

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS CREED OF MAHATMA GANDHI

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Abstract: In India the renaissance and political freedom movement raised their heads together and to some religious awakening was more important and to some it was freedom movement, but to Gandhiji, 'politics in religion and religion in politics both were blended together on ancient Vedic principles'.

Key Words: God, Philosophy, Religion, Hinduism, Anekantvad and Sayadvad, Creeds, Self-restrain, Politics

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The political sagacity, the religious humility and the moral impeccability of Mahatma Gandhi impressed me so much that I decided to write a monograph on the philosophy of religion of Mahatma Gandhi which I believe was the driving force of his being. "Blast my faith in God and I am dead".

Now the question arises what is the philosophy of religion? Philosophy is valid thinking of what is and what is not. What is real and what is false (MAYA). It is questioning your own experiences to apprehend the nature of reality. Philosophy is an intellectual quest for the truth. Reason is its main spring or a touchstone to distinguish between what is true or false knowledge. Whereas religion is a quest of some supernatural being. A spiritual power, all powerful, all knowing and self existent infinite being. An ideal of faith and fear.

It is an upward movement of the human mind from the finite towards the infinite, unknown and unknowledgeable, the unknowable. Philosophy of religion may seem to be a strange combination of reason and faith. Philosophy is a search through valid reasoning the primary substance, the source of all that exists. A substance out of which all comes and to which all returns. Whereas religion is, "human recognition of God or Gods' entitled to worship and obedience."

To a casual reader I want to remind that there is, "no provinces of human experience, there is nothing in the whole realm of reality which lie beyond the domain of philosophy or to which philosophical investigation does not extend. And religion so far from forming an exception to the all embracing sphere of philosophy rather is just that province which lies nearest to it. Religion and philosophy have common objects and a common content and in the explanation of religion philosophical may be said to be at the same time explaining it."<sup>2</sup> In the same vein John Hicks also writes, "Philosophy of religion is philosophical defense of religious convictions".<sup>3</sup> "It seeks to analyze concepts such as God, worship, soul, eternal life, hell and heaven etc."<sup>4</sup> It would not be an exaggeration if I say that philosophy of religion washes religious chaos of its superstitions and extravagant beliefs. Philosophy of religion as Caird tells us that religious ideas are to be taken out from the domain of feelings and emotions and, subject to scientific investigation, or as according to Hicks philosophy is thinking about religion.

If this is so then in the course of our study of the philosophy of religion of Mahatma Gandhi, we will analyze the religious beliefs and religious experiences of Gandhiji who says, "I

do not believe that my philosophy is an indifferent mixture of Tolstoy and Buddha. I do not know what it is except that it is what I feel to be true .I owe much to Tolstoy and much to Buddha. I still somehow or the other fancy that my philosophy represents the true meaning of Gita."<sup>5</sup> Gandhiji believed, "on religious plan- Gita to a celestial divine song with heavenly orchestra. On the social plane, the removal of untouchability. On the moral plane, swadeshi and spinning .On the political plane, free India. On the moral and religious plan-search of truth and practice of Ahimsa, is the total religious philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi."<sup>6</sup>

"Philosophy of religion starts with the supposition that religion and religious ideas can be taken out of the domain of the feelings or practical experiences and made an object of scientific reflection."<sup>7</sup> Religion is the consciousness of a personal God, an absolute or a spiritual being. Beyond reason it is an intuition that transcends reason and gives us the glimpse of that glorious being, whereas philosophy with the help of valid reason discovers what is real and rational. Science deals with that what is natural. Philosophy is putting intellect to question experience of how, what and why? Religion deals with supernatural. In another words, Philosophy of religion tends to examine through valid reasoning the concept of religious beliefs, experiences, miracles i.e. philosophizing religion . The reason has the capacity to deal with religion. In the words of Shree Aurobindo, "without philosophy religion degenerates into superstitions and obscurisim. And without religion philosophy is barren dry mental gymnast. The main task of religious philosophy is to put religious experiences, rituals into its true perspective, and to remove deeply rooted irrational beliefs and superstitions."

