

The Relevance of Gandhiji in Respect of Preventing Communalism in India

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi was a great philosopher in Indian political thought. His religious idea was totally different from the western secularism. His religious idea based on morality, truth and non-violence. In this way, Gandhi discovered and applied the most powerful and successful 'Satyagraha'. Some people opine that Gandhi was communal. In most of the cases they have misinterpreted the philosophy of Gandhi. He was never with a communal mentality. Gandhiji has solved several times the communal problems. His main aim was the establishment of unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. In Today's India this idealism of Gandhi is especially relevant.

Keywords:

Introduction

Communalism is a burning problem in Indian politics. It has revealed itself as a dominant obstacle on the way of socio-economic and political progress. Communalism can be undoubtedly termed as a social malady. The partition of the country is the pathetic end of the religious sentiment and narrowness of a section of people. It was hoped that after the partition the communal conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims would come to an end. But before long, the hope turned to disappointment. Partition on the basis of communalism made lacs of people homeless, on the other hand even do day a large number of people feel insecure due to the great expanse of communalism. Creating division among different community communalism has involved itself in destroying the 'mined culture' in India. Actually Indian National Congress surrendered before communalism when they agreed to the proposal of Muslim League who demanded that partition of India would be on the basis of Religion and Pakistan would be formed. If we judge from this point of view, the communalism in modern India may be marked as a historical inheritance.

Objectives of the Study

Our aims and objects are how to prevent the communal problems in India in respect of Gandhian philosophy. Actually, Gandhiji's idea about religion is totally free from the fundamentalistic narrowness and orthodoxy. In his opinion, true religion gives importance on the moral qualities of man. Religion is the firm belief on god and love foe all. He doesn't mean a particular religious faith. His feeling about religion is universal.

Gandhiji clearly understood that this problem cannot solved imposing s solution from outside. The root cause behind the communal conflict are the doubt and grudge against each other. So, it we are unable to cultivate the feeling of fraternity and tolerance among the masses in this land to diversify, unity cannot be ensured. Gandhiji never judged religion with a fundamentalist attitude. He tried to established the communal harmony between Hindu and the Muslim.

Review of Literature

Mahatma Gandhi on Problem of Communalism

Author: P.K.Arya, Pointer Publishers, 2009

Mahatma Gandhi on the problem of communalism written by P.K.Arya is a remarkable book about the Gandhian philosophy of religion and communalism. The author rightly stated that the problems of communalism in India are a very critical problem.

According to Arya, it can be said that Gandhiji explained religion as an important social bond, not from the angle of narrow communal outlook. During the Khilafat Movement his effort was proved to be the true. Then he moved from one part of India to another top stop communal riot. To control the communal riots of Noakhali, Bihar, Belegkata. Like a researcher in the field of science Gandhiji also made experiments on the



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various aspects of truth. According to Gandhiji, the Satyagrahee should have the spirit and interest for justice. In his opinion, the muscle power or the power of arms is not the true power to fight for justice, the moral or spiritual power is the original power. True solution can come out through the spiritual power. This moral power is the basis of Satyagraha.

According to author, not only to solve the political problem, it is the flawless means to solve economic, familiar and communal crisis. The main policy of Satyagraha is non-violence. Discarding violence Gandhiji used Satyagraha as a new way to achieve success in the history of freedom struggle traditionally, this way follows the spiritual outlook of India.

According to his firm belief, Mahatma Gandhi entered in the "Yajna" of national freedom along with others, whether they were Sikhs or Buddhists, Parsis or Jains, Christians or Muslims, or his own co-religionists. He, as all know, accepted ahimsa as both, means and goal. He made it the basis for achieving freedom for India. In my opinion, ahimsa holds its due place in all religious communities. I do not believe that it does not help the followers of any community to perform his or her duty. Rather I believe that it is ahimsa alone that assists to enable us to fulfill our duties in the best possible manner.

