



## GANDHIAN VALUES IN 'I HAVE A DREAM' – A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH THE TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE

Ms. Salma Begum

(Lecturer in English, Mahabubnagar (T.S).)

### ABSTRACT



'I Have a dream' is a speech delivered by Martin Luther King (Jr) on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1963. It changed the course of American History. Indisputably it is the world's the best ever given speech by a freedom fighter which propelled millions of minds into thinking about the human values and universal camaraderie. Martin Luther King Jr was an American Christian minister and human rights activist who spearheaded 'Civil Rights Movement' making it a realized program of action with the help of nonviolence and civil disobedience. He lived in America during 1920-1968. Like Mahatma Gandhi, he was also succumbed to the bullets of a fanatic. "I Have Dream" reflects the abundance of Gandhian ideology and Biblical teaching which envisaged the equal recognition of African Americans on par with white Americans. My paper would deal with the elements of Gandhian ideology and the teachings of the Bible in "I have a Dream"

**Keywords:** *Martin Luther King Jr., Civil Rights Movement, Gandhian Ideology, Bible.*

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The march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963 was the occasion for the famous speech 'I Have a Dream' to be delivered. Around 2.5 lakh people were present at Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C as a witness to the historical movement. Abraham Lincoln signed a declaration on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1863 which freed thirty five lakh enslaved African American from their bondage. The declaration came to be known as

'Emancipation Proclamation". It has become vital document which enabled millions of African Americans breath freely.

The speech " I Have a Dream' takes its initial support from the Declaration lamenting the fact that even after a hundred years since the emancipation declaration the scenario of exploitation remains the same. African Americans were not being considered as proper citizens of America. Equal brotherhood



could not sprout from the barren soil of America. In the name of color and creed African Americans remained subjugated to the draconian unjustifiable, biased laws and social segregation.

Martin Luther Jr states that manacles of segregation and chains of discrimination still badly crippled the life of the Negro. He identifies that social and political evils that his fellow citizens are affected with are the result of unequal laws. Gandhiji said 'first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win'. Martin Luther Jr recognized the weight of the burden of the discrimination, he noted that equality is the goal of humanity through which one can gain victory over the ignorance of exploitation meted out by the privileged over the under privileged.

'This is the no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real promises of democracy'. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sun lit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood'...proclaimed Martin Luther Jr in 'I Have a Dream'. The vehemence underscores the urgency of the change. Delay may cost a severe damage to entire humanity. Luxury of lethargy cannot be afforded. If the devil of injustice be vanquished it is now. The note of undeniable alacrity pervades the speech. Luther optimizes the strain of protest by saying 'this is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism'.

During the Quit India movement of 1942 one could have easily understood the need of the hour to bring down the chains of bondage had he ever lived in India. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi called on the nation giving the famous slogan 'Do or Die' indicating at the urgency of realizing the freedom, getting freed from the alien bondage. Gandhiji says 'God will not forgive me and I shall be judged unworthy of the great gift. I must act now'. "I Must Act Now" the utterance strengthens the fact that encased in the Bible James 4:17, where the scripture says 'Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it'. The truth of doing appropriate karma pervades the ideologies of Gandhi

and Luther that notes that whatever god we need to do it, we shall do it otherwise it would become unworthy act if time passes by.

Non violence as code of conduct, Martin Luther declares that "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness of hatred; we must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. "We must not allow our creative protests to degenerate into physical violence'. The part of the speech signifies the importance of nonviolence and striving for passive resistance as a prerequisite to agitation. One shall not repeat the atrocities committed by the opponent in order to suppress one's freedom, but by peaceful, non violent protest, the healthy change can be materialized. In the Young India on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1922 Gandhiji declared 'In the past, non cooperation has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil doer, withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence. Non violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non cooperation with evil. Gandhiji is the prophet of non violence. Had it not been to Gandhi, Indian freedom struggle, undoubtedly, would have turned a mute witness to the insurmountable burden of violence. In the New Testament of the Bible in chapter 'Romans' the scriptures say 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". In the chapter 'Luke' it is said that one should love his enemies and do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you', the teaching culminates into a peaceful restraint by saying... 'And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them'. Observance of the truth of non violence is abundantly available in Gandhi and Martin Luther Jr.

On color discrimination, Martin Luther Jr discloses his dream which can be realized when his four children would live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. He says 'one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers". Equal brotherhood cannot be realized until unless irrespective of color, caste, religion. Men and women are to be recognized as human beings first. Mahatma Gandhi termed



untouchability as a 'leper wound in the whole body of Hindu politic' and untouchability and caste discrimination as 'the fullest expression of caste'. He further aggrieved at the tentacles of caste segregation stating 'I do not want to be reborn, but if I am to be born, I would like to be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows and sufferings. The book of Colossians in the New Testament reveals "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, Circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarians, Scythians, slave or free but Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:11). It says that man is essentially made in the image of God. It simply highlights the magnificence of equality.

The divine spark of real human nature pervades through Mahatma's ideology and 'I Have a Dream' with its ever uplifting call for equality.

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