

GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF HUMANISM: WAY TO GLOBAL HARMONY

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Abstract: This paper aims at focusing the relevance Gandhian concept of humanism and its establishment of making a welfare society in a state where every individual is interconnected to each other. There is nothing independent in the universe. Both sentient and non-sentient being is interconnected and interdependent in their existence. Therefore, they must maintain equilibrium among them. If the inter-relationship is necessary for all beings, then there can be no question of separation, domination and exploitation among them. It illustrates that one's welfare is intrinsically interconnected with the welfare of others. It can be achieved through the vision of sarvodaya. Sarvodaya does not mean adulteration of good Government, it means where every man gets equal opportunity. It would create a new era of peace and non-violence where there would be no poverty, no exploitation, no war and bloodshed.

Keywords: Humanism, Sarvodaya, Truth, Non-violence, Education.

Introduction

With the advancement in scientific and technological inventions, a close communication among people could be made possible. In spite of this tremendous advancement and prosperity, human beings have been facing to encounter multidimensional crisis. However, the destiny of mankind seems to be at crossroads Today, Humanity is haunted by the fear of terrorism. Global harmony seems to be endangered by exploitation, violence, relentless pursuit power, greed, arrogance, stress, agony etc. Now human beings are becoming very materialistic and trying to achieve the unattainable goal either by hook or crook. For the satisfaction of desire, passion and emotion of our bodily urges, we are exploiting the world of both sentient and non-sentient beings carelessly. It is a result of narrow sense of intellectual ability as a tool of power and position of man's desire for controlling and dominating over the nature as well as fellow human beings. The terror of imbalanced application of technology, ecology disasters, biological warfare, poverty, deadly diseases and communal bitterness

etc., are just to mention a few of the present crises. I have pointed out that the present crisis is the crisis of values in contemporary society, which goes against of humanity. As a result of materialistic pursuits, moral values are being displaced by set of materialistic values that emphasizes the unlimited desires of human beings and craving for her/his own selfish. It refers to the relentless attempt to grab power, position and profit without having an attitude of love, trust, non-violence, co-operation, coordination and collaboration among each other. This promotes violence rather than non-violence. The spectrum of affluence breaks the unity of life in the world, which leads to the crises of global harmony.

A humanistic philosophy of life is necessary to become better man and rise from sub-human level of physical and mental existence. It should provide a frame for living human values and justifying their activities in terms of intrinsic and instrumental values and awakening about concepts like equality, freedom, justice and unity as they operate in society. Almost every sphere of humanistic philosophy of life, its meaning, aim, content and process holds out human existing possibilities for moral and ethical context. It can create harmony in society by purifying the human heart, thought and action. Moreover, it can also safeguard the strength of unity of life by developing the inner capacities and capabilities in each individual.

As a philosophical doctrine, the concept of humanism aims at an ideal life. It is used in a wider sense. Humanism, as a rational way of thinking, would maintain the equality irrespective of the social, political and economic developments in society. Humanism refers to the doctrines, which assumes the centrality of man. In the Greek tradition, *Protagoras*, *Socrates*, *Plato* and *Aristotle* have started deep interest in human affairs and emphasized on human values. The term ‘Humanism’ holds importance in Indian tradition. It starts from Bhagavad Gita that urges man to make out a perfect personality from her/his own self and all the individuals should seek to participate in the process so that they can contribute to the development of collective wellbeing.

The aim of Humanism is to develop a kind of social philosophy where there will be radical reconstruction of the society through the moral and ethical spirit. The concept of man is central point of Humanism, in other words it is called “Man-Centred Philosophy”. It seeks to develop the global harmony in society in accordance with social, political and eco-

conomic prospective and refers to universal welfare in society. It emphasizes upon the principles of spiritual unity of life. All life in its essence is one among them. Broadly speaking the concept of humanism means where all human beings are to be equally lived together saved together and shared together. The entire human beings having an attitude of equality would create the whole world as a family and able to eradicate the crisis which promotes the global harmony through spiritual unity of man i.e. oneness of everything.

