



GANDHI AND DHARMA

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Derived from it's Vedic Sanskrit root 'Dhri', Dharma means 'to adopt' the values, morals, ethics and at last the divinity. The present paper aims to explore the dimensions of the doctrine of Dharma in the context of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts and practices. We have adopted Dharma in a very narrow-minded sense & connected it with particular castes & sections of society. But Gandhi believed in a broader scenario with regards to Dharma. For him Dharma was not a religious tool, rather it was a way to do human welfare & attain solution.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was 'Modh Baniya' (Hindu), but Mahatma Gandhi was a Human & Humanitarian by religion. He proclaimed himself to be a world citizen & was an exponent of international peace.

He was not bound to a particular religion, but believed in the spirituality of all the religions & that is what the doctrine of Dharma is all about.

This paper purposes to highlight the significant differences between the orthodox religion & Gandhian Dharma, which in turn is the true essence & soul of all the philosophies & religions of the world.

The art of leading the life with astute sanctity and fulfilling one's own ethical duties is Dharma. According to Bharata Ratna MahaMahopadhyaya Pandurang Vaman Kane “Dharma has been derived from Sanskrit root ‘Dhri’ which means to adopt, to maintain or to follow”¹. Faith in truth and appropriate conduct(Sadaachar) is the essence of Dharma. Dharma is a partisan of peace. According to Manusmriti there are 10 principles of Dharma²:-

- 1.) Calmness, 2.) Forgiveness, 3.) Mercy, 4.) Asteya, 5.) Cleanliness(Shauch),
- 6.) Indriyanigraha, 7.) Buddhi, 8.) Education, 9.) Truth, 10.) Control on Anger.

According to Saint Tiruvalluvar Dharma is “Ignoring the 4 evils-: Jealousy, Greediness, Anger and Draconion words.”³

So Dharma has different meanings in different times, literatures, faiths and societies, for example in Buddhism- Dharma is described as the sign of all the teachings of Buddha. But at last Dharma is described uniformly as the charter of ethical duties and the sign of moral bondages and varnashram⁴.

Mahatma Gandhi and his Dharma-:

Bapu was a staunch follower of Dharma. For him Dharma was not bound to a particular sect or religion, but all the highest ethical values of all the religions which are based on human welfare was his Dharma. In his own words-:

“ By religion, I do not mean formal religion or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker.”⁵

“ As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religionoverriding morality. Man, for instance can’t be untruthful, cruel, and incontinent and claim to have God on his side.” -: Young India, 7-5-1925, p.385.⁶

“ Every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath.” -: Harijan, 2-3-1934, p.23⁷

Unlike others he was not an atheist and materialistic, but he was such a sort of person who accepted the role of Dharma in every sphere of life. He designed his whole life on the *upanishadik* principle of “*Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya*”

Gandhi was an exponent of universality of Dharma, which he said ‘Vishwa-Dharma’. Once during a prayer he said-:

“ I am a Hindu, a true Sanatani Hindu, that’s why I am a Musalman , a Sikh, a Parsi, a Christian as well as a Jew. I consider all the religions as the branches of single tree. To which I should consider or to which I should leave? All the religions are one. If everyone believes like me than there will be complete peace in Hindustan.”⁸

All the above discussion results in only one conclusion that Mahatma Gandhi was a true humanist and really secular and always reflected that there is no secularism without spiritualism (Dharma). Because secularism can only be practised by following Dharma. The Pseudo- Secularism prevalent today in the wake of segregating Dharma from politics and misinterpretation of Dharma on communal basis have no place in the Gandhian ideology and interpretation of Dharma. This misinterpretation is the root cause of all the communal tensions

of the country which can be solved only and only by the Gandhian way of following ones own Dharma.

Gandhi's Ram-:

The description of Gandhian Dharma will be incomplete without Gandhi's Ram. He was a great follower of Ram. To whom he considered as 'Maryada Purushottam'. But his Ram was not the Ram of Ramcharita Manas, Son of Raja Dashrath, the historic Lord, his ram was Brahma who is undescribed, shashwat and advitiya. He himself once said-:

“ My Ram is not the one we describes in our prayers- the son of Raja Dashrath of Ayodhya. But he is Shashwat, Ajanma, Advitiya. To only whom I prays”⁹

The Ram of Gandhiji can be described appropriately by on chopai of Ramcharita Manas-:

*“ Ram brahma parmaratha rupa,
Abigat, alakh, anadi, anupa.”¹⁰*

Gandhi's Hindutva¹¹ -:

Gandhi's Hindutva is effectively reflected by his answers to the two questions of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan¹²:-

Q.1. What is your religion?

