

## Celebration of Oneness: A Study of Gandhian Humanism and Sufi Philosophy

**Ms. Avnoor Makhu**

Assistant Professor\*

*Post Graduate Department of English & Research Centre  
Mehr Chand Mahajan DAV College for Women, Sector 36A,  
Chandigarh, INDIA\**

---

### Abstract

The honorific figure Mahatma Gandhi had truly shaken the world with his revolutionary ideas at the time of India's freedom struggle. He stands among the colossal figures who did commendably well not only to promote Self-rule and implement policies like Truth and Non violence, but also to build ethnic and religious amity; eliminate poverty and untouchability; and to enlarge the scope of women rights etc. Focusing on Gandhi's principal of amity and universalism that resonates in the notion of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam': the world is one family (a phrase found in the Hindu text *Maha Upanishad*), highlights his vision towards welfare world that promotes coexistence and oneness. The interconnectedness of people that eventually leads to attainment of oneness and devotion is idiosyncratic to Sufi philosophy. Of variegated faiths and religions, Gandhi promoted Truth as the core of the highest social welfare that articulates communal harmony. In the same manner, Sufi mystics embrace Truth as the highest devotion towards God and treat all beings as one community selflessly devoted to one God. Therefore, the research paper will deal with the comparative study of Sufi philosophy and Gandhian Humanism.

**Keywords:** Brotherhood, Communal Harmony, Gandhian Humanism, Oneness, Sufism, Truth, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

Mahatma Gandhi, the man behind gigantic reforms and spiritual regeneration of India was glorified not only in our country but throughout the world. He was the guiding light for India during British suppression. He was a victorious man with a deep sense of wisdom and humility. He was a personality who had vehement opposition against the ills of the society and also possessed the right fervor for its upliftment. He gave firm direction to implement policies on Non-violence, Satyagraha, Truth and Swadeshi; and also promoted Self-rule. Along with being a reformer he was also a political and religious thinker.

Gandhi's idea of universal love and peace was reiterative of the idea stated in the ancient Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* that all beings are children of the same God having the same soul. Gandhi advocated communal harmony, brotherhood and affection towards all religions and communities of the world. He always promoted the holistic style of living where he encouraged unity in diversity, thus emphasizing on the Vedic concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means 'the whole world is one family'. This phrase evokes a keen sense of commitment to all humanity and to think of themselves as a part of the global family. The impression of demarcating oneself from the rest of the world is what hampers humankind's progression to undergo a collective experience of the world as one global family.

Furthermore, Gandhian Humanism points out that "to do good to humanity is the greatest form of the worship of the Almighty. It is to evaluate the worth of oneself as a servant of the All Beautiful" (Chakrabarti 80). In the same way, the path of Sufism leads man to seek the truth of divine love for his beloved (or Allah). Truth about love therefore constitutes as the core of Sufi philosophy. It professes to give and to receive love from others if one wants love from the Almighty. By practising this, we see different faces of the Divine in others but eventually we don't see 'Many', we see the 'One' in 'Many'. On the other hand, the philosophy of Gandhi advocates the essence that nothing exists in reality except Truth and perhaps, Truth (Satya) is the most important name of God. Hence, 'Truth is God'. This rightly justifies that, to reach God comprises the ultimate reality. Basically, his concept of Truth signifies the religious belief that there is, but one God behind everything and connotes that the same God resides in us all. Along these lines, it is just to say that the two philosophies, i.e. Gandhi's Humanism and the philosophy of Sufism, are interconnected and relatable to each other.

Gandhi asserts that "there can be no room for untruth in my writings, because it is my unshakeable belief that there is no religion other than truth... My writings cannot but be free from hatred towards any individual because it is my firm belief that it is love that sustains the earth... It is my firm faith... that we can conquer the whole world by truth and love" (Chakrabarti 30). The notion of truth, love, brotherhood, friendliness and kinship is reverberated in the hadiths (sayings of the prophet Muhammad) of the Quran: God the All-Mighty says, "O man! I was ill, but you didn't visit me." Man says, "My Lord! You are the lord of all the realms, how can I visit you?" God says, "Do you know that so-and-so of my servants got ill, but you did not visit him. If you had visited him, you would have found me with him" (Gülen 24). This Qur'anic quotation clearly spurs the idea of cultivation of brotherhood feeling and oneness among people irrespective of which community, religion or region one belongs to.

According to Fethullah Gülen, Sufi philosophers and mystics uphold the teaching of *Wahdat-al-Wujud* which literally means ‘Oneness or Unity of being’. This doctrine of “Oneness of being” primarily advocates three modes of ‘Tawhid’ i.e. Oneness, namely, ‘Tawhid al-af’al’ (Oneness or Unity of the Agent); ‘Tawhid al-sifat’ (Oneness or Unity of the Subject); and ‘Tawhid al-dhat’ (Oneness or Unity of Essence or of Being) which becomes significant while drawing a comparative analysis between the two different set of philosophies. According to Taftazani, *Sufiyaa* and *Mutasawwifa* are two groups. Focusing on the former group which believed that nothing existed other than God and man is mere manifestation who delves into union with God, it is said that when a Sufi reaches God, he is therefore imbibed in *Irfan* or direct knowing. In a similar way, the philosophy of Gandhi preaches union with God by laying “emphasis on Sarvodaya, the welfare of all... He recognizes the theonomous nature of humanitarian activity. Through the service of humanity, and by action in the cause of brotherhood, we are brought to a better understanding of Truth. To help the helpless and feed the hungry is to see God” (Richards 20).