At realistic level, Gandhi has accepted the concept of humanism for making the global harmony. For him, sacrifice, trust, truth, service and non-violence may be awakened for the wellbeing of the humanity that leads to global harmony rather than monarchy system, feudal system and colonialism etc. According to Gandhi, global harmony is based on peace, which gives a state of positive and constructive view of world order. It eliminates exploitation, domination, agitation and all kinds of violence among the individuals and makes way to living with co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination. Basically Gandhian concept of global harmony is based on spiritual way of oneness where every individual can realize the essence of oneness that “all life is one.”¹ This paper has tried to illustrate Gandhian notion of humanism, which is based on the concept of oneness. There is nothing independent in the universe. Both sentient and non-sentient beings are interconnected and interdependent in their existence. Therefore, they must maintain equilibrium among them. Gandhi says,

I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have different bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source.²

If the inter-relationship is necessary for all beings, then there can be no question of separation, domination and exploitation among them. It illustrates that one’s welfare is intrinsically interconnected with the welfare of others. Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most profound figures in the modern world. He advocates the divine qualities and sound attitudes

1 Mathai, M. P., *Mahatma Gandhi World-View*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 2000, p. 89.

2 Andrews, C. F., *Mahatma Gandhi’s Ideas*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1949, p. 89.

like trust, love, friendship, non-violence and peace, etc. in our society which can be a holistic device to eradicate the crisis through the Ahimsa or Non-violence. Gandhi is neither an academic thinker nor a system builder but basically considered as a man of action and thought.

Gandhian conception of an ideal social order is taken in a broad sense, which includes the ethical preoccupations. It is reducible to some fundamental values of non-violence, freedom and equality. The activities of individuals are bound to exercise within society. Every man should exercise her/his will without any compulsion. It automatically develops the qualities of moral freedom. It is possible for every man to bring out the inherent divinity and the realization of oneness in life. The sense of oneness of the entire humanity brings the ethical contemplation of human action on society.

Welfare of All

Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya is the best way to bring equality and eradicate all kinds of discrimination in society. It is the most efficient weapon to fight against poverty, unemployment, and exploitation and establish an ideal state. He has emphasized on the individual upliftment. Every human being is an integral part of society and is interconnected and interdependent on each other. One's welfare is intrinsically related to welfare of others as well. For Gandhi, Sarvodaya means the welfare and all round development of all. His idea of Savodaya is greater than the Utilitarianism, i.e. the greatest happiness of the greatest number and emphasizes the betterment of all, that means, not only of all sentient beings but also of all non-sentient beings. Here, Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya has been taken in a very broad perspective: "*Sarve sukhino bhavantu, sarve santu niramyā*- let every one of us be happy, let all of us be freed from all evils."³

The vision of Sarvodaya is based on the spiritual idea of the existence of oneness. This idea of Sarvodaya seems to be closer to Sankara's Advaitvad. It is the establishment of socio-economic-political structure that would develop the inner capacities and capabilities of the individuals. Thus, Sarvodaya presupposes a social order, which can give equal op-

3 Chakrabarti, Mohit, *Gandhian Humaism*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1992, p. 80.

portunity to every individual. Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya contains the attitude and aptitude of every individual and provides basically the constructive programme. The individual is surrounded by different social orders, laws, customs, religious faith, habits and heritage, etc. without them he/she cannot grow. Man, not only needs the basic things like food, cloths and shelter, but also has social and spiritual needs. Man develops her/his individuality through personal efforts, talents, skills, and will power etc. Gandhi has been fascinated by the Hindu idea of Varnashramadharma, where there is a healthy division of work among the people, which helps in bringing harmony in society.