Before I explain Gandhiji philosophy of religion, I would like to state Gandhiji's religious creed in his own words. (Creeds are the index of a particular religion) Christianity and Islam both have religious creeds. The religious creed of Christianity is, "I believe in the Father Almighty the maker of heaven and earth and His only begotten son Jesus Christ etc." Islamic religious creed is, "Lahailalaha, Mohammed Rasool Allah." But in Hinduism there is no such religious creed. Radhakrishnan went on to the extent saying, "Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life." But Gandhiji had his personal creed which envelops entire Hinduism in its fold and it begins with, "I take pride in belonging to the Vaishnavite faith. My faith does not require my adherence to all ceremonial observations. I cling to Vaishnavite faith because it circulates in the universe, love and therefore brotherhood, observance of truth and nonviolence and insists on

the unselfish devotion to God."<sup>8</sup> Gandhiji spells out his personal religious creed in the following manner:-

- 1) I am a Sanatani. A man who believes in ancient Hindu Religion, law, and spiritual social and observances.
- 2) I believe in the Vedas. The ancient religious books of Hinduism consist of four Vedas- the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sarna Veda, and Atharva Veda. Vedas are authorless and eternal.
- 3) I believe in the protection of cow. A cow is a sacred animal for Hindus.
- 4) I believe in idol worship. Gandhiji condones and defended idolatry and called it safe and harmless aid to worship.
- 5) I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas, other religious books are as much divinely inspired as Vedas.
- 6) I believe that our present knowledge of these books is in chaotic state.
- 7) I believe implicitly in the Hindu(aphorism) that no one truly know the Shashtra's, who have not attained perfection in Ahimsa, truth and self -control (Bhramacharya) and who have not renounced all acquisitions or possession of wealth.
- 8) I believe in the institution of the Gurus. Not everybody is perfect in purity and has perfect learning. I am a reformer through and through but my zeal never asks me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism.
- 9) I believe in God and His oneness.
- 10) I believe in tree worship -it is the nature of man that he hankers after symbols and images- it is not a sin.
- 11) I believe in births and rebirths and the law of karma. (Actions done-you have to suffer its merits and demerits, in this birth or next rebirths.
- 12) I believe in Salvation. Freedom from the chain, of births and rebirths. But I too believe in human efforts. I regard as the 'sumom-bonum' of life. The attainment of salvation through Karma annihilating its effect by detachment.

- 13) I believe in Hinduism as not an exclusive religion but in it there is a room for all the prophets of the world. It distinguishes itself from every other religion but in its cow protection. Regarding Varna ashram dharma Gandhiji commenting on it tells us, "that Hinduism does most empathetically discourage inter-dinning and inter-marriage between divisions. He calls it the height of self restrains. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restrain. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free and by restricting his choice of a bride to be of a particular group, it excises rare self-restrain.
- 14) Hinduism does not regard an unmarried state as by any means essential for Salvation.
- 15) Salvation is freedom from births and hence death also.
- 16) Abstinance from intoxicating drinks and drugs, from all kinds of foods especially meat is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit.
- 17) Central fact of Hinduism however is cow protection. Cow protection is a gift of Hinduism to the world and Hinduism will live so long there are Hindu's to protect the cow. And in the end he sums his creed by saying, "I can no more describe my feelings for Hinduism than from my own wife... Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations, nothing elates me so much as the music of Gita or Ramayana (Tulsidas). The only two books in Hinduism. I may be said to know."<sup>9</sup>
- 18) Temple worship - I know the vices that are going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeaking failing. "I have but shadowed forth my intense longing to lose myself in the eternal and become a merely lump of clay in the potter's hands so that my services may become more certain because of uninterrupted by the baser self in me."<sup>10</sup> "If I were to define the Hindu creed I should simply say, 'search after truth through non-violence."<sup>11</sup> Religion formed the core of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts. At one point he says, "I am a staunch Hindu." In his philosophy of religion he followed those concepts of Hinduism which appealed to the hearts of general Hindu masses.