But it was unfortunate that many people could not become identical with the firm and true message of Mahatma Gandhi pertaining to non-violence. Even then, he, time and again, repeated his message of ahimsa till the last breath of his life; worked for communal harmony declaring it a value supplementary to non-violence. He, time and again, conveyed suggestions for peace brigade and for volunteers to work for harmony. These suggestions are more or less important even today for a country like India.

Thus, in order to get rid of the problem of communalism in India, there is a need of collective efforts. All will have to discharge their duties. If we do so, definitely harmony will prevail. Everybody will prosper. This must be done; this was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi for a free India.

Meaning and Nature of Communalism

Generally communalism is the principle of communal ownership, community does not mean the religious community only. In sociology 'community' refers to a group of people belonged to a particular religion and with life style of their own. Again, many of us think that a community can be formed including the people of particular religion, language, profession or caste on the basis of their mental unity though they do not live in a particular region. Such community is termed as the 'community united by mental unity'. Unlike the groups based on language, profession or caste, a religious group can be termed as a community applying mental standard. If we judge from the above point of view, the ideology of the religious group or religious community may be termed as religious communalism. In modern India communalism means this religious communalism.

According to Prof. Bipan Chandra, communalism is such a belief which is based on the

principle that when a group of people believe on a particular religion, their social, political and economic interests become the same. According to this creed, the Hindus and the Muslims, the Christians and the Sikhs in India are separate and individual communities and they are freely and individually arranged and united. The followers of a particular religion are not only part of the particular religious interest but also their political, economic, social and cultural interest is the same. According to this belief Indians certainly view the secular interest motivated by a particular religious group. So, they must have separate religious identity. KarunaKaran opines, "Communalism in India is that particular philosophy which stands for the development of a particular religious community." According to Badruddin Umar, "We term the mentality of a person communal when a religious community, on the basis of its inclusion in a particular religious community is ready to oppose and do harm to the persons belong to another religious community." Pramod Kumar described communalism as an 'Ideology', but he did not think it a 'complete Ideology' or a 'Type of Ideology' which is unable to express its subjective reality properly, on the other hand it represents it in a distorting manner. According to Achin Banaik, Communalism is a heretic process in a multi-religious society and it divides the religious communities on the basis of secularism and creates increasing tension among them.

Bipan Chandra opines that communalism is a modern ideology which has amalgamated the past ideologies and some aspects and ingredients of some institutions and historical backgrounds. The class-consciousness and joint movement of the working people can emaciate the effect of communalism, similarly the ideology of communalism is able to weaken the class-consciousness and joint-movement of the working class. A.R. Desai opines that the failure of the movement of the working class may give birth to 'false consciousness' in them. Such class-consciousness can make the unity of a particular class nature and transformed into a fertile land of mental narrowness. The oil-mongers of the ruler and exploiting class take charge of creating and spreading such ideology. Bipan Chandra has circulated this view of Desai with due importance. In his opinion communalism is a 'wrong consciousness' and in respect of religion is a 'wrong ideology'. But he again says that communalism is a modern ideology. It can never be termed as the resurrection of Middle Age theory and ideology. To create new concept and ideology the use of past ingredient is a common or known historic fact. All these information, concepts and religious faith are used for the political, economic and social purpose of Modern capitalism. In the past Hitler and Mussolini used to touch the hearts of the common people on the basis of the old ideology and conservative ingredients and to have ideological nourishment they collected ingredients from long past. Although there is religious diversity in India, but this diversity was not used as political base or to gain public support. But at present this religious discrimination is considered to be the cause of all types of social, political, economic and cultural

conflict. Bipan Chandra has marked it as 'wrong consciousness'. As a 'wrong consciousness' communalism distorts the main conflict in our society.

