UNIT 4: GANDHI: RELIGION

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4.1: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- define what is religion for Gandhi
- explain the features of Gandhi's Concept of Religion
- explain the way of religion
- discuss Gandhi's attitude towards living religion
- discuss Gandhi's attitude towards Hinduism

4.2: INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the Gandhi's concept of Religion. After going through this unit you will be able to know how Gandhi has defined the Concept of Religion. Gandhi was born in a Vaishnavite family. So he grew up in the atmosphere of Vaishnavism and Gita and Ramayana have played very significant role in his life. But he had read some important book of other religions too. Both Quran and Bible have played important role in his life. By reading all these great books finally he has stated that Truth is God. Now let us try to explain his concept of religion in details.

4.3 WHAT IS RELIGION FOR GANDHI?

According to Gandhi there is only one reality and that is God and according to Gandhi God is nothing but the truth. When Gandhi says that truth is God, sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle. Gandhi is not against such description of religion, he only qualifies it further by saying that higher principle being truth, devotion to Truth (or God) is religion. According to Gandhi religion is nothing but the purification of soul. It is a journey to the truth.

4.4 FEATURES OF GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF RELIGION

So far as Gandhi's Philosophy of religion is concerned, it has certain special features. They are given as follows:

Firstly, religion is the expression of the permanent nature of man. The animal and the brutish aspect of man is not man's basic nature. According to Gandhi Divinity is the original aspect of man and the element of goodness is present in all man.

Secondly, religion should be like the, which has the capacity to purify and elevate one's nature. Gandhi believes that true religious spirit has the capacity of changing one's nature.

Thirdly, religion has the power of arousing in man a sense of spiritual restlessness develop a sense- a kind of a thirst- which enables the individual to cultivate and develop a sense to the right and the good, and makes him a truly moral man.

Fourthly, religious aspiration is based on a desire and a cognitive urge to know 'the beyond'. It has somehow the feeling that the ultimate religious ideal is nothing but the realisation of God.

And finally according to Gandhi, religion is something, which involves in a conscious and sincere love and striving for truth. According to Gandhi no religion is higher that Truth and Righteousness and if some

religion do not have these two characteristics, then that religion cannot be regarded to be a true religion.

4.5 THE WAY OF RELIGION

Gandhi is a pragmatic philosopher. It means that the philosophy presented to us by Gandhi is very practical in nature. According to him religion is not a theoretical concept of satisfying one's intellectual curiosity and urges. Religion according to Gandhi is the way of life and a practical necessity. A religion must have the capacity to help in solving the problem of practical affairs. That is why Gandhi says that religion should be involved in all spheres of like, including the political life. For Gandhi religion is nothing but to have faith on someone, who can be considered to be the ordered moral government of the universe. According to Gandhi there is not any difference between the religion and the metaphysics or morality. Ultimately it is the search of the reality and that reality is nothing but the Truth and the realisation of truth is equivalent to God. According to Gandhi truth is the ultimate end of human being and the non-violence is the mean to attain the end. According to Gandhi there is medium with the help of which we can surrender ourselves to God and that is Prayer.

4.5.1 Prayer

For Gandhi prayer is playing a significant role in one's life. Especial when Gandhi had to face a crisis situation, he had chosen the path of meditation and silent prayer. According to Gandhi, prayer cannot be the medium of asking, but it is a longing of the soul. Prayer is the only way by which one can bring peace, harmony and order in our life. In Young India, Gandhi mentioned that the Prayer is the very soul and essence of religion and therefore, prayer must be the core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. At this point one question may arise that is why pray at all? Does not God know what he is to be done or is he not capable of not reading the heart of the people? Or prayer

is a reminder to God. Answer to all these question is 'no'. According to Gandhi God needs no reminder as he is within everyone. Nothing can be happened without his permission. Our prayer is a heart search. It is reminder to us. It only reminds us that we are helpless without His support. Prayer is regarded by Gandhi to be a call of humanity. It is nothing but the call to self purification to inward search. Prayer is the technique by which we can gain strength and prepare our own selves to share the sufferings of others.

