

M. K. GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY – AN OUTLOOK

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi has interpreted various concepts of metaphysics, political and social philosophy together with moral and religious philosophy. Although Gandhi has not given any new doctrine his interpretations on various concepts of philosophy like truth, God, non-violence, satyagraha etc. are enough to call him a philosopher and Gandhism as a philosophy. Metaphysical concept of Gandhiji is revealed in his views on truth, God, soul or mind. Truth is not an attribute of God but God is Truth. So Gandhi asserted that "Truth is God". Mahatma Gandhi is a humanist and he believes that man is the best creations of God. God is within man. Gandhi's philosophy of religion gives us a new way of thinking about religion. Gandhi shows his religious tolerance and belief in all religions. Gandhi prescribes certain moral principles for the development of man's ethical personality. For Gandhiji, Satyagraha is the truth-force or soul-force. Gandhi used the word 'Swaraj' for political freedom. This paper is a humble attempt to highlight Gandhi's contributions towards philosophy from purely philosophical and logical point of view.

KEYWORDS: Gandhi, God, Man, Philosophy, Religion, Truth

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi is the most outstanding figure of the modern Indian thought. He is the father of the Indian nation who can be compared to Karl Marx in the west. He occupies an important place as an interpreter of Hinduism and as a moral and religious philosopher. Eminent scholar, Professor Ramjee Singh has called Gandhi the Bodhisattva of the twentieth century.¹ M. K. Gandhi has contributed towards political science, economics, and sociology and so on but here an attempt is being made to look him as a philosopher only.

Philosophy is the study of the life and the world as a whole. It is an intellectual pursuit. It is an attempt to explain our ideas and experiences. By experience, we mean all types of experiences, sense experiences as well as non sensuous experiences, the later including intuitive moral and aesthetic experiences. Philosophy includes the discussions on Metaphysics, epistemology and axiology. Its sub-branches are logic, ethics, and religion, and psychology, social and political philosophy. Mahatma Gandhi has interpreted various concepts of metaphysics, political and social philosophy together with moral and religious philosophy. Indian philosophers called philosophy as Darsana. Darsana means the realization of truth or reality tattvadarsana. Philosophy has a role to play by giving rational explanation based on non-empirical experiences otherwise called vision. Here philosophy is darsana or vision and this vision, the vision of reality which is truth and the philosopher is one who aspires for truth. Gandhiji was a devotee of truth and he is undoubtedly a philosopher.

Is Gandhi a Philosopher?

Gandhiji of course never claimed to be a philosopher. As he says, "I do not claim to have originated any new

¹ Nicholas F. Gier (2004). *The Virtue of Nonviolence: From Gautama to Gandhi*. SUNY Press. p. 222

principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the external truths to our daily life and problems... The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills."² Although Gandhi has not given any new doctrine his interpretations on various concepts of philosophy like truth, God, non-violence, satyagraha etc. are enough to call him a philosopher and Gandhism as a philosophy. Professor A. R. Wadia has named Gandhiji's philosophy as "Pragmatic Idealism."³

Gandhi's Metaphysical Concepts

Metaphysical concept of Gandhiji is revealed in his views on truth, God, soul or mind. He has experimented on truth and found that truth is as powerful as a weapon. Gandhi said: "The Truth is far more powerful than any weapon of mass destruction."⁴ He took the concept of truth and God from upanisads. The upanisad says, "God is truth (Satyam)". Gandhi has logic to say that God is truth. He saw that Hindu scriptures give one thousand names of God. We believe that God is nameless, God is formless speechless and so on. As Gandhi says, "...if it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description, I have come to conclusion that for myself God is truth."⁵ No other definition can express the universal reality that is God, except truth. God is described as truth because God alone is real. Truth is not an attribute of God but God is Truth. Truth is derived from the word "sat" which means "is" and God alone is. But later on Gandhi saw that God is an ambiguous term and nobody understands exactly the same thing by the word "god". On the other hand, the word "truth" is always clear in its significance and it is self contradictory to deny truth. So Gandhi asserted that "Truth is God". As he says, "But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be God, God is Truth above all....But two years ago I went a step further and said Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after truth..."⁶ According to Gandhi, Truth or God is the ultimate reality and the goal of the human race is to realize it.

Gandhi's Concept of Religion

M. K. Gandhi's philosophy of religion gives us a new way of thinking about religion. According to him, man's religion is that which transcends all religions, that which purifies man's soul and enables him to unite himself with his inner truth. He believes that no man can live without religion. For him, prayer is the vital part of religion. Ramnama is the surprime among all mantras because Rama, Allah and God are convertible terms. Gandhiji says, 'Ramnama is the other name of Khuda or God. I want my Muslim brothers to understand that God of the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and other communities of the world is one. To me, all religions are of equal status.'⁷ He believes in the unity of religions and tolerance. Gandhi shows his religious tolerance and belief in all religions.