Religion and Communalism

Communalism originates and flourishes using religion. Still, religion and communalism are not the same. In this context Badurddin opines, "Although there is relation between religion and communalism, these two are different in nature." If we do not judge communalism and communal mentality separately, its real identity will not be understood. We call it devotion to religion when we have faith in the customs and theories of a particular religious. But communalism is a different matter. We call the mentality of a person communal when he or she on the basis of his or her inclusion to a particular religious community goes against and is ready to do harm to another who belongs to a separate religious community. Here the mentality to do harm to other comes in his/her mind not from direct acquaintance or opposition. In this regard that particular person is insignificant, his or her community is important. Religious theory and customs are related to the devotion to religion. But communalism is related to community, it means in case of devotion to religion to conduct and religious faith of a person is more important. In case of communalism devotion to one's own religious community is more important. Apart from this true devotion to religion is directed towards after-life. He or she expects true gift in this after life. Communalism makes profit in this world. Religiousness does not need opposition to any other religion. But communalism flourishes and reaches its goal opposing others and doing harm to them. So, there is no theoretical relationship between religion and communalism. The worldly interest of the society or community which is formed on the basis of religious theory and customs is the father of communalism. In this sense communalism is completely secular. When a religious community works in the name of religion to gain profit more than the religion should serve, we mark it as communal. When a community led by such communal mentality turns religion into fanaticism and involves itself in spreading its influence in political, economic and social fields, communal politics originates.

According to Swami Vivekananda, "A nation that cherishes hatred and hostile mentality can never last long. Only love ensures eternal life". But some profiteer politicians give much importance on the customs and rituals of a religion instead of its spiritual side. As a result, the positive sides of a religion like tolerance and love for humanity are ignored and the negative sides like baseless religious customs and superstition etc. become prevalent in our society. Thus, in a multi-religious country like India the places of the Veda, the Vedanta, the Upanishad and the Koran are captured by 'Cow' 'Swine', temple and mosque. And with these issues the persons who add fuel to the communal riots, have no faith on the above-mentioned religious books. For their own class-interest titillating religious sentiment such politicians are busy in acquiring national power influencing the

field of politics. Thus, 'Politicization of Religion' takes place.

Religion and Gnahiji

The thoughts and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi circled round religion. But he has explained religion from a totally different angle. In his opinion, He who thinks that there is no relation between religion and politics, does not understand the real meaning of religion, in fact Gandhi was a devoted Hindu. He placed the Hindu religion above all religions in the world. The explain it, on 6th Oct. 1921 he wrote the Young India, "We can find out truth only through the Hindu religion and following the non-violent way." He was deeply inspired by the Geeta. In this context he was written in his autobiography, "... How much my co-learners were influenced by the Geeta is known only to them." "To me, the book became a great guide for conduct. This book became an encyclopaedia in my religious matters. As I consult an English dictionary to find out the meaning of an unknown English word, similarly when any conduct-related problem arose, I used to make it clear consulting the Geeta." In fact, Gandhi also used the Hindu religion in the interest of his political movement. During the Non-cooperation movement in 1920-22, although he was recognized as an unchallenged leader of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities, he never hesitated to declare himself openly that he was an eternal Hindu. Even he openly said that he believed the class-distinction system and cow-reservation policy. Above all when he made an appeal for the unity among the Hindus and the Muslims, he used to address the former as 'we' and the latter as 'they'. And the most surprising matter is that to win the hearts of the Muslims he advised them to follow the Hindu ways of 'meditation' and 'self-purification'. In his imagination he used to describe his ideal social system as "Ram Raya". So, it is said that like the extremist leaders of the Congress Party and the armed revolutionaries Gandhi also involved himself conducting the political movement based on the Hindu religion.

Although the courses of the Nationalist Movement were based on the Hindu religion, they were not communal by nature. The extremist leaders told about the supremacy of the Hindu religion but they did not show hatred against other religion, particularly against the Islam. Above all—the main target of extremist politics was the opposition of colonialism. To fulfil the target the leaders involved in the took the shelter of the Hindu religion. So, the Marxist like Rajani Pam Dutta did not hesitate to certify the positive side of the nationalistic sentiments of these religious movements. The same logic can be applied in case of armed revolutions.

