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GANDHI HAS NOT GONE OUT OF OUR LIVES

Dr. Jyoti Trehan Sharma

Associate Professor,Department of Political Science,
Indraprastha College for Women,University of Delhi, (India)

ABSTRACT:

Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote, "And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breath, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's mind. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition." But we killed him, and killed an entire realm of understanding the symbiotic relationship of man with man, and even man with nature. His questions covered the entire spectrum of human existence, and even provided answers with a rare courage of conviction. He spelt the Truth and equated it with God. He tread the path of Non-violence when blood ran not just in our veins but on our streets. And then he questioned the basic organizing principles of modern civilization and its greed for material progress.

Did 30 January 1948 bring sorrow to every heart and remorse to every thought? Did every eye have a tear, and did every head bow in shame at the sinister sinking of humanity? Gandhi had gone…….Really, did he? Or we just classified him as an enigma and posted on the walls, while the world perfected the art of civil resistance, understood the vocabulary of liberty and equality and began creating spaces for the marginalized. The present paper is a humble attempt to revisit the ism and application of Gandhian thought. Nothing new is on offer, but if reiteration is the Aladdin's lamp then let the magic work.

Keywords: God, materialism, non-violence, power, truth.

Paper: Paradoxically speaking, it is getting to be a little unnerving, but do circumstances compel us to think that whenever humanity attempts to search for security and peace in the widespread despair of the future, it looks back to its past for solutions to the present sinister shrinking of the society, whether openly or imperceptibly? But do we need to accept something just because it had been so said in the past ; or because it has been handed down by tradition ; or because it can be proved by inference ; or because it has been accepted as worldly wisdom ? The test of reason lies not in blind faith but in the sense of discrimination and conscience as being conducive to one's benefit and happiness.

Scholars and philosophers have believed that India has important things to say to the West and to the World not only in a speculative but in a practical way. But what? Seventy one years of independence have not given us `Ram-rajya', not to be inferred on religious lines alone, but even the `Mahatma' remains under estranged

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question marks! People might feel the urge to speak of his relevance to the contemporary society due to their fundamental right of speech and expression, but they have failed to feel on the pulse of their blood the fire and the ferocity of that bygone era. There is no denying to the fact that Gandhi was an effulgent philosophy. But today, he is history. And re-opening, of the pages of history, requires herculean calculations and equilibrium, so that feelings, passions and prejudices do not affect contemporary judgment! Much has been written on Gandhi, his principles and techniques, but unfortunately, very little has penetrated in any depth into the deeper spiritual principles, motivations and objectives that he sought.

In thinking of Gandhi's understanding of religion, it is well to remember that he did not claim to have framed any consistent formulation of his outlook. It is not surprising that religion so ruled his thought and action. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said : "The spiritual motive dominates life in India."(1929:25) However, Gandhi did not feel that religion acts in a separate sphere. He felt that `mere religious knowledge' was futile. Religion, for Gandhi, was not really what is grasped by the brain, but a heart grasp.

Allow us to believe that by 1920, Gandhi had already developed his moral and social philosophy, but it was not until 1930 that he had perfected his political techniques for a successful all-India Satyagraha. Gandhi's philosophy was moulded in South Africa, and was influenced by such diverse factors as the Jain and Vaishnav environment of his youth, the example of Christ, and the philosophic teachings of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. These factors combined in his complex and hyper-sensitive personality (partially resulting from his feeling of rejection by the orthodoxy of his homeland and the world of the Western European) to produce neither a Western nor a traditionalist philosophic system. The Moderates turned to European Liberalism ; Tilak turned to Hindu traditionalism ; Gandhi synthesized a system from the aberrant philosophies of both West and East. Gandhi's relation to Hindu political philosophy may be analyzed thus.