Ans. Gandhi-“ My religion is Hindutva, but for me Hindutva is the religion of humanity. All the benign principles of the entire religions are included in its perimeter.”

Q.2. How you attracted towards it?

Ans. Gandhi-“I attracted towards it just because of the principles of Satya and Ahimsa, which reflects love in their broadest sense.”

For Gandhi the eternal quest for truth is the gist Hinduism.

Objectives of the Paper-:

- To present a real picture of Gandhian Dharma.
- To differentiate between what Gandhi practised as Dharma and what is imposed by us on him.
- To reflect the problems occurring in country by the misinterpretation of Dharma.

Methodology-:

The methodology used in this paper is the analysis of the secondary data.

Discussion-:

India is a secular state, which do not constitutionally patronises any particular religion, community or sect. The Preamble of Indian Constitution clearly states that-:

“ We, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all it's citizen:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity

and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT, AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.”¹³

It is the technical and ideal situation and was adopted to minimize or even finish the tensions among the communities in a diverse country like India. But we Indians wrongly interpreted Dharma and spiritualism against Secularism, in spite of sectarianism, which was not the motive of The Secular Indian state as well as the Gandhian philosophy. We inexorably parted our ways from the spiritual ethos which Bapu used to teach us. This misinterpretation of the Gandhi and his spiritualism sowed a seed of distrust among the masses in the name of secularism, leading to a number of problems which are discussed below:-

1. Vote politics:-

The politics to get vote and appeasement of a particular section of society in the name of Gandhi has taken such an ugly face that we do not hesitate to get massacred the innocents to get the votes of the particular section.

For example:- Communal riots like that of Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh in 2013.

2. Minority Appeasement:-

Mahatma equally loved both Hindus and Muslims and considered them as brothers. He was also equally harsh if any of them has done any mistake. But we had gravely misunderstood his affection towards Muslims and converted it into a policy of minority appeasement, which was confirmed by the then government in the case of Shah Bano in 1985.¹⁴ This is the result of the misinterpretation of the Gandhi.

3. Political Intolerance:-

In the support of this Pseudo- Secularism, Political parties started patronising different communities by framing their policies in their favour. For example :-

Bahujan Samaj Party, Smajwadi Party, All India Muslim League, National Conference, Shiva Sena, MNS, Akali Dal.

Still it was bearable , but it took a turn of vicious rivalry among parties. The parties favouring one community became hostile to the other communities particularly towards those favoured by the rival party.

There are numerous examples from the Anti- Sikh riots of 1984 to recent murder of a RSS worker in Kerala, The Godhra Train incident and afterwards the massive rioting in Gujarat, The Assam riots of Kokrajhar in 2013 etc.

Another shameful and intolerant example is that our mindset has become so much communal that if someone says “Jai Shri Ram” than he is Facist and if someone says “Allah hoo Akbar” than he is a Turk invader. This kind of unbearable intolerance in the name of religion has no place in the country and thought of Gandhi.

4. Social Intolerance:-

We are the citizens of India and had to follow the Constitution of India, which clearly provides the social equality to it’s citizen indiscriminate of it’ gender. But still some sections are in the opposition of Uniform Civil Code which is a clear cut defamation of Mahatma’s thought of Gender equality and dignity of women.

Further Mahatma was in the favour of Ban on cow slaughter, but still we had paid no heed to his wish after 67 years of Constitutionalising ourselves and after 100 constitutional amendments.

❖ Suggetions:-

- Uniform Civil Code must be implemented as soon as possible.
- Ban on all kind of communal political parties and a strict watch on the propagandas of so called secular parties .
- Election commission must resist the formation of different cells like the Minority cell, SC- ST cell in the political parties.
- Media should also behave in mature way. It must be inclined towards communicating the views, not in forming the fallacious views.
- Although we have Right to Express ourselves but still to protect the secular nature of our country social media must be watched and checked regularly so as to resist the rumours.

Conclusion-:

In this way it is clear that today what we understand about Dharma is totally different from what Mahatma taught us. Today Dharma has become the synonym of communalism but for Gandhi it was a tool of completing the Moral goals. Today politics is using Dharma in a collective way as a communal tool in the name of Gandhi, but for him politics was branch of Dharma and Morality as a medium to serve the society. It was not a tool to get power and wealth. He was an illustrious supporter of the spiritualisation of politics, not to give it a communal face, but to awake the morality of the politicians.

Because where there is morality, there is humanism,
Where there is humanism, there is brotherhood,
Where there is brotherhood, there is harmony,
And where there is harmony, there is peace.

P.V. Kane, Dharma Shastra ka Itihas, U.P. Hindi Sansthan, 1963, Part-I, Ch.-1, pg.-no.3
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