The inherent spirit of Sarvodaya is a way of life. It promotes the inherent qualities of human beings such as physical, mental and moral attitudes, etc. Sarvodaya merges oneself to the good of all. It is based on the humanistic approach: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means we all are the part of a family. Sarvodaya is the principle of Self-realization or Divine Truth through thought and action for the goodness of mankind. For Gandhi, the concept of Sarvodaya follows the moral laws and principles in order to do the duties and responsibilities for the benefits of others. The religion of Humanism is based upon the morality, truth and non-violence. As Gandhi says, "As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religious over-riding morality."⁴

Character building-Education

Education plays a vital role in individual life towards becoming a civilized being and maintaining peace and harmony in the society. Universal education is necessary to make an ideal state because the educated person would discharge his duties in proper way. An ideal government can make the state ideal by bringing peace and happiness, in which every individual would be able to get equal opportunity. So the aim of education is to provide social, intellectual and physical faculties to satisfy the need of the individual in society. Gandhi writes, "Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man."⁵ The state should provide an intellectual skill for developing

4 Gandhi, M. K., *Young India*, November 24, 1921, p. 385.

5 Gandhi, M. K., *Harijan*, May 8, 1937, p. 104.

the intrinsic and instrumental criteria and give adequate information about democracy, equality, secularism, freedom and social justice, etc.

According to Gandhi, the education is a lifelong process and does not confine within degree and label. It advocates “*Nai Talim*” or New education, which is the key for the construction of ideal society. The education is a mechanism, which brings out the inner capacities and capabilities of human thought, which can develop the idea of Humanism. The education should be useful, purposeful, meaningful and successful in life towards the spirit of human progress, peace and prosperity. Gandhi does not accept the degree oriented or bookish-oriented education. For him, the education is the development of human thought, which gives perfection to life. In literal sense, education is to be called- *sa vidya ya vimuktaye*, i.e., the inner development of oneself. The character building is the most important role for the development of inner capacities and capabilities. Gandhi’s basic education is to make all- round development of the individual personality. Gandhi is not in favour of present education system because it creates unemployment and develops the pseudo modernity. Educated person tends to takes up white coloured jobs rather than agriculture work or any small work. No doubt the modern education peruses people to proceed in materialistic path but not in ethical. According to Gandhi, education means not literacy, but it should help in the growth of an individual. For him, education is “that which draws out and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of children.”⁶ The tragedy is that our present education does not provide the ethical virtues to make a difference between ‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’. Today the system of education makes a clear distinction between the theory and practice and break up the unity in life.

According to Gandhi, education is directed towards mankind from ‘one to all’ and shows the positive force of Humanism. The positive force is nothing but the development of inner qualities. The aim and objective of education is, to transform the human attitudes rather than to collect the information. According to William Cenkner:

There is an identity of ideas between truth and ahimsa and the Wardha Scheme for basic education. Truth, Non-violence, service to humanity and fearlessness were Gandhi’s goals and education became the

6 Ibid., September 1, 1937.

means to these goals.⁷

Economic Aspects of the Social Order

Gandhi has extensively emphasized on the economic issues that can bring an economic equality and harmony in society. He has basically dealt with the basic economic problems that how we can bring equality among the people. He has realized that harmony in social order is not possible without economic equality. The disparity between have and haven't creates serious hindrance towards establishing an ideal society. Gandhi has stated this against the capitalist's views. For him, there should be no big gap between the landlords and the workers. His main idea is to maintain justice in society. The concept of Trusteeship is a formulation of an economic equality as key to maintaining the cordiality social harmony. By maintaining the social harmony, every individual will have to find her or her exact proportion of share i. e. each man finds her/his share according to her/his ability. Gandhi's formulation of the concept of trusteeship gives the equal distribution of wealth. His basic idea is to have a simple life and to get the basic requirements fulfilled. So Gandhi does not favour the concentration of wealth in the hands of few people.

The concept of Trusteeship is a critique of the capitalists system and provides equal opportunity to all. He is against the private and disproportionate accumulation of wealth. The concept of Trusteeship is rooted in the principles of non-violence, Truth, kindness and love, etc. The man who possesses the wealth can act like a trustee. He has to work for the betterment of the society without selfish motive. The main theme of Trusteeship is that the material wealth of an individual in society is not considered as a personal wealth but can be used in the service of the other. Thus, Trusteeship is regarded as the welfare of all through the equitable economic harmony among the people. The concept of Trusteeship promotes the ethical principles in society. So Gandhian concept of Trusteeship presupposes the realization of oneself with the other.

