

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD: A VISION OF MAHATMA GANDHI IN THE CONTEXT OF SANT NIRANKARI MISSION

Sangeeta Hasija

Research Scholar, Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

"We are all tarred with the same brush. We are members of the vast human family... Humanity is not divided into compartments. They may occupy one thousand rooms but they are related to one another..."¹

- Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi taught the gospel of brotherhood by not only preaching it rather by practicing it in his whole life. His teachings have a universal appeal. He believed in the essential unity of man and the underlying unity of all the nations. He did not make any distinctions between religions, nations or races. "I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Jews"².

With this philosophy in mind, he acted as a torchbearer for the people living in the darkness of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, hatredness, violence and otherness.

There is no doubt that we are living in a world of increasing violence and confusion and it is felt that the post-modern human civilization is going through a crisis. Individually human beings feel alienated from the community and now a days there is much more despair and sorrow among them. The world is torn apart in perpetual conflicts, wars and social divisions. And in all social relationships, as MacIntyre observes 'truth has been displaced as a value and replaced by psychological effectiveness'³.

The collective injustices are on the rise. The society is corrupt and the individuals making up that society are also corrupt. One longs for some kind of order, some kind of peace, but every collective action- social, political, military, for betterment, seems to generate its own opposite effect and bring further disintegration. Saints and reformers come and go but the suffering and exploitation of the unfortunate lot continues. What value does one good and healthy life has in a world of constant strife? One seems to be loosing faith in goodness. How can it affect the degenerate character of the society as a whole? When no satisfactory answer is available, the modern scientific culture divides the vast problem of human relationship into numerous problems disconnected with each other.⁴

To arrest all the human maladies, the Sant Nirankari Mission says, we have to reverse the gear from violence to love and peace, by realizing the Fatherhood of God, the by-product of which is the spontaneous brotherhood of the mankind. The Nirankari Mission asserts that God-Realisation is the only force that is mortar binding together the many-shaped bricks of human society into a coherent structure. It vouchsafes that it is possible to realize the prospect of a world family with the unifying bond of love among its members in the wake of Realisation of Fatherhood of God only. The apostles laboured hard, the martyrs died in torment, the scholars and the scientists proclaimed the beauties of higher life, the sociologists untiringly inculcated the sense of duties of good citizen, the philosophers pioneered sublime thoughts, and all agreed that God is one and that man's first duty is to realize Him. This is the key to what one can describe as Universal Brotherhood.

"The mystical bond of brotherhood makes all men brothers".

- Thomas Carlyle

The Mission was revived in Peshawar (Pakistan) in 1929 by Baba Buta Singh ji. He believed that God - the formless (Nirankar) can be known only with the grace of the Living True Master (Satguru). The Sant Nirankari Mission upholds religious tolerance, communal harmony, social unity and human fraternity. The present Satguru Mata Savinder Hardev ji Maharaj is the fifth Satguru in succession. She preaches the concept of one God and realization of

¹ (cited in *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, compiled and edited by U.S. Mohan Rao, (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1968), p.127.

² Gandhi,M.K, *An Autobiography: My Experiments with Truth*, 2nd edition (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press, Reprints, 1976), p.207.

³ MacIntyre Alasdair , *After Virtue*, (Duckworth, London),1981, p.29.

⁴ Aggarwal,M.M., "Ethics and Spirituality", (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla),1998,P.7.

Brahm Gyan as the prime aim of human life. This Brahm-Gyan forms the base of the Mission; and therefore a person after attaining the Brahm-Gyan becomes the member of the Mission, and is addressed as a 'Brahm-Gyani', 'Mahapurush' or 'Nirankari'.

The Sant Nirankari Mission's uniqueness lies in this that it unites the people of all religions, faiths, cultures, races and nationalities through a common spiritual chord. It gives the clarion call: Know One, Believe in One and Be One. It promotes the spirit of oneness, peace, tolerance, harmony so that it is established everywhere globally. There are few Mottos which Mission strives to achieve are as follows:-

TRUE RELIGION UNITES; NEVER DIVIDES

SARA SANSAR EK PARIWAR

PEACE NOT PIECES.