Religion demands the awakening of the spiritual aspects of man, for that it is essential to subdue and to put to a check on the bodily and the sensuous aspects of man, this requires a ruthless curtailing of all our selfish motives- an attempt to reduce ourselves to zero. It is considered by Gandhi to be kind of renunciation and self-sacrifice. Gandhi's meaning of renunciation is very practical. For him renunciation means renouncing of the selfish and personal for the good of others. Gandhi recommends that the religious man must practice renunciation by living in the midst of men.

Gandhi believes in Gita. Gandhi is a strong believer of Niskama Karma. Gandhi has regarded Niskama karma to his Guru and tries to follow the Karma-marga as preached in the Gita. It is believed by Gandhi that we should concentrate on our karma, which fruits of it should be left in the hands of God.

4.6 GANDHIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIVING RELIGIONS

According to Gandhi, religion is more or less a way of life and every individual has the right to his way of life or religion. But one has to also know the fact that he/she must have a tolerance and respect for the points of view that others might have chosen for themselves. That is why it is said by him that the attitude towards different religions must be one of tolerance and respect. For Gandhi, it is much more than that. He has born in an Hindu family, so definitely the atmosphere in which he has

grown and religious principles which he has seen from his childhood is based on Hinduism. He himself declares that Gita and the Ramayana have become his invariable companies.

In his lifetime Gandhi has read many of the great scriptures, including Bible and the Quran. He was also influenced form many of the religious saints teachers. By taking into consideration of all this Gandhi has finally come to the conclusion that there are different ways of finding the Truth.

According to Gandhi all the religions contains good precepts and noble teachings. But he believes that many of the commentaries and interpretations of religions has somehow degraded and distorted the basic standard of the religions. He has found that almost all the religions has given birth o fanatics and unreasonable practices. That is why he said that all religions are both good and bad. So far their ideal is concerned; they can be regarded to be good and they can be regarded to be bad because they create hatred, fanaticism and crusades among the people. That is why he said that all these historical religions actually should never cross the limit of 'sober religion'. He always says that the human beings are rational animal. So while we practice in any religion, we should think with the help of 'rationality'. If rationality will guide us to handle a religion, then it may be called 'a fellowship of all religions' or the 'kingdom of God'. It is said by Gandhi that fellowship of religions should help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Muslim to better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian. Prayer should be like that that God can give all the lights and truth to the person he need for his development.

4.7 GANDHIS ATTITUDE TOWRADS HINDUISM

When Gandhi's attitude towards institutional religions will have to be discussed, we must have to be specially focused on his attitude towards Hinduism. Gandhi himself mentioned that his feeling towards Hinduism is like his feeling towards his wife. He says that it is not the case that Hinduism does not have any fault, but inspite of this the music of Gita or the Ramayana of Tulsidasa affects him like anything.

But he in the same time he strongly opposes animal sacrifice. Gandhi also strongly criticises practice of untouchability. He says that it is something, which is totally against of principle of Truth and non-violence. Gandhi supported Varnasrama Dharma. But he is against of present cast system. According to Gandhi, present caste system has totally distorted the original Varnasrama Dharma. According to Gandhi, Varna does not admit the superiority or the insuperiority of any Varna over any other, it purely question to duty. It simply means that one has to perform the duties that his ancestors had been performing. In fact the original recommendation was based on the consideration that man is born with some specific missions, obligations and duties. Gandhi tries to incorporate Varnasrama in his socio-political scheme.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This is in brief about Gandhi's theory of religion. So from the above discussion, it becomes clear that for Gandhi God is truth and there is not any religion which is greater than truth. Gandhi believes that truth is the end and the non-violence is the means to attain this truth. This is found that so far as Gandhi's concept if non-violence is concerned, he has given equal respect to all and urges us all to respect all the religions equally and to take the good things forms all the religions. He has also said that if we will think rationally and try to find a religious harmony, then we will find a harmonious and peaceful world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which religion background Gandhi belongs to?

Q 2: According to Gandhi what is the original aspect of man?

Q 3: What is God according to Gandhi?

Q 4: Fill in the blanks:

a. According to Gandhi no religion is higher that Truth and _____.

b. Gandhi is a _____ philosopher.

c. Prayer is regarded by Gandhi to be a call of _____.

d. Religion demands the awakening of the _____.

Q 5: Who has written the book, “Young India”?

