

Gandhi and His Human Values

Abstract

Gandhian concepts and values are dynamic and have an evolutionary dimension in the sense that they developed through human experience. No value or concept is fixed or static. Gandhiji's sincere love and regard for the people was the expression of humanism. Humanism was not a mere moral sentiment with Gandhi. It was a living reality. Humans are born equal and hence they should live equal. Human dignity, self respect and concern for fellow humans was his aim.

Keywords: Humanism, Gandhian Values, Renaissance.

Introduction

Humanism is not an established school of philosophy, but is a definite philosophical outlook. It emphasized the worth and dignity of man by rejecting other worldliness and transcendentalism. It is this worldly, man-centered secular philosophical outlook. It claims that the man is self-sufficient and is able to comprehend the world phenomena and works out a certain social order without the help of God. It is an attitude towards and an approach to man's worldly life and values. It is characterised by interest in man, concern for man and faith in man's reason and conscience for discriminating perception of truth and goodness. The modern genetic engineering sees man as a product of evolutionary process, and an agent controlling and directing this process. Humanism as the philosophic attitude regards the interpretation of human experience as the primary concern of all philosophizing and asserts the adequacy of human knowledge for this purpose. By giving to all science and literature a reference to human life and its purpose, philosophy connects itself with literary humanism.

Gandhiji opposed the State. The State is the military, police, prisons, courts, tax collectors, and bureaucrats. He saw the State as concentrated violence. "The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence." Gandhiji recognized that the State claims to serve the nation, but he realized that this was a fallacy. "While apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, [the State] does the greatest harm to mankind."

Gandhiji was a philosophical Anarchist because he believed that the "[the greatest good of all] can be realized only in the classless, stateless democracy." While Gandhiji advocated democracy, he differentiated between direct democracy and western democracy. Commenting on the parliamentary system, Gandhiji says, "If India copies England, it is my firm conviction that she will be ruined. Parliaments are merely emblems of slavery." He had no more appetite for majority democracy of America, "It is a superstition and an ungodly thing to believe that an act of a majority binds a minority." By centralizing power, western democracies feed into violence. Thus, he thought decentralization was the key to world peace.

In Gandhiji's view all the political power that was concentrated in the State apparatus could be dissolved down to every last individual. He stated "Power resides in the people, they can use it at any time." Reiterating the idea of Anarchy, Gandhiji said, "In such a state (of affairs), everyone is his own rulers. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor." Gandhiji had no illusions about the enormity of the task, but he took it on anyways. He believed that by reforming enough individuals and communities, society at large will change. Gandhiji's concept of Swaraj elucidates the connection between the individual and society.

Gandhiji however, did not favour the use of force to bring about a social change. He tried to bring about change by means of bringing about a change in the heart and minds of those practising such social evils. He wanted to make everyone realize his or her share of duties towards society in accordance to their capacities. It is this non-violent approach towards social reconstruction that made him a distinct and unique kind of social reformer and ushered in a new era of humanism. He also opined that for a



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social reform, it is important to bring about a transformation in the mental outlook and there has to be an economic upliftment.

Independence begins at the bottom. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be every-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it.

In apparent contradiction to these ideals, Gandhiji battled for national liberation and he expressed a lot of patriotism towards Indian civilization. He redefined the terms 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' to fit his vision. Nationalism, for instance, meant many different things. Gandhiji said, "Every Indian whether he owns up to it or not, has national aspirations--but there are as many opinions as there are Indian Nationalists as to the exact meaning of that aspiration." Gandhiji's nationalism stood to disband the Congress Party upon independence, "Its task is done. The next task is to move into villages and revitalize life there to build a new socio-economic structure from the bottom upwards." He also understood patriotism differently than his contemporaries, "By patriotism, I mean the welfare of the whole people."

Religious Belief and Humanism

It is also notable that while his faith in non-violence was absolute, when faced with choosing between violence and cowardice he would prefer violence because cowardice meant running away from Truth itself. Gandhiji came from a deeply religious Hindu family and absorbed the philosophical roots of his inherited religion: unity of all life, universal brotherhood and tolerance, and voluntary poverty. He observed quite strictly these tenets in his own behavior, but as a mass leader had to go along with their attenuation among his followers. Prof. Lindley lists in his introduction some tenets which he takes as humanistic. I would go along with most of the list except for the exclusion of beliefs in deities and in life after death. (As Prof. Lindley shows, Gandhiji did not believe in deities, but did in rebirth.) Among Indians such religious beliefs are common and, impart much of the humanistic content present in Indian society, whereas the absence of such beliefs among many communists and some capitalists has helped breed an inhumane intolerance in the communists and exploitation of human beings by the capitalists. It may also be mentioned that among some Hindus, to regard rivers, mountains, trees and cows as "deities" has engendered a deep ecological concern, while the belief in rebirth tends to guide such people along a righteous path. In regard to moksha, although "salvation" is a proper literal translation of the word.