ONENESS

HUMAN VALUES

HARMONY IN ONENESS

WORLD WITHOUT WALLS BRIDGING HUMANITY PIECE BY PEACE

TRIBUTE TO HUMANNESS

It encourages the concept of "One God, One Religion, and One Human Race" and removes all bondages, barriers, divisions and dissensions. It enjoins upon its devotees to keep the company of saints (Satsang), render selfless service to the humanity (Sewa) and constantly remember God (Simran). It does not require anyone to renounce the world or change existing faith and belief, rather improves the quality of life by inculcating the spiritual and moral values.

Five Spiritual Tenets/ Principles of the Mission

In order to wipe out self-pride and hatred against others, which are dominating factors negating realisation of God and to inculcate humanity and love in all the devotees, the Nirankari Mission has formulated five principles for adoption in every day life. They are:

This first tenet of the Mission is a practical action plan of the theory of Trusteeship propounded by Gandhi ji. It is said that all the assets - physical, mental and material belong to God. One should not be proud of any of his belongings. If the human being uses the same as a trustee, conscious of the divine order, he or she shall not be afflicted by the diseases of ego and pride. One must understand that all one's worldly assets are gifts of God and are to be used as a trustee only

The second tenet of the Sant Nirankari Mission creates the mental base in the human beings for bringing the down-trodden and caste afflicted section of the society on the same platform and sets the tone for their welfare for which Gandhi ji identified himself during his life. He fought against untouchability and called 'harijans' the men of God. This principle fosters the concept of Humanism according to which one should not be proud of one's caste, creed, colour, sex etc. None is high or low because of one's birth in a particular family. Being the creation of the same Almighty God, a 'human being' should be loved & respected as such, and not as a follower of a particular religious faith. Somebody's faith in a particular way of worship should not become a reason for hatred towards him or her. Gandhi ji thought of society in terms of the poor and the oppressed and the downtrodden. To raise them was the mission of his life too.

Gandhi ji said, "It is a tragedy that religion for us means nothing more than adherence to restrictions on food and drinks and nothing more than adherence to a sense of superiority and inferiority." The Sant Nirankari Mission preaches its devotees to respect each other's cultures and not to criticise anyone on the basis of one's diet and dress. One may eat, drink and wear what one likes and one must not dictate one's own choice to others and also on the other hand one should not be proud of one's own food and dress habits. One thing must be noticed here that the Mission asks its followers to avoid the use of alcohol in their diets. Cultural Harmony has been emphasised in the third principle.

The fourth principle lays stress on Societal Responsibility whereby one has to fulfill one's responsibilities towards one's family and the society at large. If anyone who wants to realise the God, need not to renounce the world or become a recluse or an ascetic. Rather, He can be realised while leading a normal life as a householder and performing one's duties and responsibilities. The Mission asks its followers to earn their livelihood by righteous means. One must,

however, trust the Almighty and treat all ups and down of life as 'Divine Will' keeping at heart the advice of Gandhi ji that no joy can compare with the joy of doing one's duty quietly.

All the four traits mentioned above seems to be very simple and easy but these can only be followed in practical terms if one has shed one's pride, ego, arrogance, superstitions and adopted the path of spirituality after attaining the Brahm-Gyan. One could attain the Divine-Knowledge (Brahm-Gyan) by approaching the True Master (Satguru) and enjoy the bliss. It is mentioned in the last principle i.e. the fifth principle is that the disciple should not divulge the Brahm-Gyan to any person without the permission of the True Master.

With these principles at heart and God all around, a Nirankari is said to be a guiding star for the world by the practical life he lives. It enables the devotees to lead a simple, true and balanced life which is worthy of a being human. All the differences, controversies and quarrels are rooted in implicit or explicit pride and ego which are uprooted through these five principles. The Mission thus seeks to ensure individual development as well as welfare and progress of the society as a whole. The Sant Nirankari Mission encourages the concept of "One God, One Religion, One Human Race" and removes all bondages, barriers, divisions and dissensions. It enjoins upon its devotees to keep company of saints (Satsang), render selfless service to the humanity (Sewa) and constantly remember God (Simran). It does not require anyone to renounce the world or change the existing faith and belief, rather improves the quality of life by inculcating the spiritual and moral values.