Gandhi received an early but limited religious education from his mother, but as a youth was excommunicated from caste and thus from his religious community. A careful study of Gandhi's life and thought reveals that both were deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition. He himself openly acknowledged his indebtedness to the past when he said, "I have presented no new principles, but have tried to restate old principles"(Young India, 1926:419). Gandhi accepted Hinduism not as a dogma but as a working hypothesis of human conduct adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life.

Simply speaking, the ancient Indian spirit takes on a new form without ceasing to be itself, in every age. However, questioning the morality of the method, Gandhi asserted that "Every formula of every religion has to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world."(Young India, 1925:74)

The book, which became Gandhi's strongest bond with Hinduism as well as the greatest influence on him and which he called his "spiritual dictionary", was the Bhagawad Gita, to whom, surprisingly, he was introduced by the Theosophists. While he never claimed to be well-versed in the scriptures, he preferred to rely upon reason and his own moral sense when the scriptures conflicted with his own philosophy. The Mahabharata, the epic of which the Gita forms a part, has been a part of Hindu heritage for at least 2500 years. Gandhi put forward the view that the epic was an allegorical and not a historical work. He attempted to employ traditionalist terms to communicate his own philosophy and wrote a commentary on the Gita which, however, was so controversial that he was widely attacked by the orthodox scholars.

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Gandhi did not accept the traditional interpretation of the Gita as the poetic presentation of Lord Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna, the warrior, to go forward and meet his cousins in combat. The battle field of Kurukshetra was only a symbol of the battle between good and evil which rages in every human heart. To those who insisted on taking the story of Mahabharata literally, Gandhi pointed out that even if the story was taken at its face value, the Mahabharata had demonstrated the futility of violence ; the war had ended in universal devastation in which the victors had been no better off than the vanquished(Nanda,'Gandhi and Religion',1990:8).

Gandhi, thus, attempted to hint as to the right way to understand religious or spiritual texts. He alleged that as contrasted with books about the objective world whose truth can be easily ascertained by checking them with outer fact, religious or spiritual texts, which are concerned with experience that is in the main subjective, cannot be similarly understood. Were the Gita a mere narrative of objective facts its truth could be easily checked by an external verification; but in so far as a good deal of what it says relates to the life of the spirit, a quite different approach is here needed (Khanna, 1985:14).

Gandhi's critics had, and still have, a shrewd suspicion that he deliberately underplayed the quietist and esoteric elements in Hinduism because of the harm which excessive preoccupation with them had done to the Hindu society, and that he sought confirmation in the Gita for his own framework of values:

- Ahimsa or non-violence,
- Varnashrama based on division of labor rather than of birth,
- Manual work, and
- Brahmacharya(Bharati, in Ray,1970:61-63).

Would it be safe to say that Gandhi was one of the greatest innovators in the history of Hinduism? He re-shaped and re-defined time-honored concepts. Gandhi placed no special emphasis on the spirit of Hindu history though he admired various historical figures, Gautama Buddha being one of them.

Gandhi professed a form of Hinduism, no doubt, but deviated so far from orthodoxy as to equate God and Truth, as rationally perceived, and to emphasize the validity of all religious beliefs on the basis of their moral worth. Truth is the supreme value not only for Gandhi, but has been a key concept in the Indian traditional ethic-religious thought. However, Gandhi accepted Truth not merely as a concept, but sought to realize it in practice as the `sovereign principle' of life and conduct, and as a reality. And since God is also thought of as being the only, eternal Reality, He is, for Gandhi, the same as Truth. The two have been essentially equated, for Gandhi found in Truth the quickest and the easiest way to realize God. Gandhi made truth paramount (Khanna, 1985:18-19). Nonetheless, in his search for Absolute Truth, he was fully aware that the absolute cannot be known by the yet unfulfilled human mind.