7 Cenkner, William, *The Hindu Personality in Education*, Manohar Book Service, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 100-101.

Ethical Aspects of Politics and Religion

For Gandhi, both religion and politics are supplementary to each other. The true religious person means he would participate in politics, which further indicates that the righteousness of a man can play constructive role in achieving social harmony. Religion means the development of the all forms of human activity, which provides the establishment of social, economic and political harmony from purely religious work and practices. He says, “My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion.”⁸ For Gandhi, a true religious person is one for whom the highest goal in life is the attainment of liberation i.e., Divine Spirit or God. According to him, “The only way to find God is to see Him in His creations and be one with it. I cannot find him apart from the rest of Humanity.”⁹ So it is obvious that Gandhi does not separate religion and politics and makes them complementary. Therefore, religion is regarded as a people-oriented politics. Politics should promote the religious idea; so that politician can be dedicated for the service of humanity, which leads to a better understanding of Truth. He writes, “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identify myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics.”¹⁰

According to Gandhi, the social order is based on the fundamental values of equality, harmony, non-violence and liberty. He is rigorously opposed to the monarchy and capitalistic views. Politics does not mean to acquire power rather to provide justice in society. Gandhi’s views on politics are to do with social transformation with regard to moral values. He advocates the moral values like truth, non-violence, love, brahmacharya, non-stealing and non-possession for the individuals who would participate in political activities. Gandhi has comprehensively recommended the decentralization of power where the weakest should get the same opportunity as the strongest. He does not favour merely parliamentary democracy because the government can have some possibilities of misusing the power. He has recommended the moral principles in place of counting the numbers. “Gandhi tries to introduce morality in politics, and that he does by presupposing that even political activity is an aspect of the spiritual

8 Gandhi, M. K., *Harijan*, March 2, 1934, p. 23.

9 Ibid., December 26, 1936.

10 Ibid., December 24, 1938, p. 393.

pattern that guides the world.”¹¹

Democracy is a political system for the all-round development and betterment of people and interactions among individuals in society. In a democratic country, political power is exercised through the people. India is a big country and therefore, it is not advisable to centralize the power. So Gandhi emphasizes on the decentralized polity like Panchayat Raj System where every individual would be able to do her/his duties in proper way and it gives more power at the grass root level. The primary aim of this system is to protect the freedom of every individual and make him or her aware of their duties and responsibilities. So it claims, “Every village should be self-contained at least with respect to daily necessities of life, like food, clothing, basic education, health, sanitation and similar other things.”¹² Gandhi has emphasized on Gram Swaraj, i.e., the upliftment of villages from the exploitation, ignorance, illiterate and superstition, etc. He has realized that how the economic-political authority exploits villages centered in the town and cities. As Gandhi says, “As every country is free to eat, to drink and to breathe, even so is every nation free to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly.”¹³ Etymologically the swaraj means freedom or self-rule. Gandhi’s idea of swaraj is the establishment of Socio-economic-political freedom in all realm of life.

Gandhi takes religion in the sense of ‘dharma’, which is derived from Bhagavat Gita. Truth and Non-violence are the two branches of religion, which promote the moral and spiritual characters in each individual. Gandhiji’s concept of religion is based on the ethical principle. So religion formulates the ethical values like love, compassion, Truth and justice, etc., which plays an important role in transformation of society in a perfect way. A man “who doesn’t order his life in obedience to the generally accepted moral laws, cannot be said to be a man in the full sense of the word.”¹⁴ Gandhi’s concept of ethics and religion are inseparable from social life. The attainment of self-realization is quite impossible without this

11 Lal, Basant Kumar, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banaridass, New Delhi, 1973, p. 146.

12 Ibid., p. 150.

13 Gandhi, M. K., *Young India*, October 15, 1931.

14 Satyanarayana, Y. V., *Marx and Gandhi*, Andra University Press, Visakhapatnam, 1988, p. 45.

kind of society. So we cannot escape from the social service and Gandhi says, "For me there are no politics devoid of religion. Politics devoid of religion is a death-trap because they kill the soul."¹⁵