ORGANISATIONAL ASPECT OF SANT NIRANKARI MISSION

The Nirankari mission has an organization called Sant Nirankari Mandal which is worthy of the Doctrine it stands for. It is dynamic in character as it has been evolving and changing as per the requirements of the times. There have been meetings of the Mandal to sort out any organizational problem or otherwise. It monitors, guides and supervises the holding of Congregations, Publication Department, Charitable Section of the Mission. The main focus is on the conforming on the ideology of the Sant Nirankari Mission. The organization is democratic in nature but it does not associate itself with any political party. The purpose is to preach the concept of One Formless God and to promote the idea of Universal Brotherhood. There is total unity of thought, unity of action and nothing is allowed which directly or indirectly infringes the basic tenets of the Nirankari Mission. The aims and objectives of the Mandal are given in the memorandum of Association. Para 3 and 4 state them as follows:

- (i) To preach and propagate the concept of one formless God (Nirankar), peace, non-violence and universal brotherhood among the people everywhere by:-
 - (a) holding Satsangs (Congregations) daily and periodically at various places in India and abroad.
 - (b) publishing and distributing Mission's literature and propagating it through other media of publicity.
- (ii) To run and/or aid Educational, Social and Medical Institutions, and also to run Langar (free community Kitchen) for the benefit of the public at large.
- (iii) To render services of charitable nature including monetary help to various sections of the people-widows, disabled, physically handicapped, downtrodden and weaker sections of society.
- (iv) To render financial help and other service to the deserving students and individuals.
- (v) Any other aim and object conforming to the ideology of the Sant Nirankari Mission⁵.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE MISSION INFLUENCING SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE :-

Under the divine guidance of True Master - Satguru Mata Savinder Hardev Ji Maharaj, the Sant Nirankari Mission participates in social welfare effort, including health care and education, the Govt. of India have accepted the activities of the Mission as of Charitable nature, and have duly notified the Nirankari Mandal as Charitable Institution. It is on record that 75% of Mission's budget is spent on its multifarious activities, connected with the amelioration of human sufferings, particularly of the less privileged section of society, contributing towards social justice and harmony, as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi ji.

Blood Donation Camps:- The Sant Nirankari Mission today is one of the leading blood donating voluntary organisations in India. Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj who said that donation of blood would be the best tribute to Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji and other martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of Truth and human values. "Rakt naaliyo mein nahi naadiyo mein behna chahiye" i.e. "blood should not run in drains but in veins". This has saved lives

⁵ (Singh,Naranjan,*Global Faith In The Age Of Science*,Delhi: Sant Nirankari Mandal,2014, pp.126-127.)

of many patients who were battling for their lives in various hospitals." The number of blood donors always exceeds the capacity of the blood collecting teams. The outstanding contribution made by the Sant Nirankari Mandal has been widely acclaimed and appreciated by the Indian Red Cross Society, the Central Health Ministry and the State Governments.

Health Care: - The Medical Department of the Sant Nirankari Mandal is also actively participating in the Immunization Programme, Hepatitis Control Programme and other public health programmes of the Government as also the Blindness Eradication Programme, Pulse-Polio Eradication programme of the World Health Organisation. The project of a big hospital Health City Plus is under process and it aimed at serving the poor by providing all health related facilities at large.

Education: - The Education Department of the Sant Nirankari Mandal is running a scholarship scheme under which the meritorious students of the schools and colleges run by the Mandal are given scholarships. It benefits the proficient and the needy students in academic, technical, sports and professional fields. Another initiative the Mission supports is primary education to illiterate women, provided under a special program, 'Project Upkar'. Villages having population of Tribals and Gypsies are the main target under this project.

Welfare of Women And Children:- The society is advancing very fast with all round development but the position of women is not improving in rural as well as urban areas with the pace of development. The main hindrances are: illiteracy, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, resistance to change, lack of infrastructure facilities etc. The Social Welfare Department of the Sant Nirankari Mandal encourages Women's Empowerment. The Mission operates near about 80 tailoring and embroidery training centers in different parts of India. Many Vocational Courses have been introduced by the Mission to help the under-privileged in this regard. Child care Centres have also been set up at various places.

As it is rightly said that, "When a woman moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves." These words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru are often repeated because it is an accepted fact. Employment gives economic status to women. Economic status paves the way for social status. Uplift of women is an essential ingredient of human development.