Gandhi was the pioneer Hindu-Muslim unity. In his opinion there is a fraternal relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. Swaraj can never be achieved without their joint effort. He heartily believed that the welfare of both the Hindu and the Muslim communities will not be possible till they have faith on each other. His 'Ramdhan' song proves that he was faithful to all religion. Gandhi's earnest desire for secularism is expressed here. But this secularism

is not the separation of religion from politics. Instead, his secularism is based on the ideology of 'equality to all religion'. This ideology naturally helped the bourgeoisie to establish supremacy. In this context Prof. Randhir Singh said that the Indian rulers have always used religion to establish their supremacy, to spread ideological influence and to control the common people socially. Thus, they have become successful to impose unjust and unequal social system on the common people. And this has been done through the formation of Indian secularism of special concept. The definition of this secularism is 'equality to all religion'. We cannot deny that the preachers of such concept have unknowingly sown the hemlock tree of communalism when they try to lead the Hindu religion based political movement.

Nature of Gandhiji's Secularism

When we shall analyse the secularism of Gandhiji, we should mention first that it cannot be done in any traditional method. He did not accept the concept of secularism in Western sense. He has clearly announced in 'Young India', "I prefer my emancipation most, even it is more preferable than the freedom of India. So, at first I am a Hindu and then a patriot." But he did not accept the extremist concept of Hindutwa. He accepted the concept of Hindutwa broadly and with liberal mentality. Although he declared himself a Hindu, he gave much importance on equality to all religions. On the other hand, the Marxists have described the religious concept based on non-violence as 'colonial trick'. In this divergent opinions Gandhiji's secularism has gained a complicated shape.

The Marxists have marked the thoughts of Gandhiji as the main obstacle in the way of anti-colonialism movement in India. They opine that through various movements Gandhiji has secured the colonial interest. Some of them, even do not hesitate to call him as the spy of colonialism. They have shown that Gandhiji established his social and political set up on the basis of wide spread Hindu religion among the Indian farmers. In Gandhism, the presence of anti-capitalism is very weak and incoherent. British colonialists blocked artificially the progress of India in the semi-feudalism stage. Gandhiji had direct connection with this feudal ideology. As a result, the socio-economic condition of India helped to spread the Gandhism. They have showed that Gandhiji had openly supported the inequality in the society. He had opined that class-distinction system is essential. He had advocated for vested interest saying that truth and justice can be achieved through self-sacrifice and suffering. The Hindu religion which gives priority to social discrimination, preaches barbarism and baseless ideals was used by Gandhiji to represent himself as a saviour of spiritual service for the Indian people. Lenin has termed the Hindu religion as the most despicable thing in the world and preaching such a religion Gandhiji has caused great harm to the conscience of the common people. His theory for non-violence and equality to all religion actually pave the way of class-co-operation. They opine that the historic role the religion plays is that it is a weapon to make the people

slave on the basis of spiritualism. So, religion is also a political weapon. Indian Jamindars and Bourgeois used Gandhism to make the Indians slave and to keep them in the darkness of ignorance.

But this analysis in respect of Gandhiji's thoughts is not correct. The aim and object of his religion was service to mankind and he believed that through this service the blessings of God can be achieved. Some pose the question – if he wanted to worship God only, there was no need to be involved in politics. He should have worshipped God like Ramkrishna, Kabir and Tukaram. Amalgamating religion with the politics he has well-joined the reactionary force only. In history it is seen that in every ages reactionary force in disguise of religion has saved the vested interest. There are so many such examples in Indian History too. Gandhiji also admitted that he is afraid to see cruelty in the name of religion. He has arranged hunger-strike several times against this fanaticism. Finally, he was killed by a fanatic Hindu. Still, he could not forget his religion and his God for a moment.