As he says, "After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that [1] all religions are true; [2] all religions have some error in them; [3] all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible."⁸ Most people like to speak good things about their own religious

² Gandhi, M. K., My Philosophy of Life, p-1

³ Diwakar, R. R., Gandhi-A Practical Philosopher, p-23

⁴ Nonviolence By Senthil Ram, Ralph Summy, 2007

⁵ Gandhi, M. K.; Young India, 11-10-28, 310.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ M.K. Gandhi, The Supreme power, P.172

⁸ M. K. Gandhi, All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as told in his own words, Paris, UNESCO 1958, p 60.

belief and dislike to admit good things inherent in other religions. But Gandhi never hesitated to call himself to be a member of any other religion. Gandhi asserts thus: "Yes I am. I am also a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist and a Jew".⁹

Gandhi's Ethical Ideas

The most important contributions made by Gandhiji towards philosophy in the field of ethics of Moral philosophy. He has been called a moral genius. Mahatma Gandhi prescribes certain moral principles for the development of man's ethical personality. They are – Ahimsa or Non violence, Brahmacharya or chastity, non- possession, Fearlessness and self- purification. According to Gandhi, Non violence is the greatest and the most active force in the world. "It does not express a negative force, but a force superior to all forces put together one person who can express Ahimsa in life-exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality."¹⁰ Non violence or Ahimsa is the mean to attain the supreme goal or truth. The practice of non violence requires fearlessness and patience. Ahimsa or non violence in positive sense means love. It is very difficult to be a non-violent. We can even destroy the God created world but we can never create such a beautiful world. As Gandhi remarks, "It has always been easier to destroy than to create".¹¹ Brahmacharya or chastity is to be observed for moral development. Brahmacharya means the search of Brahman. It means control in thought, word and action, of all the senses at all times and in all places. Non – possession means not to have anything what so ever. In other words, a willing to surrender. Fearlessness means freedom from all kind of external fear, such as, fear of disease, of physical injury and death, of losing reputation etc. and so on. Self purification is essential for moral life. Humility, fasting, silence etc. are the devices for purification.

Gandhi's Social Philosophy

M.K. Gandhi's concept of social philosophy includes his views on bread labour, Swadeshi, removal of untouchability varnas and communal unity etc. According to Gandhiji, the labour of man in all essential occupations is regarded as bread – labour. Body labour is an essential requisite even for the intellectualists. Swadeshi is the spirit that inspires man to work for the immediate surrounding excluding the remote ones. Gandhi tried his best to remove the superstition of untouchability. For him, all human beings are alike under the same sky. Gandhiji believes that concepts of four classes or varnas of ancient India was made for well maintenance of society and it depends on labour distribution. Varnas should not be hereditary right. Mahatma Gandhi is a humanist and he believes that man is the best creations of God. Man becomes man by a slow process of evolution from the brute. Like Rene Descartes, Gandhi says that man's body and mind are intimately related to each other. Human body dies but the soul is immortal. The soul or atman is the part and parcel of God. God is within man. According to Gandhiji, the body is bestowed to man by God to perform divine service in this world.

Gandhi's Political Philosophy

In the field of political philosophy, Gandhiji has given certain new concepts like Satyagraha, Swaraj, Sarvodaya etc. In order to win political freedom Gandhi used the technique of Ahimsa which is known as Satyagraha. For Gandhiji, Satyagraha is the truth- force or soul-force. As he says, "truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as soul-force."¹² Satya graham teaches man to fight against powerful enemy without hurting the opponent. Satyagraha is based on love. There must be love even for the opponent. It includes negotiation, arbitration, agitation and demonstration, economic boycott, non – co – operation, civil disobedience, direct action, fasting, strike, picketing, dharma and non- payment of taxes

⁹ A Man Called Bapu, Subhadra Sen Gupta, Pratham Books, 2008. P.5

¹⁰ M.K. Gandhi, My philosophy of life, PP.26-27

¹¹ Trustworthiness by Bruce Glassman – Juvenile Nonfiction – 2008

¹² M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha, P.3.

etc. Gandhi used the word ‘Swaraj’ for political freedom. Swaraj is different from mere independence. For him, “The Swaraj dream is the poor man’s Swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by princes and moniced men.”¹³ Sarvodaya etymologically means ‘the betterment of all’. Sarvodaya is based on love. It proceeds on the faith that a Sarvodayi will also be prepared for maximums possible self sacrifice for the good of others. The end of all activities, social or political, has to be nothing else but the upliftment of everybody.

CONCLUSIONS

M.K. Gandhi occupies the highest status among the contemporary philosophers of India. He is a man of practical outlook. He has discovered the principle of Satyagraha and other philosophical concepts like truth, God, Swadeshi, Swaraj, Sarvodaya, breed- labour, non violence etc. only to solve the practical problems of man kind. So, Gandhian philosophy is regarded as pragmatic Idealism. But his pragmatism is different from James and Dewey. Gandhian philosophy is based on ancient Indian thought and we observe new interpretations of the old concepts. His concept of non-violence and truth has played an important role in philosophical discussions.

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¹³ *Young India*, 26-3-31