In Gandhian philosophy, closely connected with the ultimate or absolute end was the problem of means. Gandhi laid surpassing emphasis on the use of right means for achieving objectives. For him, means and ends are convertible terms. The two are inseparable and should be equally pure. As Gandhi said: "the means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." (1908:60). Thus, specifically speaking, non-violence as a means became the supreme value for Gandhi. Gandhi's interpretation of ahimsa (non-violence) is striking for its unparalleled richness of significance. It does not stand for pacifism. Instead, it inspires the individual and the nation to achieve complete harmony with all the impulses of human nature. However, the impression that one

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gets is that Gandhi believed in non-violence as a creed, as an eternal virtue and as a supreme way of life to which even the freedom of the country could be subordinated. But still, a more careful analysis of his activities would betray a tendency on Gandhi's part to equate expediency with principle.

Truth and non-violence are acknowledged disciplines in traditional Hindu thought. But the remarkable feature of Gandhi is the pains he took to emphasize the extreme intimacy of their interrelation. Writers on Gandhi have rightly regarded this as a distinctive feature of his thought. Truth and non-violence, for Gandhi, were but two sides of an unstamped metallic disc.

Another clear contribution of Gandhi is the way he practiced and understood fasting – as a heightened moment in the practice of ahimsa. He used it, on the one hand, to achieve social objectives, and, on the other, for the realization of his essential identity with others. Fasting, for Gandhi, was a model exercise in humility, compassion, faith, surrender, patience and ontological hope. In fact, he illustrated how fasting is being very close to God (Khanna, 1985:55-58).

What distinguishes Gandhi is not merely his treatment and practice of Truth (Satya), Nonviolence (Ahimsa) and Fasting (Upvasa), but of other rows as well. A vow here appears not as an isolated, frozen or restrictive concept, but as a vital and integral accent that at once enriches and is enriched by the good life as a whole. Gandhi also insisted on the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization. Gandhi's treatment of the vows was not a matter of medley of bloodless categories, but a needful and continual self-expansion of every concept in the setting of practice, and were, all deducible from Truth.

The knit work of vows enumerated by Gandhi can thus be listed as:

(i) Brahmacharya : This is no isolated control of sex, but simultaneous control of all the senses.
And in the practice of brahmacharya, Gandhi stressed the role of will, as against mere instinctual
thoughts. It ought to be observed in thought, word and deed.

(ii) Asvada : Though it is not merely bodily in significance, brahmacharya vitally depends on the
control of the palate. Gandhi, therefore, turned asvada into a distinctive vow, thus enriching the Hindu ethical tradition.

(iii) Asteya : Though asteya literally means not to commit theft, Gandhi interpreted it in a far subtler way. He described the essence of non-stealing as stealth (or the tendency to conceal) and not mere abstention from theft of others' property. Like asvada, asteya has a positive significance. It calls for definite effort to abstain from conditions which bar the manifestation of Truth.

(iv) Aparigraha : Though the literal meaning of aparigraha is not to possess property ; it has (like asvada and asteya) a distinct positive significance in Gandhian thought. Gandhi's treatment of this vow is the idea that aparigraha requires one to be non-attached even to the body which too is a kind of possession. Gandhi believed that if we look upon the body merely as an instrument of service, we can attain to real happiness and the beatific vision in the fulness of time.

(v) Abhaya : Following the Gita, Gandhi gave the place of pre-eminence to the observance of abhaya or fearlessness. He regarded this vow as indispensable for the growth of other noble qualities. Nonetheless, instead of extolling fearlessness categorically, Gandhi cared to say that we do need to fear the inner foes.

(vi) Apart from the above vows, Gandhi also insisted on the four distinctive vows of Removal of

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Untouchability, Principle of Bread Labour (Fruits of labour accrue only to him who has worked for it), Sarvadharma Samabhava (equal respect for all religions) and Swadeshi(Sharma,2000:164).