According to Gandhiji, religion is the extended form of social service. I can never be a follower of religion if I am unable to be united with the whole human society. Again, if a person does not take part in politics, he will not get the chance to be united with the human society. In his opinion, the entire human life is the same and inseparable. The social, political and religious activities of man are inseparable. So, there is no religion separate from human activities. If we try to separate religion from the normal activities for our life, the effort becomes meaningless. It means, Gandhiji did not add religion of politics to again narrow political aim. So, he did not hesitate to bring religion in politics. He thought that the help of religion should be taken for the emancipation of our society and to render service. Deep faith in God was prevalent in the large part of his life. His religious thoughts circled round this faith. In history, the rules have used religion in every age to have vested interest. Again, the oppressed section revolved hoisting the religious flag. Religious conflict, reformation movement in the same religion etc. have become active due to the urge of protecting class-interest. But it is the dark-side of religion. On the other side, religion has a very important role in the progress of human civilization. The movements that took place before the French Revolution were somehow related to religion. We cannot say that religion related movements are reactionary. Gandhiji used religion for the welfare of human civilization, to make them free from sufferings and miseries, and to establish universal fraternity and love.

Gandhiji did not follow many of traditional religious customs of Hindu religion. He made strong protest against the decision of prohibiting the Harijans to enter the temple. In his opinion, God is not there where the Harijans are prohibited. He supported the widow-marriage. He struggled for establishing equality for the woman folk. It is true that he supported the class distinction system in our society, but he gave equal importance to all the classes. He gave importance on the distinction based on human

activity. Later, he had completely ignored the classification of work based on religion. All the religions were equal to him. In his Hindu religion he had preached the message of unification of all religions. So, he did not use religion to hamper progress. Instead, he has used religion for the revolution is society. In the 'Harijon' Magazine he wrote:

I do not admit the differences in between the religions and in between the castes. To me everyone is human being only. In the movement I have started, there is love for both the Indians and the British. Having faced miseries, I want to change them, I never expect their destruction.

The dominance of faith in Gandhiji's life has been widely criticized. Faith has an important role in every person's life. When logic falls short, the shelter of faith is preferred. All of us do not believe in God. But everyone believes in the existence of a power. Gandhiji gave importance on this faith. He believed that belief in God helps us to have faith in man and in his own life. Service to mankind though worshipping God was the motto of Gandhiji's religion. He gave much importance on the emancipation of the suffering humanity. The demand of the persons who is at the extreme end should be fulfilled first – this was Gandhiji's philosophy of life. The main target in his life was that the poor should be served as God. He gained enormous popularity as he could establish himself as a servant of the poor. So, we cannot accept the Marxist analysis that Gandhiji used religion for colonial interest. But it cannot be denied that sometimes his excessive faith in religion led him to throw superstitious comments. After Bihar earth-quake he said that it had happened due to the torture on the Harijans. Rabindranath Tagore strongly criticized this comment. Gandhiji did not hesitate to confess that he was wrong. Many times in his life Gandhiji confessed that he was wrong. He had strong objection against state's interference in religious matter. In this regard he supported the principle that Religion and state should be separate entity. He was against the killing of cow. He wanted this should be stopped by growing love for the cows in the hearts of the Muslims. He was against the use of law to stop this killing. He did not accept the suggestion that Government should arrange religious education. In his opinion it is very difficult to control if someone starts distorted religious education. In his later life he gave much importance on the unification of all religions. His meetings were attended by thousands of people. Every one participated in his 'Prayer' and 'Ramdhun'. Gandhiji delivered his speeches in simple language. These meetings can also be termed political meetings. But, in these meetings he gave much importance on moral

teachings. India was then in a turbulent period due to partition and communal riot. Gandhiji realized that peace is very essential in this situation. He accepted the shelter of religion to calm the disturbed situation. During this communal tension only Gandhiji took effective step to fight against communalism.

Conclusion

So, it is said that Gandhiji used religion as a means of progress. True religion, either in personal life or in case of community, is the most effective power in society. Awakening of religion is a special revolution which brings change and resurrection in society. A great influence of religion exists in India since long past. Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshob Ch. Sen, Swami Vivekananda, Bipin Ch. Pal, Dyananda Saraswati and many others followed the same path. Gandhiji was no exception to it. He had respect for secularism although he patronized a particular religion. Such secularism may be termed as a special type of Indian secularism. Such secularism does not believe in the principle of separating religion from politics. Instead, it preaches 'equality to all religions' or 'to be respectful to all religions'.

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