Q 6: Who is regarded by Gandhi to be his Guru?

Q 7: What is the way of life according to Gandhi?



4.9 LET US SUM UP

- According to Gandhi there is only one reality and that is God and according to him God is nothing but the truth. When Gandhi says that truth is God, sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle.
- According to Gandhi Divinity is the original aspect of man and the element of goodness is present in all man.
- Religion should be like the, which has the capacity to purify and elevate one’s nature. Gandhi believes that true religious spirit has the capacity of changing one’s nature.
- Religion has the power of arousing in man a sense of spiritual restlessness develop a sense- a kind of a thirst- which enables the individual to cultivate and develop a sense to the right and the good, and makes him a truly moral man.
- Religious aspiration is based on a desire and a cognitive urge to know ‘the beyond’.
- According to Gandhi no religion is higher that Truth and Righteousness and if some religion do not have these two characteristics, then that religion cannot be regarded to be a true religion.
- Gandhi is a pragmatic philosopher. It means that the philosophy presented to us by Gandhi is very practical in nature.
- A religion must have the capacity to help in solving the problem of practical affairs.

- For Gandhi religion is nothing but to have faith on someone, who can be considered to be the ordered moral government of the universe.
- According to Gandhi there is not any difference between the religion and the metaphysics or morality.
- According to Gandhi truth is the ultimate end of human being and the non-violence is the mean to attain the end.
- According to Gandhi there is medium with the help of which we can surrender ourselves to God and that is Prayer.
- According to Gandhi, prayer cannot be the medium of asking, but it is a longing of the soul. Prayer is the only way by which one can bring peace, harmony and order in our life.
- According to Gandhi God needs no reminder as he is within everyone. Nothing can be happened without his permission.
- It only reminds us that we are helpless without His support. Prayer is regarded by Gandhi to be a call of humanity.
- Religion demands the awakening of the spiritual aspects of man, for that it is essential to subdue and to put to a check on the bodily and the sensuous aspects of man, this requires a ruthless curtailing of all our selfish motives- an attempt to reduce ourselves to zero.
- Gandhi's meaning of renunciation is very practical. For him renunciation means renouncing of the selfish and personal for the good of others.
- Gandhi believes in Gita. Gandhi is a strong believer of Niskama Karma.
- According to Gandhi all the religions contains good precepts and noble teachings. But he believes that many of the commentaries and interpretations of religions has somehow degraded and distorted the basic standard of the religions.

- Gandhi has a great faith and attachment with Hinduism but he strictly criticizes animal sacrifice, untouchability, and the distorted from of Varnashrama Dharma, that is present caste system of the society.



4.10 FURTHER READING

Barua, M. (2002). *Religion and Gandhian Philosophy.* Akansha Publishing House.

Gupta, R. K. (2011). *A Gandhi Note book.* Apple Book.

Lal, B. K. (1973). *Contemporary Indian Philosophy.* Motilal Banarsidas Publishers.

Mishra, A. D. (2010). *Mahatma Gandhi on Ethics.* Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd.

Parel, A. J. (2006). *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Hamony.* Cambridge University Press.



4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1: Vaishnava

Ans to Q 2: Divinity

Ans to Q 3: Truth

Ans to Q 4: a. Righteousness

b. Practical

c. Humanity

d. Soul

Ans to Q 5: Gandhi

Ans to Q 6: Gita

Ans to Q 7: Religion



4.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

1. What are two Hindu religious book, which influenced Gandhi?
2. How Gandhi has defined religion?
3. Who is the author of the book entitled, 'Young India'?
4. For Gandhi is religion important for political life?
5. During crisis situation, what path he uses to choose?
6. What is the 'fellowship of all religions' or the 'kingdom of God'?

B. Short Questions: (Write in about 100-150 words)

1. Write a short note on the Gandhi's concept of religion?
2. Briefly explain Gandhi's concept of prayer.
3. What is Gandhi's attitude towards living religion?

C. Long Questions: (Write in about 300-500 words)

1. What is Gandhi's concept of religion? Discuss.
2. What are the main features of Gandhi's concept of religion?
3. What is the way of life according to Gandhi? Explain.
4. Discuss Gandhi's view regarding living religions?

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