However, none of these vows can work without humility. Gandhi was convinced that humility was even more essential than any of the vows. He even traced out its links with the ideal of incessant and self-effacing service. True religious humility was thus, for Gandhi, paramount. This follows that ethical religion brought about distinctiveness in Gandhi. It is important to note that though he emphasized the ethical basis of religion, he did not fail to see how the ideal of religion itself called to ever better moral life.

Gandhi did not accept the orthodox interpretation of religion though he employed the concept to convey his own philosophy, but like the Buddhists, he taught a universalized religion based on Ahimsa. He also interpreted religion or dharma as selfless service of others, mastery over passions, fearlessness, and most important of all, devotion. Accordingly, dharma, for Gandhi, became an embodiment of the content that was shaped by one's own special gifts, the discipline a man voluntarily undertakes, and a moral insight which leads a man beyond the performance of his customary duties.

In his description of dharma, one of the main things Gandhi emphasized was that caste had nothing to do with religion. It was a later excrescence on what had originally been basically the principle of labor and of duties. What remained was an outstanding feature of the Hindu social system, but this should in no way be confused with religion, with dharma, with the life it was good and reasonable for men to lead (Chatterjee,1983:19).

Gandhi turned the tables on Swami Vivekananda's formula that all men should be Brahmins, by saying that all should become Sudras. Sudras are those who serve, and nothing more was needed than service, whether in Indian society or elsewhere. Gandhi thus, attempted to incorporate the duties of scavenging and bread labour in the concept of dharma. He tried working out his ideas in a society where dirty work was the lot of the untouchables, the outcastes of the Hindu society, and where manual work was considered inferior to the work of the scholar, lawyer and teacher. The concept of bread labour advocated that each man should engage in some productive activity, such as spinning or agriculture, everyday, in addition to the work he ordinarily did. Thus, Tolstoy's therapeutic value of manual work and Ruskin's views on the equal value of different kinds of work to society became the basis of Gandhi's thought that trusted for the good of society (Chatterjee,1983:20)

Gandhi interpreted his own life as being guided by the dharmas of social service, poverty, harmlessness, vegetarianism and celibacy, whose practical applications were, for him, no more than mere experiments with truth. As he himself said: "The instruments for the quest of truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite

impossible to an innocent child. The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should be so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of truth (1927:xi-xii). However, what has been unique in Gandhi's experiments with Truth was that they were carried out not in the seclusion of an ashram, but in the arena of life.

Gandhi's greatest contribution to dharma is his realization that the caste system was opposed both to his principle of universal ahimsa and his programme to abolish untouchability. He demanded the abolition of caste as unjust and immoral, and the substitution of a non-religiously-sanctioned occupational, but hereditary, class structure.

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It is also very important to analyze Gandhi's view of religion in relation to the art of politics. Gandhi considered his own philosophic system superior to the Hindu art of politics. He endeavored to develop a sense of unity by employing traditional terms, but was far more successful in communicating to the masses through his personality and way of life, appearing as he did as a modern sanyasin, and this traditional appearance especially influenced Indian women, chiefly devotees of Bhakti worship.

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Like Tilak, Gandhi realized that effective political action demanded that the Congress become mass organization, and as such, he and Sardar Patel provided it with a well-disciplined authoritarian structure. He also tended to follow the heretical attitude, which forms a sub-strata of the Hindu tradition, emphasizing world and life-negation, renunciation, self-sacrifice, and suffering for a moral purpose. And above all, Gandhi abhorred the use of force, but utilised the political techniques of Tilak, not because they were the only expedient techniques but because could justify them in terms of his own moral philosophy by emphasizing non-violence, the "constructive programme", and a return to the spinning wheel and the simple life.

The combination of religion with politics or religious politics is the very essence of Gandhism, and on its legitimacy or otherwise depends the whole significance of the Fact of Gandhi. Gandhi himself asserted : "Yes, I still hold the view that I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion.Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions." He continued, "For me there is no politics without religion – not the religion of the superstitious and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal Religion of Toleration. Politics without morality is a thing to be avoided."(1961:308) Here, Gandhi claimed to be in stark contradiction of Machiavelli's concept of complete separation of religion and politics.

