



RESEARCH PAPER

**MAHATMA'S RELIGION AND CERTAIN CANDID CONFESSIONS**

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The paper entitled "Mahatma's Religion and Certain Candid Confessions" is an attempt to explore the religious inclinations of M. K. Gandhi in order to ascertain that his ultimate religion is 'truth.' Further it justifies the relevance of Gandhian ideology to contemporaneity despite the scathing criticism on Gandhi's stand on untouchability and other issues.

**Keywords:** Religion, Truth, Ahimsa And Satyagraha, Untouchability

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Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, sings of Mahatma Gandhi while apostrophizing him as 'mystic Lotus' in her lyric, "The Lotus." She makes him "coeval with the Lords of Life and Death," of course an intuition of his martyrdom. The infinite magnitude of his greatness is not because of the whole body of "Gandhiana" standing as a monumental testimony but for the all pervasive spirit of his ideals, values, principles and the path from which he never swerved away.

An ardent reading of M. K. Gandhi's *Autobiography* reveals that the religion to him in the broadest sense is self realization and knowledge of self. As a child being born in Vaishnava religion, Gandhi had to go to "Haveli" but he disliked it for its immoral practices. He regarded the *Ramayana* of

Tulasidas as the greatest of all devotional literature and the *Bhagavat Gita* as the evocating source of true religious fervor. He developed tolerance for other religions also through the discourses of his father's Muslim and Parsi friends. His readings of *Manusmriti* failed to influence him but instead made him develop inclinations towards atheism. These atheistic tendencies slowly melted down later under the influence of Mrs. Besant who turned a theist from an atheist and the incident at Bradlaugh's funeral. But Gandhi as a child nurtured hatred for Christianity:

"Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had



already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity. (*Autobiography*, 24)

But all his Rajkot convictions were dispelled by his Manchester Christian friend who he met in England. Further Gandhi's readings of the *New Testament* made him draw some comparative contours with the *Gita*.

The verses, 'But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too,' delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal' etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, the *Light of Asia* and the *Sermon on the Mount*. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly. (43)

Truth became the guiding principle of Gandhi's life and his ultimate religion. Gandhi opines that a mere knowledge of religion does not give the inner strength to withstand the trials and tribulations of life. He quotes an incident of his stay in Portsmouth in which he was moved to lust by a landlady but saved by God. This belief was his constant companion during his bar practices as well his politics.

He firmly believed, "Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts of more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal." (46)

He was confirmed in his opinion that religion and morality were synonymous. He was greatly influenced by Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and understood the essence in terms of the principles viz. the "good of the individual is contained in the good of all, that lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's and that a life of labour, is the life worth living." (125)

Gandhi observed fasting as the means of penance. Ultimately his confession that there is no other God than truth made him realize that truth is Ahimsa which is absolutely passion free in "thought, speech, and action." This is the concept of triple

purity. Without purification of heart, the observance of Ahimsa is a mere dream. The confession that self purification is purification in all walks of life and surroundings also can be examined in the light of prevalent untouchability of those days. Gandhi was administered the triple vow by Swamiji not to touch wine, women, and meat before sailing from Bombay to England. He addresses to his reader:

What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistencies between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject. (*Harijan*, 29-04-'33 p.2)

Shri Hardev Sahay wrote to Gandhiji in 1946 that it was the duty of the Congress governments in power to provide wells for the Harijans. Shri G. G. Tapase, the then Minister for Backward classes (Bombay) sent a copy of the Bombay Harijan (Removal of Social Disabilities) Act that was passed by the Legislature and the clause that read as follows speaks of the predicament of the untouchable India.

. . . no Harijan shall merely on the ground that he is a Harijan - be prevented from . . . having access to or using any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water-tap or any bathing place, burial or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, any road, or pathway which the members of all other castes and classes of Hindus have a right to use or have access to: (*Gandhiji Expects*, 105)

There are many other clauses and Gandhiji made the following notes from the text of Tapase's speech.

This untouchability amounts to irrationality. As soon as a Harijan is born, untouchability applies to him....as a Harijan he is born, as a Harijan he lives all through his life and as a Harijan he dies. . . However clean he may be, however wise he may be, however superior he may be, to the so-called orthodox Hindus he is not a superior being, the worst of it is that even after his death,



his dust and ashes are not allowed mingle with the dust and ashes of the others. (107) Dr B. R. Ambedkar who awakened the India's consciousness regarding religion, untouchability and socio-economic, political issues, never addressed Gandhiji as Mahatma, not even Gandhiji; he addressed Gandhiji only as Mr. Gandhi after his direct confrontation in the Round Table Conference. He was critical of Gandhiji's attitude towards the problem of Minorities and the deprived classes. Dr Ambedkar wrote in *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables*:

Those, who were friends of Mr. Gandhi, could not understand Mr. Gandhi's attitude to the demands of the Untouchables. To give recognition to the Muslims and the Sikhs and to refuse it to the Untouchables came to them as a surprise and a puzzle. Whenever they asked for an explanation, Mr. Gandhi did nothing except to get angry. Mr. Gandhi himself could not give a logical and consistent defense of his of opposition to the Untouchables.

(Ambedkar, 166)

Winston Churchill's infamous comment "seditious half naked fakir" as well as loathing criticism could not tarnish the image of Gandhiji instead it invigorated his religious conviction of truth and the commitment to the cause of freedom through his "Ahimsa" and "Satyagraha." His martyrdom would remain significant and relevant as long as the followers of Gandhian philosophy and ideology continue to embrace his ideals in true spirit to nullify Mr. M.C. Chagla's lament while highlighting the injustice done to Gandhism by his so called followers: "The most dishonest, the most disreputable and the most corrupt politicians capitalize on his name, and everyday he is being assassinated again, not in the body, but in the spirit. (*Indian Writing in English*, 293)

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