti* or devotion and the gospel of *Jnana* or knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three."⁵ Gandhi justified *Varna-Ashrama* and the division of society into four but there was some criteria behind this was duty and not privileges.

In the ethical and cultural field, Gandhi practiced Dharma the beginning as well as the end of life. The idea of Dharma flowing from both Hinduism and Buddhism in the political framework has a dominant tradition in India. Gandhi resurrected this ideal as an ethical force in politics. Gandhi wanted the incorporation of moral values in politics and thus stressed to moralize religion. According to him, the morality is the core of religion. He said, morals, ethics and religion are changeable terms. Gandhi tried to reconstruct the structure of politics and gave it a moral base. According to him, if religion is an act of faith, then that faith will be justify itself in action. For him, religion is a way of life, it is the basis of all morality, and morality is the criteria of politics. Morality is the sources of all religion and politics is operated within the framework of morality. Now we can say, Gandhi's political techniques of non-violence have important ethical consequences. Gandhi wanted to build the political structures on ethical root, providing it correctives.

Gandhi criticised to the approach of Machiavellian to politics seems reliable. He advised the reconstructed of the moral values in the political practice might appear utopian in the present context when politics has gone downhill. His views to the *Khilafat* Movement was criticised by many of his colleagues as a move towards appeasing the Muslims. He found in nationalism, a use of religion and religious symbols for political purpose. Gandhi wanted to go into a deeper analysis of the character of Islam as a religion especially in its interaction with the Hindu religion. Nowadays India that Muslim faced the greatest challenge for they felt insecure within the folds of the Hindu society although they were converted from Hinduism and adopted a reactionary militant posture in the process of nation-building. In 1938, Gandhi elaborated: "My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. I approach politics as everything else in a religious spirit. Truth is my religion and Ahimsa is the only way of its realisation....I have rejected once and for all the doctrine of the sword"⁶. He showed that the *Gita*, the *Quran*, the *Bible*, the *Granth Sahib* and *Zend Avesta* contained gems of wisdom.

In the Indian context, religion and politics unlike the west have gone together and any attempt to separate the two would be unrealistic. Today in India has maintained a relationship between religion, morality, spirituality and politics. Spirituality is conceived in India as the foundation of social, economic and political goals. Religion is one of the paths of our life and it cannot be separated from the state. His faith was based on the *Shastras* among the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and the *Bhagavada Gita*. He advised daily reading of the *Gita* to the Hindus, read the *Quran* for the Muslims

and the Bible for the *Christian*. He rejected the concept of coercion in the field of religion and wanted for leaving every individual to follow the religion of their own choice, without any interference from the state. He rejected the concept of state religion and any kind of institutionalisation.

In modern era we have started using the word Dharma for religion but previously meaning was duty or righteousness. Radhakrishnan says, "Man is not only a social, religious and rational animal but also a political being"⁷. His view that if man as a political being has not been much of a success, it is because he has kept religion and politics apart, thus misunderstanding both. But Gandhi was criticised this rule. He did not separate politics from religion, sacred from secular, pious from profane. He said very clearly that Politics without morality is a thing to be avoided. Louis Fischer says about Gandhi, "Actually Gandhi's politics are indistinguishable from his religion. In Politics he adhered to moral considerations, and as saint he thought his place was not in a cave or a cloister but in hurly-burly of the popular struggle for rights and the right. Gandhi's religion made him political and his politics were religious"⁸. He was a saint among politicians and a politician among saints. He was a dynamic person who enriched the political world, he proved the efficacy of moral compulsion as an instrument of politics, and the against of crude instrument of physical coercion that has dominated man's political history so far. He felt compelled to come into the political field because he found it could not do even social work without touching politics. He felt that political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress. He gave an ethical orientation to politics which his own participation in democratic politics. Politics is connected with ethics. His approach to the problems of politics was creative, original and revolutionary and he accepted to his debt to Indian scriptures and religious principles. His views on self-realisation, the relationship of duties and rights and the relationship of morality and politics, his theory of non-violence and Satyagraha are an integrated way of thought and experience.

Gandhi's view on religion and politics are quite different from those of many political philosopher of the modern era. He was ignorant of any religion apart from human activity. In the modern ages the characteristics of politics was never free from the influence of religion. In this modern age politics is being looked as a secular activity. But Gandhi was a spiritualized politics; he was opposed to separating religion and politics. Politics without religion is meaningless. Those said that religion has no relationship with politics; do not understand the connotation of religion at all. There will be no politics without religion; politics must be subordinated to religion. We can conclude that Gandhi's concept of religion being a broad one, it is not Hinduism or Islam nor for that matter specific religion. It is only search for Truth and God. He said that his mission was to win self rule and broad enough to encompass various paths. We knew from Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography that his first reaction to Gandhi's fast in jail in September 1932 was one of anger at his 'religious and sentimental approach to a political question'. He said fasting as the most potent of the weapons in his weapon of Satyagraha. He did not fast to compel the Muslim League to give up its demand for Pakistan. He started fasted for awaken the conscience of the Hindu community against untouchability. In the present situation we can remind, a century ago Swami Vivekananda's message to the world is "The Christian has not to become Hindu or Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. Every religion had produced men and women of most exalted character."⁹

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