Although Gandhi and Machiavelli lived in different epochs of history and in diverse cultural environments, their views of religion and politics can only be regarded as the projection of former's optimism and the latter's pessimism about human nature and human capabilities. In Machiavelli's view, to say that moral goodness will result in political goodness is political idiocy (Parel, in Power, 1971:189) Machiavelli did not deny the efficacy of moral goodness, but he denied its claim as a specific means of politics. He did not trust the dependability of human nature to do good.

On the other hand, Gandhi felt that spiritual values had no relevance unless they were put into social practice by those who professed them. As such, it was not very difficult for a semi-clad contemplative sanyasin to become a karma yogi in the field of politics. Gandhi's actions may also be justified in the sense that in the Hindu tradition, religion is such an integrative force that there is bound to be a close relationship between religion and politics. It can almost be said that historically culture, politics and religion have been synonymous for Hinduism. One may recall that both Gautama Buddha and Mahavira, founders respectively of Buddhism and Jainism, were of the ruling or warrior caste. Part of the shastras are political texts, such as the Arthasastra attributed to Kautilya and parts of the Laws of Manu. Nevertheless, tension was not entirely absent between religion and politics, for the latter often took a ruthless turn and, thereby, stimulated transcendental speculation in Indian religious life.

Gandhi's religious quest helped to mould not only his personality, but the political technique with which he confronted racialism in South Africa and colonialism in India. Gandhi inherited Swaraj as the political objective of the Congress ; however, he felt compelled to find a moral issue upon which to base his campaigns of political agitation, and he finally succeeded in being able to rationalize that, while swaraj was not a self-justifying

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objective in the traditionalist sense, the immorality of the British Raj made Indian swaraj a morally - justifiable goal.

Gandhi repeatedly asserted the oneness of life. It was one continuous whole and could not properly by conceived as compartmental. Therefore, it was not a matter of "mixing" religion and

politics, for they were already rightfully one. However, there is a probability that Gandhi himself

experienced a dichotomy between his religious pursuits and political endeavours, which was never completely resolved. But inspite of such a tension, he succeeded in evolving a well-integrated personality, essentially religiously-oriented.

Unfortunately, there is also another side of the picture ! Though Gandhi wanted his followers to practice non-violence or ahimsa, which he regarded as the highest dharma, as a creed and not as an expediency, most of his followers and co-workers could never adopt it as a matter of principle(Sodhi,1988:63).

Looking back from the vantage point of history, the application of non-violent techniques in certain social and cultural contexts may be justified, but using them for political objectives was asking for too much. When persuasion is not always possible, and compromise is not always permissible, the use of force, pressure or at least, some kind of pressure is admissible.

Gandhi's own actions and writings give one an ambivalent feeling on this issue. Gandhi perhaps committed a typically idealistic mistake of failing to take into consideration the frailty of human beings. Violence is, after all, a relative aspect – relative to the agent and times in which one lives. Being a man of intuitions, his lack of consistency and theoretical completeness can thus be explained. However, his evolution of the technique of Satyagraha as a mode of non-violent struggle, displayed a unique call for utter spiritual purity of intention, that is, freedom from egoism and dictates of self interest.

Gandhi was a colossus in the field of politics, and an anti-communalist par excellence, no doubt. But Gandhi's religious ideology, his religious practices and his attempt to mix religion with politics proved, to some extent, hindrances to his objective of attaining Hindu - Muslim unity. He

failed miserably in his attempt to decrease Hindu - Muslim antagonism. His anxiety for the cause

deserves all praise, but his was a sentimental approach to the problem, and was not based on a realistic appreciation of the situation. His techniques, grounded in dharma, may have been flawless, but they failed to realize the inconstancy of human nature. This was due to his inability to trace the socio-historical genesis of that antagonism. He discovered its, origin not in the material life processes of Indian Society but in the weak ethical structure of people. Gandhi, thus, symbolized a peculiar blend of bold advances followed by sudden and capricious halts. Living in the society, how could he remain untouched by its pitfalls!

