

Meeting of Minds
Gandhi and Haydar in Today's
World

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Tolerance & Non-Sectarianism

by

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Were Gandhi and Haydar soul mates? I do believe they were. As a matter of fact, Haydar, in a poem he dedicated to Gandhi, quoted the latter saying: “We Indians are born patient and calm”, as if our poet wanted to attribute Gandhi’s preaching of nonviolence and tolerance to the very nature of the Indian people; genetic virtues of theirs. This shows the amount of influence that Gandhi must have had on Haydar, a very happy influence indeed.

Haydar admired Gandhi, the principles Bapu stood for and the evils he fought against: hot tempers, hatred, abuse of might¹.

The Mahatma’s spirituality is legend. Haydar’s is most revealed through his exploration, of his own identity and the depth of the human soul. This exploration, quite non conspicuous, but real, has made out of him a devout believer, who refuses to question the existence of God². Unlike those believers who associate grief with faith, for him “joy is the right measure of faith in the heart”. Does joy not suggest a welcoming spirit ready to accept others? He was by nature a tolerant person.

Gandhi looked deeply into the democracy concept and, through his meditational mind, linked it to the intolerance³ that the world suffers from: “Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a democratic spirit”.

¹. “Salaam on earth he preached and still preaching
By the repeated rhythm of the reeds blown
By the pen that has writ and still teaching
How to water the seeds of love where grown.”

“He, a phoenix revived by fire and pen
To live ever read in stories to right
The wax of temper in the hearts of men
The cause of hate, the foolish use of might.”

². “True believers are the shield of sanctity
Go on my friend and smash the fear of doubt
And be adamant in your approach to God
To keep going en route to—Tomorrow.”

“Ergo, why should I slight a distant king?
Why should I shoot a passerine in flight?
I believe in Him without questioning,
To keep moral excellence in His sight.”

³. “If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant.”

Haydar, rich with a long history of mingling with westerners, and their respective cultures, developed an inner understanding of the fellow human beings sentiments. This has consolidated the virtue of tolerance that he must have already had. “Haydar’s verse is intolerant of intolerance and unsympathetic to sectarianism and (blind) allegiances”, a critic who analysed his works once said⁴.

This natural tolerance has rescued Haydar from the evil of sectarianism. Armed with his faith and spirituality, just like Gandhi, Haydar, although coming from a country that has always been torn apart by religious feuds, was genuinely non-sectarian.

As for Gandhi, he considers that all religions are real and equal. “God has no religion”. He sensed the difference between a religion and its followers who do not go by its teachings”. “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians”. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ” This realization is so true nowadays. The intolerant storm of fanaticism and violent fundamentalism that we are currently witnessing would have gotten Gandhi to say “I like your prophet but some of you moslems are unlike him”. He believed in “the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world”.

Haydar, as a secular thinker, would have addressed his fellow Lebanese moslems in a similar way, asking them “How could you Sunni and Shia fight against each other with so much values in common? The adverse impact of your animosity has already taken an enormous toll that threatens future generations. You should get together and unite before it is too late.”

Gandhi, when meditating on civilization, asserted that it is “the encouragement of differences”.

Both Gandhi and Haydar have founded their thoughts about tolerance on love and brotherhood. “Where there is love there is life”, Gandhi had said. He also stated: “Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment”. Tolerance is but one of the many facets of love, an off-spring of this noble feeling.

⁴.John Munro, former professor of English literature at AUB.

In Gandhi's mind, the power of love is the foundation for his nonviolence and tolerance theory "Wherever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love".

And so did Haydar think. He was conscious of the positive effects of love on human relations: "Preach love and peace to those who listen"⁵. He asks the Almighty to cause men to love each other ⁶, and to "Keep [one's] jar of virtue empty of hate."

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Two great men, two real inspirers, two beautiful minds. Their lives crossed for half a century in critical times the world witnessed, but their minds continue to meet as the world only changes today to the worse. Had both of them been around today, they would have had the same feelings and expressed them in the same way.

They left us a heritage of values that challenges evil and promote tolerance. Let us follow their path.

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⁵. "Better praise God and catch your heart by hand
To shape it right to love your neighbor and
Preach love and peace to those who listen .."

"Explain to them what're the rights of man and
What's liberty what's equality ...
What's a brotherhood what's altruism and
How to be sociable lovable and
Pleasant and friendly to all people."

⁶. "O God! Knock into our heads to walk straight
To love the whole world and forget our hate."