Compassionate Aid: - The Mission provides relief/financial assistance in individual cases to the aged, infirm handicapped, widows, poor and the needy persons, who have no support and cannot make both ends meet. Varied amounts of money were donated by the Mission to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the rehabilitation of the victims of natural calamities like earthquake in Uttarkashi, floods in Punjab and Haryana and a cyclone in Andhra Pradesh, bomb blasts in Maharashtra 1993. The Mission keeps on providing such assistance to countrymen from time to time.

Simple Marriages: - The Mission advices its followers to observe maximum austerity in marriages and other social functions. It counsels them to avoid unnecessary show of dowry etc. The Mission would, of course, exhort its members to spare whatever they can and utilize the same for the common good of humanity. Inter-caste marriages are also encouraged. In order to make Nirankari weddings further economical, the Mission is now encouraging mass marriages in which a number of marriages take place at a single congregation.

Cleanliness & Tree Plantation Programmes: - The Mission organizes the cleanliness programme every year on the auspicious day of Guru Puja Diwas i.e. on 23rd of February. The Hospitals, Dispensaries, Railway Stations, Bus-Stands, Public Places like Public Toilets, Roads, Parks, and Gardens etc are cleaned on the orders and blessings of the Satguru. The Sewadal volunteers without caring of their high social statuses and positions participate religiously in this programme of cleanliness. It spreads the awareness among the people to keep their surroundings clean and save the Environment by growing more and more trees. This could benefit the economy of the country as well.

The donations and the offerings during the congregations are properly channelised for the welfare of humanity. The Mission has provided employment to many people in its organization named Sant Nirankari Mandal. The Mission helped many people in settling their lives economically by providing them jobs.

PEACE:- AN AGENDA TO BE ACHIEVED BY THE SANT NIRANKARI MISSION

The entire humanity right from the beginning of human life has been craving for peace at different levels such as individual, social, communal, national and international levels. Gandhi ji was of the view that peace is a feeling which is to be emotionally experienced by everyone. He felt that Peace is the superpower, which if realised, leads to eternal happiness and it should be the ultimate goal of any human emotions and actions. The minds of individuals must be at rest and must concentrate their energies for spreading the message of peace. They should strive peacefully to make their and other people's social lives happy and undisturbed which is the aim of any society.

Peace, development, democracy and equality are still missing in many parts of the world despite the trumpeted slogan of world getting into a global village. Gandhi believed that moral degeneration is the root cause of all evils including conflicts, so he recommended acquisition of moral values such as truthfulness, non-violence or love, self control, forgiveness, non-enmity or friendliness, compassion, mercy etc. He lived and worked for the establishment of peaceful relationships among individuals and groups. His is a unique contribution to peace in the modern world context. He pointed out that since conflict takes place in the mind first, which could be removed only through a mental process or a mental force, not through deployment of physical force. In his words, "If my gain spells another's loss then it will not make for peace. But if my gain means my neighbour's gain also & the gain of all, it will make for a real lasting peace".

The Sant Nirankari Mission is working on the same lines of Truth, Non-violence, Peaceful Co-existence followed by Mahatma Gandhi. The UNO with the support of some other organizations like the Security Council, UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO and a few more is striving to resolve conflicts and to maintain peace in the world as well as to eliminate illiteracy, poverty, hunger and to enhance respect for human rights. The wide range of socio-spiritual activities of the Sant Nirankari Mandal led to the grant of Special Consultative Status by U.N. The Mission holds that every kind of inequality, including social, economic and gender, can better be sorted out through spirituality. The people are not only to be moulded, but also to be unfolded spirituality. The U.N.appreciated Mission's views, "Thank you so much for your comments, we are sure you are raising very important points. We need to keep comments coming".

The Mission has been honored by the Universal Peace Foundation for engaging itself in promotion of peaceful and non-violent activities.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru International Award for Intercontinental Peace, Tolerance and Harmony, awarded to His Holiness by Interfaith Harmony Foundation of India on 21-22 April 20076.

Both Baba Hardev Singh Ji and her esteemed spouse Pujiyamata Savinder Kaur Ji has been awarded as the Ambassador for Peace by Universal Peace Federation7.