Though Gandhi's attitude to religion holds the key to the understanding of his life and thought, its significance still remains a mystery for both his admirers and critics. Archbishop Cosmo Lang

Once spoke of Gandhi in unsympathetic terms as a mystic, fanatic and anarchist(Chatterjee,1983:90). On the other hand, Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India, wrote after his first meeting with Gandhi, "Mr. Gandhi's religious and moral views are, I believe, admirable, but I confess that I find it difficult to understand the practice of them in politics (Hyde,1967:352). Left-wing critics, like M.N. Roy, R.P. Dutt, and E.M.S. Namboodiripad accused Gandhi of exploiting religion to rouse the masses and then deliberately curbing their political consciousness in the interest of the Indian bourgeoisie. Among Gandhi's own adherents there were not a few

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radicals who chafed under the moral constraints he imposed on the struggle with the British. Then there were the `modernists' who equated all religion with irrationalism and obscurantism and resented Gandhi's saintly idiom. Finally, some later-day historians have advanced the thesis that by using Hindu symbols. Gandhi contributed to the communal polarisation which culminated in the division of India (Nanda,1990:5).

Summing up, it would not be wrong to say that Gandhi had a strongly rational and skeptical streak which enabled him to fashion for himself a religious philosophy which, though grounded in Hinduism, acquired a deeply humanist and cosmopolitan complexion. Gandhi's religious thinking was stamped not only by his own confessional character, but it also shot through with a vision splendid which he believed could be a beacon light for all men everywhere.

Gandhi's personal experience of living in a society where the distinction between sacred and

profane was a somewhat unnatural one, and where people of very different ethnic types and ways of life were actually living side by side, gave him a unique advantage in thinking out what the shape of the future community might be like. It would be noteworthy to mention here that Gandhi shared the Hindu hope of Ramarajya which he used inter - changeably with the Kingdom of God. This was a vision of kingly rule in righteousness, truth and peace. He once went so far to say : "Swaraj is synonymous with Ram Raj — the establishment of the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth(Young India,1921:143). Nevertheless, this was utopian to say the least. In any event, on the eve of India's independence, he had apparently given up any hope that particular Swaraj would be Ramarajya(Harijan,1947:235).

Nonetheless, Gandhi's passionate concern with the building of a new society which would be free of exploitation, and in which the lowliest of the low would have their minimum needs satisfied, was the concern of an outstanding Indian with a conscience. And in this context, religion for him was not in a watertight compartment, sealed off from the agony of living in conditions of scarcity Gandhi saw the struggle for human liberation as part and parcel of the quest for salvation (Chatterjee,1983:10).

One cannot but admire Gandhi's revisionist strategy in his encounter with Hindu orthodoxy. He declined to fight it on its own ground, by denying unqualified allegiance to scriptural authority, and claiming the right to interpret religious texts in the light of reason, morality and common sense. His task was made easier by the fact that he selected one Hindu scripture, the Bhagawad Gita, and made it a common symbol between himself and the Hindus of his generation. When his interpretations were called in question, he disarmed his critics by suggesting that the text on which they relied could be an interpolation or simply by asserting that he had all his life "lived Hinduism', and knew what he was talking about. He did not, however, make any claim to infallibility. "The opinions I have formed", he wrote, "and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow (Nanda, 1990:12).