It is believed that “since the essence of everything is ultimately God’s, every religious tradition or belief reflects an aspect of divinity. From this perspective, any form of religious idea that denies all other beliefs denies the common root or essence of all religions” (Akbar 3). Furthermore, individuals walk through different paths throughout their lives but their ultimate destination is the same. There are numerous communities and religions in existence which practice variegated rituals yet they share amongst themselves similar teachings and common wisdom about life. The rudimentary thought of every faith is the same but the manner of deliverance might vary. For instance, Christianity pictures ‘Brotherhood’ as “All men are brothers. If one has anything against one’s brother, he should make his peace with him before attending to other religious duties. As one treats a brother, so does he treats God. To hate one’s brother is evil. Brotherly love should rule the world” while Mohammedanism believes “All mankind is one family, one people. All men are brothers and should live as such. The lord loves those who so live” (Ghai 21, 23). In terms of the Japanese religion Shinto, Peace may be defined as “The Earth shall be free from trouble and men shall live at peace under the protection of the Divine” (ibid 107) while Zoroastrianism states that “All men and women should mutually love one another and live in peace as brothers and sisters bound by the indestructible hand of Humanity” (ibid 108).

Highlighting the facets of brotherhood, peace and harmony, unity and oneness as the primordial features of life, it becomes an utmost important duty to pay particular attention to the spiritual foundations of communities and their moral elevation so as to enhance the global humanistic philosophy of mankind in humans as Mohit Chakrabarti asserts that:

The inherent spirit of humanism as Gandhi believes, lies in endearing one and all-Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- irrespective of caste, creed, community, color, religion etc. The inconsistencies and absence of harmony born of hatred and ill-feeling towards humanity destroy the very essence of humanism. The ideal humanist, as Gandhi himself proves, upholds the spirit of love and truth under any circumstance. (30)

Likewise, the ultimate station where Sufi philosophy rests is in its essential message to remember God and practice a selfless service towards others. By following the service of selflessness, an individual comprehends the deeper aspect about oneself where one’s pompous ego smoothens and vanishes. It leads man into a state of mind where one learns to be tender

against arrogance and develop love for others, thus growing spiritually high. Akin to this is Gandhian Humanism whose ultimate aim is to endear brotherhood and eliminate the nursing of hatred which hinders the unison not only between man and man but also between God and man. The harmonious blending of all creations of God emphasizes on the interconnectedness and oneness of the supreme creator. This union elevates mankind towards superior deeds of nobility and to defy this beautiful aspect would mean to deny the existence of Truth that is the basic essence of Humanism. The seeds of Humanism must germinate so that they foster mutual amity, individual tolerance and co-responsibility in man.

These humanist seeds must cultivate and mature into a prosperous tree of humanity; with different religions and their propagated philosophies as its branches; the vital message of oneness, togetherness and connectedness as its trunk; but the main root as always associated with God. Man must be encouraged to pursue a rational construct in the society in order to substitute violence for non-violence, love for hatred, harmony for dissonance, untruth for truth and inequality for equality. Humans must follow an extensive approach towards the structure of family, rather than celebrating the union of few members within a single family, union of multiple nations should be celebrated as one big global family. All nations must aim for a global cosmopolitan evolution for the goodness of humanity where nothing but peace prevails.

Ever since man started the journey of progression, there have been numerous prophets and saints preaching the idea of Oneness. Their chief goal was to encourage man to undergo spiritual awakening, to recognize the abstract soul in place of the concrete body, and to choose the path of Oneness, i.e. Oneness with one's self, Oneness with people, and Oneness with God. In the poetical sense, the image of 'God' can be metaphorically used for the white light which passes through the prism of humanity and gets dispersed as the VIBGYOR colors that connote various teachings of various religions. Ultimately, it exhibits that every human has the same root of origin and must abide by the principles of peaceful coexistence.

It was Gandhi who asserted that the advancement towards peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, and oneness would be achieved through self-realization while Glyn Richards in addition to this maintains that:

“Self-alienation and alienation from others also means alienation from Truth or God,... Ahimsa, non-violence or love, removes our sense of self-alienation; it binds us closely to our fellow men so that we are no longer alienated from them: and since self-realization is God-realization, we are no longer estranged from Reality, and we are re-united with Truth”. (69)

Thus, it would perhaps lead humanity to be in close association with the Almighty because “as a humble servant of mankind, Gandhi says about himself: If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service...”(Chakrabarti 93). Furthermore, Gandhi believed that self-realization would enhance self-purification which would lead man's inner spirit to think for the welfare of all as the welfare of his own. In the contemporary world, the pressing priority should be to direct humans to plant love in one's hearts for the fulfillment of common good. Differences must be eliminated and the world should aim for conflict resolution through the recognition of general welfare.