Gandhiji's philosophy in his own words is, "Which is based on the stuff and substance of Indian thought and many of his revolutionary theories were rooted in the ancient Hindu traditions."<sup>12</sup> As he says, "I want to write many new things, but they must be written on Indian slate."<sup>13</sup> "I see the world is changing every moment and is therefore unreal. It has no permanent existence. But though it is constantly changing it has a something about it which persists and therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to call it real and unreal and thus being called anekantwadi or Syadvadi. But my Syadvad is not the Syadvad of the learned. It is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experiences that I am always true from my point of view and am often wrong from the point of views of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from respective point of view and this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their perspective point of view and wrong from the point of view of one another. And right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of manyness of reality. My anekantwad is the result of my twin doctrine of Satya and Ahimsa."<sup>14</sup>

In the light of Gandhiji's religious creed and his belief in the doctrine of Anekantvad (indescribable reality of manyness) and Sayadvad (Ex: This is a Table .This is not a table. Table is both real and unreal. Table is indescribable.) Guided by these the two light houses, standing on the shore; I will try to wade through my journey into the religious philosophy of Gandhiji. "Jain metaphysics is realistic and relativistic pluralism i.e. the reality is indescribable. It is called the doctrine of manyness of reality. Each atom and each soul posses innumerable aspects of its own (ananta dharma Kama vastu). Human knowledge is not only relative but also limited and so are our judgments. Epistemologically it is called Sayadvad and metaphysically it is called Anekantvad as a matter of fact both Anekantvad and Sayadvad are the two aspects of the same teaching i.e. realists and relativistic pluralism)"<sup>15</sup> Anekantvad and Sayadvad are the two pillars of Gandhiji's huge structure of philosophy of religion. In the light of these two principles, he explains all complicated moral and religious issues, for example: discussing his theory of incarnation, he writes, "I believe in Krishna of my own imagination who was identical with God and had not much to do with the historical Krishna about whom there is a mass of conflicting evidences ... My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my

head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride was hurt or the Krishna whom non Hindus portray as a desolate youth. I believe in the Krishna of my own imagination."<sup>16</sup>

Gandhiji also saw that among the Hindu's there is a strong tendency that any person who is religious is raised to the throne of divinity. A religious sect is formed who begins to worship him, therefore to discourage it, he said that, "There is no such thing as Gandhism. I do not want to leave any sect after me. I have simply tried in my own way to apply all the eternal truths to my daily life and its problems. The opinion I have formed and the conclusion I have arrived are not final."<sup>17</sup>

Image of Gandhiji does not become that of a divinity in the Hindu pantheon but remains that of a man who schooled himself in self discipline, who made his life a continual process of growth, who shaped his environment as much as he was shaped by it. Einstein paying tribute to Gandhiji says, "generations to come it may scarcely believe that such a man was there ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth, and who tenaciously adhered to certain values to which civilized humanity pays only lip service while flouting them in practice."<sup>18</sup> In an essay R.M Grag and M. C Parkeh, quoting Mahatma Gandhi who once said, "Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise. I, however, who wears the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man. I believe that every work of man must have a religious backing."<sup>19</sup> At another place Gandhiji writes, "I may claim to nothing exclusively divine in me. I do not claim prophet ship. I am but a humble seeker after truth and bent upon finding it."<sup>20</sup> C.F. Andrews writes, "He rose to conquer the world with spirituality."<sup>21</sup> About himself Gandhiji writes, "I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the kingdom of heaven which is a spiritual deliverance. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and humanity. So my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace.

Thus it will be seen that according to Gandhiji there is no politics devoid of religion and a politics bereft of religion is a death trap. From all that is stated the reader can draw conclusion that his philosophy of religion is like a stream in which many currents flow together, sometimes mingled up and sometimes apart.

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