Gandhi could take all these liberties with Hinduism, because he was an "insider" and was seen by the people as a devout Hindu, a great Hindu, a Mahatma. His unique position as a political leader stood him in good stead as a social reformer. He was permeated with profound humanism and was a crusader against injustices in all spheres of social relations. He denounced in words of blazing moral indignation the barbarous institution of untouchability, the age long crime of the Hindu society against its most oppressed section. He passionately struggled for the liquidation of this most inhuman institution and made it even an integral part of his political programme. He addressed powerful ethical appeals to the higher classes of the Hindus and endeavored to

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awaken their conscience against this infamy of ages(Desai,1984:348). Gandhi's insistence on the autonomy of human reason and conscience in the interpretation of religious ideas and practices not only for himself, but for everyone else, makes him one of the most daring religious reformers in history.

In Gandhi, religion brought about a rare amalgamation of public and personal life. It culminated itself into self-realization on the one hand, and service of the humanity on the other. That is to say, it had wings in the secular character of political life, but its roots lay deep into the spiritual content of man's existence. Gandhi believed in the essential unity of principles of all religions, for he viewed them as a system of beliefs and practices for God-realization. It was a progressive outlook on the part of Gandhi in his attempt to make religions co-exist. And all in all, Gandhi must attribute his thinking to the flexibility and catholicity of the Hindu civilization, that has the power of both renewal and change.

Gandhi combined in himself the dual role of a saint and an active politician. He has been called by some `the most saintly among the politicians', and by others the most `political saint'. However, this has only led to a dichotomy between the devotion that a saint deserves, and the expectations and achievements that a leader entails. There was something in the saint that failed as the leader, or something in the leader that failed as the saint. He was equally mistrusted by both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists. All the way he preached ahimsa or non-violence. But in the hour of crisis, this ahimsa had been rejected, and violence voluntarily chosen. And most unfortunately, fate never permitted Gandhi the time in retrospect!

There is no doubt that Gandhi's thought constitutes a challenge to the main currents of modern civilization. But the question is that are his ideas likely to fire the present imagination and win wide acceptance? Of course, there are skeptics who maintain that Gandhism possesses little survival value.

It is alleged that very little of what Gandhi stood for survives in India today. His teachings have been safely locked in the cupboards, and only lip-homage due to them is paid without failure. There is little of God, and little of Truth, and little of Non-violence in our lives. Does it mean that are we trying to prove Gandhism wrong and untenable? There are two aspects involved in it: the first relates to the difficulty of translating into practice the great truths which Gandhi emphasized, and the second pinpoints to the simple fact that values change slowly. The ideal may not be compatible with the present era.

Gandhi always first put into practice what he preached to others. In this respect, to define Gandhian way of life as utopian and impracticable would be to reject without acceptance. Gandhi claimed neither originality nor finality for his philosophy of life. The conceptions of truth and nonviolence have always held a high esteem in the Hindu way of life. What Gandhi did was to demonstrate that they could be applied to practical life. Of-course, in relation to the present times, they may be used in relative terms. However, it is an indisputable fact that there can be no conditions for both truth and non-violence.

The crux of the problem, in all probability, lies in the human nature. The present has always tried to prove itself right by crushing the past. The same has been true in case of Gandhi. Born and bred in an atmosphere reeking with violence, selfishness, greed and untruth, the individual finds it difficult to repose confidence in the weapon of truth and non-violence. Truth has been repudiated as difficult because words are generally used to hide rather than to express one's feelings, and nonviolence is difficult because it demands the control of the animal impulses. Purity of means is also fairly difficult because, after a person has once chosen his end, there is little else in his mind but the thought of attaining it at any cost (Suda,1964:198).

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Despite all odds, the significance of Gandhi lies in his faith that the religious attitude is a thing of permanent value to mankind, individually and collectively. There is an urgent need for a full and free exchange of our differing religious experiences, in a spirit of mutual respect, appreciation and sympathy. Religion can be for our growth and development, as also for our downfall and decay —the authority of choice lies with us. However, the acceptance of religion in the secular context with spiritual content is an alternative without challenges. It stands apart.

And as we revisit his experiments with life day after day, it is difficult to believe that he left us on 30 January 1948.

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