Gandhiji self-described as a philosophical anarchist, a school of anarchist thought which says the State has no moral legitimacy, but rejects the use of violence to eliminate it. He believed that citizens had no obligation to obey the State. His ultimate vision of India had no government as we'd understand the term. He once said "the ideally nonviolent state would be an ordered anarchy." Gandhiji believed that a society was possible where nothing was done without consent, down to the individual and said it could be achieved through nonviolent conflict mediation, systematically divesting power from the existing layers of hierarchy until all power was invested in individuals who would embody the ethic of non-violence.

Free Will In Gandhian Thought

The Problem of free will is discussed by almost all renaissance humanists. 'Man the measure' is the earliest declaration of humanistic outlook. Humanists confirm that man is the maker of his own destiny. Gandhiji also gave great importance to freedom. His whole life was spent for the individual's and national freedom. However for him free will did not mean slavery to desires of our mind but freedom of 'rational self'. Once you condition yourself with 'rational self' you are free to move within those restraints. In the words of Emerson, "A man is free to speak the truth not to lie, free to serve, not to exploit, free to sacrifice himself but not free to kill or injure". Gandhiji's whole philosophy of wants and needs was conditioned by self-control. Gandhiji has respect for and faith in the individual. To him, the individual alone is real; the Society and the state have little meaning apart from the individual. Gandhiji is known as one of the most revolutionary of individualists and one of the most individualistic of revolutionaries in world history.

The Importance of Morality in Humanism

Renaissance Humanist accorded the privileged position to poetry, rhetoric, history, ethics and politics on the conviction that these disciplines alone educate man as such and put man in a position effectively to exercise his freedom. Like other humanists, Gandhiji gives importance to Social Sciences. Having an ethical approach to life Gandhiji sought to unite the mankind in common pursuit of justice and establishment of a moral order in world-society. Morality for him was not a matter of outward conformity but of inward fulfillment, of deep conviction accomplished by right action. Hence famous Socratic dictum 'Virtue is knowledge', implies that right thought must result into right action. For Gandhiji action was his domain. Gandhiji's greatness lies in translating one's noblest thoughts into action which is the highest achievement of man.

Action Oriented Seven Fields of Social Life

Gandhi wanted people to put into practice morality in the seven main fields of life. He enumerated following seven Social Sins:

1. Politics without Principles.
2. Wealth without work.
3. Commerce without Morality.
4. Knowledge without Character.
5. Pleasure without Conscience.
6. Science without humanity.
7. Worship without sacrifice.

The Integrated Vows for Society

As part of his moral religion, Gandhiji introduced eleven vows in his "Ashrama". They are Nonviolence, Truth, Non-stealing, Chastity or celibacy, Non-possession, Bread-labour, Abstemiousness in diet, Fearlessness, Tolerance or equality for all religions, Self-sufficiency in respect of the use of indigenous products, Elimination of untouchability. All these vows have integral implication of moral, social, political and economic values. Gandhi attached special importance to these vows, not in a ritualistic manner, but as a way of entering more deeply into the truth.

Gandhiji as a humanist has provided us the lasting solution to the vexed problem of so-called secularism. Humanism did not have an anti-religious or anti-Christian character. The religious discussions of the humanist had two principal themes the Civic function of religion and religious tolerance. The Civic function of religion was recognised on the basis of the correspondence between the heavenly and earthly city. The heavenly city was the norm or the ideal of man's civil life, its recognition meant the commitment of man to realize, as much as possible, its characteristics in the earthly city. For the humanists, the attitude of tolerance is derived from their conviction of the fundamental unity of all the religious beliefs of mankind and therefore the possibility of a universal religious peace. The vow of tolerance of all religious beliefs in Gandhiji's everyday Prayer, and the cooperation he received from the people of all faiths, confirm his genuine tolerance. Gandhi's religion

was not narrow sectarian. As a humanist, Gandhiji worshipped God through the service of man and looked upon all human beings as but the manifestations of God Himself. His humanism meant his utter devotion to the human interest.

Conclusion

Gandhian philosophy is no comprehensive that it has left no aspect of human life untouched. Morals serve the cause of the progress. Morality serves the great task of the social revolutions of our times. Gandhiji's philosophy of life is relevant to all humanity. Each and every principle of Gandhi still holds meaning and importance in today's society and amongst the Indian people. Human beings are social animals and acceptance in the society and amongst their own group is of utmost importance. In today's time as well people who lie are not accepted as well as respected in the society.

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