

Religious thoughts of Gandhi and R.K.Narayan

Author Name : Hariprasad N. Kamol

(Assistant professor of English), (Research Scholar)

Dr. Pavankumar J. Dwivedi.

(Research Guide), (Professor of English)

Institute Name : Parul University,

(Department of English), At : Po : Limada, Vadodara, Gujarat.

Abstract:

Mahatma Gandhi's religious thoughts were rooted in Hinduism, focusing on truth, non-violence, and a belief in the soul's power over physical force. R.K. Narayan, while less overtly religious than Gandhi, often wove subtle moral and ethical themes influenced by Indian spirituality into his literature. Both figures emphasized personal ethics and societal betterment.

Keywords: Hinduism, Non-violence, Truth, Ethical Themes, Spirituality.

I. Introduction

In exploring the religious thoughts of Gandhi and R.K. Narayan, it is essential to understand the profound impact their beliefs had on their personal lives and literary works. Gandhi, known for his principles of nonviolence and civil disobedience, was deeply influenced by Hinduism and Jainism, seeking spiritual guidance in the pursuit of social justice and equality. Similarly, R.K. Narayan, a devout Hindu, infused his novels and short stories with themes of moral integrity, the significance of tradition, and the search for spiritual enlightenment. Both men's religious perspectives played a pivotal role in shaping their views on society, politics, and the human condition. By delving into the religious ideologies of these two influential figures, this study aims to provide insight into the ways in which faith and philosophy intersect in their narratives and ideologies, shedding light on the complexities of belief and spirituality in their works.

Gandhi's religious thoughts were deeply rooted in the principle of nonviolence and truth, which he referred to as 'Satyagraha'. He was influenced by Hinduism, Jainism, and various other religious philosophies but did not confine himself to any orthodox religious practices. Gandhi believed in the unity of all humans and respected all religions. He saw himself as a seeker of truth, which for him had many names, but ultimately led to God. He believed in the moral responsibility of individuals and that true religion involved experiencing the divine within oneself through service to humanity.

R.K. Narayan was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. Narayan's narratives highlighted common human traits and subtly wove the intricacies of Indian daily life with its traditions and customs. While his works don't directly delve into deep religious discourses, they often reflect Hindu philosophy's influence and its integration into everyday life. Narayan was appreciated for his storytelling that captured the essence of India, its people, struggles, and simple joys, without becoming a preacher or overtly religious instructor.

II. Background of Gandhi's Religious Thoughts

Gandhi's religious thoughts were deeply rooted in Hindu beliefs but also incorporated elements from other religions, especially Christianity and Islam. His philosophy emphasized the significance of truth, nonviolence, and selflessness as fundamental principles in the pursuit of social justice and equality. Gandhi's concept of 'sarvodaya' (welfare of all) reflected his vision of a harmonious society based on the principles of non-discrimination and compassion. His emphasis on self-restraint, simplicity, and living in harmony with nature resonated with traditional Indian spiritual teachings. Gandhi's religious views influenced his approach to political activism and resistance against colonial oppression, shaping his belief in the power of moral force over brute force. Through his writings and speeches, Gandhi sought to inspire individuals to transform society through inner spiritual awakening and active nonviolent resistance (Anand Sreekumar, p. 431-449).

Gandhi's study of different religious texts like the Bhagavad Gita, the Quran, and the Bible during his time in London and South Africa shaped his inclusive approach to religion. He sought to find a common truth in all religions and emphasized the importance of personal morals over ritualistic practices. However, the Bhagavad Gita emerged as his spiritual dictionary and greatly impacted his ideology. Gandhi also drew inspiration from Christianity as he admired Jesus's teachings on love and non-retaliation.

Throughout his life, Gandhi continued to evolve spiritually and developed a religious outlook that embraced humanitarian ideals and espoused a life of simplicity, self-discipline, and community service. His interpretation of Hinduism was broad and progressive involving elements of tolerance, dialogue, and see-the-best-in-others virtues that were tools for social reform. It's this comprehensive understanding of religion that laid the philosophical foundation for his nonviolent activism in both South Africa and India's independence movements.

III. Key Concepts in Gandhi's Religious Philosophy

Key concepts in Gandhi's religious philosophy encompass notions of truth, non-violence, and self-discipline, all rooted in his profound belief in the interconnection between the individual self and the universal spiritual reality. Gandhi's emphasis on satyagraha, the pursuit of truth through nonviolent resistance, reflects his conviction that ultimate reality is characterized by love and compassion (A. Khasuev et al.). His religious philosophy also underscores the importance of ahimsa, or non-violence, as a fundamental tenet guiding both personal and political actions. Additionally, Gandhi's commitment to self-discipline and renunciation of material desires are central to his beliefs in the pursuit of spiritual growth. Through these key concepts, Gandhi sought to inspire individuals to embody the virtues of truth, non-violence, and selflessness in their daily lives, fostering harmony and unity within society.

