



RELEVANCE OF GANDHI
IN INTER - RELIGIOUS
CONCOED

G. RAMACHANDRAN M.P.

mind of the people. Hinduism operates strongly in the politics of India through the Jana Sangh, one of India's major political parties. Let us therefore be clear in our minds that in any programme of establishing world peace and concord between nations we must face the problem of religious conflict squarely.

One of Gandhi's vital contributions was in the direction of forging harmony and goodwill among the great religious systems of the world. It is worthwhile recalling at this point what the great scholar President of India, the late Dr. Zakir Hussain of revered memory, said in this connection in his address to a World Conference of Religions sometime before he passed away, "Let us be clear in our minds that in spite of all advances in Science and Technology, Religions still exercise a powerful influence on the mind of millions of human beings. The majority of the people of the world belong to one religion or another. Great issues continue to be settled, consciously or unconsciously, against the background of religious convictions. It will be unwise for anybody to ignore religious influences in finding solutions for world problems, big or small. Mahatma Gandhi was wise enough not only to recognise this but to link his great non-violent movements of liberation to the basic values common to the world religions.

In order to understand Gandhi's contributions to

concord and co-operation among the great religious systems for the reconstruction of society, we must look at Gandhi's concept of religion. This was a revolutionary concept as will be clear from a few relevant quotations from Gandhi:-

1. " Not a dead leaf is lifted by the wind from where it lies and dropped elsewhere except at the will of God." Gandhi's God was thus immanent and vibrant in every atom and not living high up in the Heavens and taking care of the world from above. Gandhi's God was not a personal God though he accepted the validity of a personal God for those who needed it and believed in it. Gandhi's God was Truth and Love acting everywhere through everything and all the time.
2. " God dare not appear before the hungry and starving millions except in the form of food". Why and how did Gandhi say this? He was not asking for 'manna' from heaven as happened in the time of Moses. He was simply asserting that the challenge of truth and love in an area of famine was that these should operate actively in the production of more food for everybody. This would be religion for Gandhi in this context.

3. " I have long said God is Truth but I have now reversed the order and say Truth is God." This was not a reversal of words. It was the reversal of one concept for a profounder and more universal concept. Gandhi firmly held that Truth always becomes love and operates through non-violence. This was the simple metaphysics of Gandhi's philosophy and religion. He took care to repeat that the name of Rama for God which he took was not the name of the historical Rama of the Ramayana but his favourite appellation for God and as such it was a supreme abstraction rather than a personification.
4. " My message is my life". Gandhi said this many times. More than his words and more than his writings his message to us was his life. It is upon this basic concept that he developed his theory that religion must be lived and not preached by the missionaries of all religions. Life was the test of the truth for all the spoken and written words on religion. When you live the truth anger and hate in spoken and written words will vanish like the mist before the rising sun. It is against the background of these basic concepts

of Gandhi that we have to study his contribution and therefore his relevance in regard to the problem of religious conflict. Gandhi could and did understand conflict in politics, economics and even in social relationship. He found it terribly difficult to accept any need of hate and violence among religions because what every religion stressed beyond any doubt was truth and love. God revealed Himself only in terms of love and love acted inevitably in terms of non-violence. He challenged every religion to prove anything to the contrary in it. And so, hate and violence among religions became for him the betrayal of God and equally the betrayal of reason. For Gandhi, reason and religion were not contradictory. Every religion accented the validity of reason and the need to walk with reason all the way and then only take up the staff of faith. Faith must come as the crown of reason and not to defeat it. Gandhi's call therefore to every religion and its votaries was to rediscover the truth and the love embedded in its own tradition and remain faithful to them. This rediscovery and this reaffirmation of allegiance Gandhi called self-purification from within every religion. It was in vain for any religion to attack another without its own votaries remaining faithful to the highest value within it. If Hindus strayed away from the teachings of the Upanishads and the Gita they have no moral right to throw stones at Buddhists, Christians, or Muslims for not living to the best in their own religions. It was Gandhi's unalterable

conviction that the day every religion purified itself from within and its votaries lived up to the best in it, then we shall find like a miracle that there could be no hate or quarrel among the religions of the world. Gandhi therefore dedicated himself to inspire self purification within Hinduism. He called upon the Hindus to give superstitions, complex rituals, caste and untouchability and to worship God in truth and in spirit and in every word and deed. The Hinduism after Gandhi is not the Hinduism before Gandhi. That Hinduism was not completely purged was no fault of Gandhi. It will remain to its eternal credit that he struggled with all his strength to enable this process of self purification to go forward till the last day of his life. Every word he uttered in his post-prayer speeches before he was assassinated will bear testimony to this fact. In this regard, Gandhi was in line with Ashoka, the Great Buddhist Emperor, who inscribed on rock his edict that any Buddhist monk who spoke ill of any other religion did more harm to Buddhism than to the religion he reviled. In this, as in other basic matters, Gandhi came not to destroy but to fulfil the essential values embedded in Hinduism and Buddhism.

The sanguine conflicts between religious systems throughout history were often those in which the votaries betrayed the teachings of their own Masters in order to increase material and political power. According to Gandhi no one has