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THE GREAT INDIAN LEGEND GANDHI - AN EXPLORATION OF TRUTH, RELIGION AND GOD

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ABSTRACT

Mohandas K. Gandhi was a constant explorer of truth. As a man who also explored God, religion, status of women, environment, education, politics and the human mind, Gandhi became the sole representative of the downtrodden and the exploited. But Truth in Gandhi's philosophy is God. He was a firm believer of what he said "God is Truth" and later he himself rephrased it as "Truth is God". It was his simplicity combined with his commitment to Truth that resulted in the transformation of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi into Mahatma Gandhi.

Born in Porbandar, in the present day state of Gujarat, India on October 2, 1869, this selfless man through his adherence to truth had constantly endeavoured to direct millions of Indians through their poverty, slavery, false religion, conflicts, superstitions, ignorance and the colonization by the British and ultimately to their freedom from every one of these evils. In order to achieve this Herculean task, Gandhi used Truth as an effective instrument of mass construction. Among Gandhi's disciples was Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Steve Biko people of different nationalities and ethnic cultures.

This article tries to demonstrate and disseminate Gandhi's exploration for Truth, religion and God based on Gandhi's doctrine on the "Law of Suffering", a doctrine that states that "the endurance of suffering is a means to an end". The purpose of this paper is to serve as an introduction and inducement to Gandhi's belief that truth being the only moral force on Earth, acts for the moral upliftment of mankind. This paper also proposes to present a broad outline to the great Indian Legend Mahatma Gandhi, and his exploration as well as his adherence to Truth.

A man who utilizes one's experiences, expectations, yearnings and dreams, doubts and dilemmas to look at the world in a different light with the intention of creating a better, more prosperous and more peaceful world stands a better chance of being accepted and acknowledged. Such a man not only draws the attention of the people but it attains their approval and appreciations too. The great legends irrespective of the country to which they belong stand testimony to this by their deep concern for mankind and its betterment of the human race. In other words great souls all over the world are concerned with and build upon the strong feelings and passions of men and women all over the world in spite of their differences in nationality, race, religion, colour or government.

Mohandas K. Gandhi was one such man. Born in Porbandar, in the present day state of Gujarat, India on October 2, 1869, this selfless man through his adherence to truth, religion and God, had constantly endeavoured to direct millions of Indians through their poverty, slavery, false religion, conflicts, superstitions, ignorance and the colonization by the British and ultimately to their freedom from every one of these evils. In order to achieve this Herculean task, Gandhi used Truth as an effective instrument of mass construction. Gandhi had great influence not only among the Hindu and Muslim communities of India but on people of all ethics and background. Among Gandhi's disciples were Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Steve Biko people of different nationalities and ethnic cultures.

Gandhi was a constant explorer of truth, religion and God. As a man who also explored the status of women, environment, education, politics and the human mind, Gandhi became the sole representative of the downtrodden and the exploited. But Gandhi held the view that truth is synonym with religion and God. Truth in Gandhi's philosophy is God. He was a firm believer of what he said "God is Truth" and later he himself rephrased it as "Truth is God". It was his simplicity combined with his commitment to Truth that resulted in the transformation of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi into Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi became the symbol of Truth. Gandhi dedicated his life to the wider purpose of discovering truth. To Gandhi, truth was the eternal principle of life, the regulating force in the universe. In the Gandhian context, truth is synonymous to God and amounts to sincerity of heart and inner force of soul that implies the discovery of one's own self. This belief in the ethical

virtues of human beings grants a practical appeal to Gandhian vision capable of fulfilling the human needs. Gandhi balanced his social, political and spiritual life on the foundation of truth. In his autobiography, he writes:

The truth is not truthfulness in world, truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is, God.... But I worship God as Truth only.

(Gandhi M. K., An Autobiography p. XI).

Mohandas Gandhi was a great man and his ethics is correlated to religion. He gave the greatest priority to religion. Gandhi's interest in religious matters was due to the background of India, which was saturated with religious ideas and spirituality. Religion, to Gandhi, was not a matter of individual experience. The meaning of the word 'Dharma' is 'religion' in India. At the same time it should be understood that, Gandhian religion has no geographical or national limits, and is not bound by the constraints of colour or caste. Gandhian religion is not a prison house but has room for the entire humanity. It is not a formal or customary religion, but a religion which brings us face to face with the Absolute Truth. This belief in the ethical virtues of human beings grants a practical appeal to Gandhian religion capable of fulfilling the human needs. Gandhi experimented with what he preached synthesizing religion and ethics. He defines religion in the following manner: "I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound by God, that is to say, God rules your every breath."(Gandhi M. K., Harijan, 02/03/1934, p. 23).