Key concepts in Gandhi's religious philosophy include Satyagraha (insistence on truth), Ahimsa (non-violence), Swaraj (self-rule), and Sarvodaya (welfare of all). Satyagraha was a method of non-violent resistance or civil disobedience that Gandhi employed to challenge unjust laws and practices. Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the principle of not harming living beings, which was central to Gandhi's ethical and political philosophy. Swaraj, or self-rule, emphasizes self-governance and political independence but also personal self-control and self-development.

Finally, Sarvodaya encapsulates the idea that the good of the individual is tied to the good of all, leading to an equitable and moral society.

IV. Influence of Gandhi's Religious Thoughts on Society

Gandhi's religious thoughts significantly influenced society by emphasizing non-violence, truth, and compassion. His concept of "ahimsa" (non-violence) served as a guiding principle for many social movements, including the Indian independence struggle. Through his religious beliefs, Gandhi inspired individuals to resist oppression through non-violent means, fostering a sense of unity and collective action in the face of injustice. Additionally, Gandhi's teachings on truth and compassion promoted empathy and understanding among diverse communities, leading to greater social cohesion and harmony. His religious philosophy not only shaped political movements but also had a profound impact on societal norms and values. By advocating for spiritual principles in the public sphere, Gandhi challenged prevailing norms and encouraged a more ethical and compassionate society. Overall, Gandhi's religious thoughts continue to inspire social change and promote peace (A. Vijayan).

Mahatma Gandhi's religious thoughts profoundly influenced society, both during his lifetime and beyond. His commitment to truth, non-violence, and satyagraha was rooted in his deep religious convictions, drawing from Hinduism, as well as elements from Jainism, Christianity, and other faiths. Gandhi's interpretation of religion was not about ritualistic practices but rather focused on the ethical and moral aspects of daily life.

He advocated for compassion, tolerance, and the idea of interconnectedness of all living beings. His championing of these values inspired civil rights movements around the world. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela were influenced by Gandhi's methods to mobilize masses in a non-violent way to achieve social and political change. Gandhi's emphasis on social justice, equality, and community service also encouraged numerous initiatives and organizations to work towards the upliftment of the underprivileged and to challenge social evils.

In India, Gandhi's ideals contributed significantly to the development of a modern secular ethos while simultaneously promoting a sense of unity among various religious communities. His insistence on religious harmony has been woven into India's societal fabric and continues to be invoked in times of communal unrest.

Gandhi's religious thoughts fostered a societal outlook that prized peace over conflict, dignity over oppression, and solidarity over division. These values have had a lasting impact on global societies as guiding principles for peaceful coexistence and human rights.

V. R.K. Narayan's Interpretation of Religion in Literature

R.K. Narayan, a prominent Indian author, provides a unique interpretation of religion in literature through his works. Narayan's writings often intertwine themes of spirituality, morality, and the human experience, offering readers a nuanced perspective on the role of religion in society. In his novels, such as "The Guide" and "Malgudi Days," Narayan delicately explores the complexities of faith and tradition, questioning their impact on individuals and communities alike. By incorporating religious motifs and characters into his narratives, Narayan highlights the profound influence of religion on human behavior and relationships. His approach to portraying religious themes reflects a deep understanding of Indian spirituality and

cultural heritage, making his works a valuable contribution to the exploration of religion in literature. Through his storytelling, Narayan encourages readers to contemplate the significance of faith in shaping human identity and society, prompting a deeper reflection on the intertwining of religious beliefs and personal values (John Nicol Farquhar).

In novels like "The Guide," Narayan explores themes of duty, redemption, and spiritual transformation. The protagonist, Raju, starts off as a corrupt tour guide who eventually becomes a spiritual guide, illustrating the complex layers of personal faith and the quest for meaning beyond material existence.

Narayan's portrayal of religion exhibits how it intersects with everyday life—a common feature in his fictional town of Malgudi. For him, religion is not disconnected from the daily routines; it is deeply interwoven with the characters' lives, influencing their decisions and providing a moral framework within which they operate.

His interpretation also highlights the diversity and plurality of Indian religious life. In stories like "The Vendor of Sweets," Narayan does not limit himself to just Hindu philosophy but also subtly includes references to other religions, thereby showing a holistic picture of religion's pervasive presence in India.

Narayan's literature suggests that the essence of religion lies in its ability to guide individuals towards self-realization and understanding their role in the larger tapestry of life. Through his storytelling, he encourages readers to look beyond dogma and ritualistic practices to embrace the core philosophies that unite humanity.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the religious thoughts of Gandhi and R.K. Narayan offer unique perspectives on spirituality and ethics. Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence, truthfulness, and selflessness reflects his deep connection to Hindu philosophy and his belief in the inherent goodness of humanity. His concept of 'satyagraha' as a form of resistance through soul force has inspired social movements around the world. On the other hand, R.K. Narayan's portrayal of religious characters in his novels provides a nuanced understanding of devotion, tradition, and superstition in everyday life. Through his narratives, Narayan explores the complexities of faith and the impact of personal beliefs on individuals and society. Together, the religious ideologies of Gandhi and R.K. Narayan shed light on the diverse ways in which spirituality shapes human behavior and values, offering valuable insights for contemporary discourse on religion and ethics.

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