Gandhi insists that humans must put their best effort “to develop a feeling for the oneness of mankind through reverence for the spirit of man and the practice of the great virtue compassion”

and this feeling will serve as “the surest foundation of the new humanism, deriving its strength from all great religions and traditions, gaining from the scientific spirit of our times, and becoming ultimately something like a new religion of the future” (Chakrabarti 98). Even the teachings of profound Sufi saints claim that they are people who belong to the true essence of oneness in existence. Sufi Philosophy has enlightened the world since ages towards the path of Divinity by endorsing simplicity, purity, truth and eternal love for the divine. Sufism focuses on the dimension of man’s inner self. Man should be in harmony with his inner self in order to be in harmony with everything that exists around. True knowledge about oneself would spring the right essence about realization of the beloved or Allah which would further serve man’s actions towards the global welfare. Poetry written by Sufi saints, such as Rumi, Hafiz, Nezami, Sanai and many more, clearly portray seeking the beauty of the beloved or Allah through love, admiration, worship and oneness of the soul. Rumi asserts that “I have been a seeker and I still am, but I stopped asking the books and the stars. I started listening to the teaching of my Soul” (Wagner 14).

In conclusion, it must be noted that Gandhian thought is valid more than ever. The issue of Oneness discussed in the paper is the only beacon of hope for the present scenario where the world is subjected to violence, terror and hatred for each other. It consequently violates the principle of unity of all existence. Nations fight with other nations, communities turn intolerable towards other communities, and religions speed up their pedals to prove their superiority over others. This pictures that “they clearly have social, economic and political ramifications and affect man’s relationship with his fellow man: all men are brothers because they partake of the same reality and share the same Ātman” (Richards 64).

To dwell in this vicious cycle and negate the very essence of Oneness, man has exposed the entire mankind to a detrimental state of existence. Therefore, “we must develop a spirit of cooperation among the different religions. Mutual respect helps us to interpret other religions at their best and learn from them. We cannot have respect for another religion when all the time our attempt is to obliterate it. We should not try to undermine faith and allegiance of other peoples” (Radhakrishnan 85). Perhaps, the best manner to eliminate all wrongful practices is to remove disparity and blend together all the faiths available in the world. Oneness would prevail when man finds associations and relations with other men. S. Radhakrishnan opines that:

In a variety of ways Hindu and Buddhist thinkers have laid stress on the transcendent unity of religions along with their empirical diversity. The goal of religion is one but the paths leading to it are many. The cows may be of different colours but the milk they give is of one colour, white. The lamps may be different but the light, the flame, the illumination they generate is the same. The story of the elephant and the six blind men is well known. When our eyes are opened we see that the different parts we stressed are parts of one whole, different sides of one truth (83).

Therefore, through this research paper, multiple dimensions of Oneness have been discussed. The paper has essentially shed light on the One and every(One) in the entire process of Oneness “as Gandhi says: I am endeavouring to see God through the service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven nor down below, but in every one” (Richards 75). An implication has been drawn to promote the benefits of spiritual recovery, without which the idea of harmonious coexistence would be truncated. The notion of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam should be ingrained into all minds. Let us break the barriers of divided identities where people name themselves

Indians, Americans or Africans. Let there be no Hindu, no Sikh, no Muslim and no Christian. Let us be One and witness an era of togetherness, peace and harmony. Let us shut all narrow windows of our mind and open up wide doors of our hearts in life.

**Works Cited:**

- Akbar, Ali. Looking at Ibn Arabi's Notion of *Wahdat al-Wujud* as a Basis for Plural Path to God. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 45-51, June 2016. [http://jiscnet.com/journals/jisc/Vol\\_4\\_No\\_1\\_June\\_2016/6.pdf](http://jiscnet.com/journals/jisc/Vol_4_No_1_June_2016/6.pdf)
- Chakrabarti, Mohit. *Gandhian Humanism*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1992.
- Ghai, O.P. *Unity in Diversity*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1986.
- Gülen, Fethullah. *What is "Unity of Being" (Wahdat al-Wujud)? Does it Conform in Any Way to the Teachings of Islam?* 26 Dec. 2005. <https://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-works/questions-and-answers-en/what-is-qunity-of-beingq-wahdat-al-wujud-does-it-conform-in-any-way-to-the-teachings-of-islamq>
- Radhakrishnan, S. "The Case for a United Religious Organisation." *Towards a New World*. Vision Books Pvt. Ltd, 1980.
- Richards, Glyn. *The Philosophy of Gandhi*. London and Dublin: Curzon Press Ltd, 1982.
- Wagner, Paul. *The Beautiful Teachings of Sufism and the Sufi Saint*, Par. 14, *Gaia*, 24 Jan. 2020. <https://www.gaia.com/article/the-beautiful-teachings-of-sufism-and-the-sufi-saints>