Gandhi regarded Hinduism as a universal religion which incorporates the best of Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. The Vedas for Gandhi are unwritten, divine in nature and they promoted the "purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave."(Gandhi M. K., Young India, 19/01/1921, p.22) Regarding this universal religion, he remarks:

The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all life not only human beings, but all sentient beings is one i.e. all life coming from the one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parmeshwara.

(Gandhi M. K., Harijan, 26/12/1936, p. 365)

Gandhi's religion is deeply rooted in the traditional set up, scriptures and old values of India. Gandhi preached the old Indian values of non-violence, truth, non-appropriation, patience, celibacy, control of senses, forgiveness etc. To Gandhi, Hindu religion was the most appealing and relevant religion. He writes in Young India, "I hold my religion dearer than my country and therefore, I am a Hindu first and a nationalist later." (Gandhi M. K., Young India, 20/02/1922, p. 123). The influence of the Bhagwad Gita and Ramayana on Gandhi is a well-known fact. Apart from these Hindu scriptures, Gandhi firmly believed in the Bible, the Quran and the Zend Avesta. This universal grasping of all religions sublimated Gandhi to a cosmopolitan who could apprehend and empathize with the humanity at large.

Gandhi found God within creation. He believed God is one and he variously equated Him to love and truth. However, for him leading a godly life was more important than debating about the true nature of God. The poor and the downtrodden were for Gandhi the living representatives of God on earth, and even a little work for the amelioration of their troubles was a more pious act than performing a thousand rituals by spending millions. The influence of a number of religions can be seen in Gandhi's understanding of God. He thought that no religion could grasp God in its entirety. They were all equal in their imperfection, which is why Gandhi never foresaw a future where there will be a single religion preaching a single God. He knew that geographic, climatic and demographic conditions influenced the way the inhabitants of a region envision God, and there can never be a single way in which God will be understood, because these conditions will never be the same across the world. Gandhi believed that all that is needed is a single-minded devotion to God and a similar respect to His creatures. Gandhi avers:

I believe it to be possible for every human being to attain to that blessed and indescribable, sinless state in which he feels within himself the presence of God to the exclusion of everything else (Gandhi M. K., Young India, 17/11/1921, p. 368).

Despite his belief in one God; Gandhi never entertained any hope of a single world religion, as that would be a fantasy. Gandhi believed this fantasy to be not only simplistic, but potentially dangerous as well, as it could lead to various coercive measures to succumb people

to it. Gandhi asserted that ...

It is unnecessary to believe in an extra mundane Power called God in order to sustain our faith in ahimsa. But God is not a Power residing in the clouds. God is an unseen Power residing within us and nearer to us than finger-nails to the flesh. There are many powers lying hidden within us and we find this Supreme Power if we make diligent search with the fixed determination to find Him. It is so very necessary because God is in every one of us and, therefore, we have to identify ourselves with every human being without exception. This is called cohesion or attraction in scientific language. In the popular language it is called love. In the popular language it is called love. It binds us to one another and to God. Ahimsa and love are one and the same thing. I hope this is all clear to you. (From a private letter, dated Sevagram, I-6-42).

Gandhi is greatly respected for his simple living, high thinking, and fearless attitude. Gandhi concentrated his attention on the betterment of the downtrodden people. Equal opportunities and equal status was what he aspired. He was a real Mahatma, 'meaning the great soul', who had dedicated his entire life to the service of humanity, and had taught the importance of truth, brotherhood, peace, non-violence, equality and simplicity. People around the world have viewed the importance of this man as a universal figure of peace, equality and the most respected and inspiring political leader of India. Gandhi not only ruled the heart of millions but also transformed it by regarding truth, religion and God as a treasure beyond any price and he expected it to be so to every one of us. Dr. John Hayness Holmes remarks about this trait of Gandhi:

Gandhi, in other words has laid hold upon the divine truth that religion is one and universal – and uses, with equal ease and satisfaction, the holy writ of Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. The Bhagwad Gita, the Sermon on the Mounts the great *Suras* of the Kuran – they are all the same in their deliverance from superstition, and their disclosure of what is fundamental to the soul and its destiny upon earth. So Gandhi has found peace, since he has attained – and like Buddha is the Path and like Jesus is the Way.”(The Enduring Greatness of Gandhi, p.215)

Gandhi believed that devotion to truth, religion and God are the sole justification for human existence. He also believed that these three are interwoven with each other without an identity and thus cannot be separated. The faith, experience and dedication of Gandhi are forged in the heart and soul of Indians. And when we find that our faith in these three is failing and that we are sinking, he comes to our assistance and proves to us that we must not lose our faith in Man. This is because even though man will ever remain imperfect, it will always be his part to try to be perfect. Gandhi's life of service was one of humility and he could sacrifice his life for others without any reservations for caste, creed or race. This is the goal which we too have to set before ourselves and while we are pursuing this, if we have truth in us we shall reach it someday.

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