The Sant Nirankari Mission with its primary goal of spiritual upliftment is playing the outstanding role in promoting the ideals of peace and non-violence for achieving social, economic and political transformation through Truth and Non-violence as envisioned by Gandhi Ji. The Mission has been awarded with various national and international awards from time to time. His Holiness Satguru Baba Hardev Singh had been awarded with 'Gandhi Sewa Medal' on 26th November,2013 by an organization named 'Gandhi Global Family' (GGF), for his continuous service to humanity and its commitment towards community services. The GGF recognised its distinguished contribution for the upliftment of underprivileged people through the ideas of non-violence, love, tolerance, patience, universal brotherhood. GGF is a non-political organization seeking to internationalize, coordinate and propagate Gandhi Philosophy among all sections of society8.

Mahatma Gandhi Award 2013 was presented to Sant Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh by Director UNIC India and Bhutan Mrs. Kiran Mehra Kerpelmen and Padma Shri S P Varma, Vice President, Gandhi Global Family on 15th Nov 2014 at Delhi in recognition of exemplary contributions towards World Peace in the presence of over 1.5 million peace lovers. They appreciated the efforts of the Mission towards contribution in fulfilling the dream of Mahatma Gandhi and his fellow freedom fighters9.

Princess Maria Amor, founder and President of We Care for Humanity and Chairman of the G.O.D. Awards declares: "Love is the greatest unifier and spiritual denominator for the soul of humanity. It is the moral compass that perpetually navigates us through the darkest of our days and transcends what our physical means cannot. For the greater portion of our lives, we struggle to find our wealth but a wealth that is greater than our brief existences is found in the accomplishments we make in life, in bettering ourselves and the ones around us. Andwhile the future may be cast in shadow, faith is what keeps up moving forward when what lies ahead is unforeseeable. The incredibly wonderful trait each individual has is the spirit to help realize the potential of the fellow human. His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh's contributions to world have irrefutably won countless battles and will forever provide humanity a source of direction when needed. The late Guru Baba Hardev Singh may no longer be with us but to live in hearts, we leave behind is not to die-Thomas Campbell. His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh's compassion and love for humanity is embedded in our hearts and fellow Nirankari's worldwide. I have the tremendous honor to declare that the G.O.D.

⁶ <http://nirankarimission.blogspot.in/2008/10/recent-awards.html> retrieved on 30th November, 2017.

⁷ <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-Sant-Nirankari-Mission> retrieved on 30th November,2017

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandhi_Global_Family_medals_and_awards retrieved on 2nd December, 2017.

⁹ <https://adilmohammedblog.wordpress.com/2014/11/17/mahatma-gandhi-peace-award-2013-conferred-on-sant-nirankari-baba-delhi-by-ggf/> retrieved on 2nd December, 2017.

Awards Committee has reached a unanimous decision to recognize His Excellency as 2017 SUPREME SPIRITUAL ICON OF THE YEAR. It is our strong belief that his accomplishments and distinct caliber of talent should be shared with and forever remembered before the global audience at the United Nations this 2017.¹⁰

The Nirankari leader aims at creating the understanding of spirituality through a living revelation of God, thus paving the way to universal peace, unity and fraternity all over the world. Infact, Gandhi himself believed in some supreme power which guided the destinies of all. For him, love of God and love of man meant the selfless service of the God in man, and suffering even total sacrifice for the cause, if need be. To seek the truth of life, to see the truth as it is, to declare it to the world and to try to establish it through non-violent means became his life-mission¹¹.

He also gave the concept of Sarvodaya which does not mean only prosperity for all but the real progress and advancement of all human beings measured in terms of an integrated, civilised living in all the dimensions of man's life, namely, physical, vital, mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual. The ultimate aim is to change the present society into one which is peaceful, harmonious, happy and full of the joy of fulfilment and nearing perfection¹². With these noble values of eminent personalities and many selfless organisations, one can expect that the dream of Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam could become a reality if all unite together and make an effort religiously not through their words but by their actions.

¹⁰ www.godawards.com/news retrieved on 1st December,2017.

¹¹ Misra K.P., Gangal S.C. *Gandhi and the Contemporary World : Studies in Peace and War*, Chanakya Publications, Delhi,1981. p.34.

¹² Ibid.p.38.