Metaphysical Aspect of Man

Any thinking person, some time in his life asks: 'what is existence of man and what is human nature? These questions have been discussed from various perspectives and many theories have emerged out of different inquiry. Hence, it is very complicated to get a comprehensive picture of human nature. Gandhi understands the nature of man in metaphysical sense. Man is basically related with inner goodness. The ultimate aim of man's life is the attainment of self-realization. Therefore, Gandhi says, "The ultimate aim of man's life is self-realization, which means realizing Absolute Truth or knowing oneself or seeing God face to face. The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and to be one with it."¹⁶ He has tried to reconcile the spiritual with socio-economic and political activities. Man is basically peace loving being, he/she becomes violent due to influence of external factors. Man is a combination of both good and evil ideas. No man is always perfect and good. Gandhi did not consider man as merely a creator of circumstances. He has examined how man overcomes the difficulties of circumstances. So self-confidence and self-restrain play positive role in shaping man's nature. Gandhi accepts the Darwinian theory that "we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute."¹⁷

Gandhi believes that man is a part of God. Man possesses within herself/himself capacities and capabilities, which are divine. The divine qualities in man promote the attainment of the higher Truth. Gandhi has accepted the inherent goodness of man, which makes him to be a perfect being. The individual reformation is possible through the realization of perfection. Gandhi has rejected the Marxian views that human nature depends only upon the social order. But he believes that it is not totally isolated from these circumstances either. He has accepted that certain changes can be possible through the influence of social environments but

15 Gandhi, M. K., *Young India*, April 3, 1924, p.112.

16 Gandhi, M. K., *Harijan*, August 29, 1936, p. 226.

17 *Ibid.*, April 2, 1938, p. 65.

it cannot completely change the instinctive power of man. Gandhi says, "Every individual is a part of the nation or the social structure surrounding him."¹⁸ Gandhi's concept of freedom of human being should be exercised by self-rule i.e. swaraj which seems to be closer to the Kantian notion of Categorical Imperative.

Conclusion

Gandhi is an apostle of Humanism. For him, every individual is authorized to work towards his own decision and will. The real meaning of Humanism is a self-transformation, self-activity and self-respect. It encourages every man to live up to his rational will. The concept of Humanism is the disciplined way of respecting oneself and also others. Where everyone is responsible for her/his works, which they do to the best of her/his abilities and capacities not because of, bring any compulsion. Gandhian concept of Humanism cannot make an individual narrow and self-centred. It must allow the inculcation of kindness and love for every individual. It suggests how to draw equality and harmony in socio-economic, political and educational structures of society, which promotes the global harmony.

Gandhian concept of Humanism would create a new era of peace and non-violence where there would be no poverty, no exploitation, no war and bloodshed. For him, peace is a state of positive and constructive world-view and world-order. Every individual and community has to eliminate the exploitation, domination and conflict among each other and to establish co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration in the society. Gandhian concept of Humanism advocates the discipline of respecting oneself and others and providing justice to the 'man' in oneself. It reveals in one's consciousness. It is to do with self-activity, self-dependence and self-honour. The idea of self-honour would automatically prosper in oneself only when one is continually awake in performing one's duties and responsibilities to the best of one's abilities. The main goal of the Gandhian Humanism is self-activity and self-respect that gives everyone to be worthy of her/his existence. It is obviously said that everyone is to be awakened for the worship of humanity. Gandhi believes; service to man-

¹⁸ Ibid., August 2, 1942, p. 249.

kind is the service to God. The people having an attitude of selflessness can see the whole world as a family and will be able to eradicate the crises and promote the spiritual globalization or oneness in the world. This has rightly been expressed in the following words in *Rg Veda*:

“Samani va Akutih samana hridayani vah

*Samanamastu vo mano yatha vah susamuhasati”*¹⁹

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¹⁹ *Rg. Ved*, 10/191/4.