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Gandhi and Weber: The work ethic capitalism and conscience

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“Only a small portion of existing concert reality is colored by our value-conditioned interest and it alone is significant to us” – **Max Weber**

“ That economics is untrue which ignore or disregards moral values”.

- **Gandhi**

Abstract-

In this article to highlight some conceptual and methodological issues in the study of India's cultural traditions with specific reference to what generally are called religious ideas, values and attitudes continuing in the same vein. I focus my attention in this article on religious ethics and on the cross-cultural dichotomy of instrumental and ultimate values. I begin with a brief reference to how Mrinal Miri, a distinguished Indian philosopher, approaches this problem, and then following him, engage with mahatma Gandhi and Max Weber. The attraction of proceeding thus lies in that it brings intercultural comparison into the discussion.

Key words- Gandhi; Weber, ethic capitalism and conscience.

Ultimate or Instrumental Values-

One of the abiding themes of Miral Miri's work is his concern with the exploration of the significance of being a person. To be a person means sociologically, being more than an individual: it connotes one's situations within a collectivity of individuals held together by common values, purposes and procedures which are to a very large extent externally given, that is socially defined and controlled by sharing norms, customs and laws one's personhood, the fact of togetherness is also defined by the instrumental (economic, political) and value (Moral) choices that one makes for one comes wholly molded out of the crucibles of custom or by the tyranny of tradition. Liberal sociologists generally have, however, abstained from telling people how to live; this is particularly true of those who derive their inspiration from Max Weber (1864-1920) rather than Emile Durkheim (1855-1917).

For philosopher like Miri these may well lead to multi-stranded engagement with the thought of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1968) more precisely with Gandhi's deep concern for the preservation of autonomy of the individual conceived as a moral agent. In the face of the threatening presence of the 'modern' state (with its violence) and 'modern' industrial civilization on less than the unreasonable demands of tradition. In an important essay and Gandhi's conception of moral life in the context of plurality of religion Miri (2003) sets out to examine the notion of 'humanism' which he arguably locates in the ambit of ' western modernity'.

This ideology produces, Miri notes what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world (Weber 1948), that is, it's being brought under the regime of reason alone. In other words



‘there are no mysterious incalculable force’ and one can, in principal, master all things by calculation - (weber 1948).

In the light of weber’s insights Miri (2003) detects a major problem characteristic of the predicament of modern man;

Since the world revealed by our rational scientific- epistemic gaze is not a world in terms of values what might be called a dharmic world the humanist values must be articulated in the language of rights and not in the language of ontological commitment.

For such a language of commitment, Miri recommends we should term to Gandhi, whose pre modern or traditional approach flows from the unqualified conviction that our existence is spiritually grounded (2003).

In this article, I make an attempt to highlight some significant convergence between Gandhi and Weber’s perspective on the conflict between ultimate and instrumental values that lies at the very core of modern life.

Gandhi’s conceptions of work as duty –

The years 1908-09 were of immense importance in the spiritual and intellectual development of Mahatma Gandhi. In the midst of a wide range of professional, political, and social activities by his own acknowledgement, experienced an achromatic inner turmoil a kind of enlightenment. He read the Bhagavad-Gita the Bible and the Quran, and also select works of a number of western thinkers. He was inspired by the scriptures and stirred by the other works.

Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that he ‘discovered’ some of his deepest convictions reflected in Ruskin’s book so much so indeed that it made him transform his life thus he found in it a welcome valorization of first the good of all placing it above the good of the individual ; and, second, the life of labor. In Tolstoy’s the kingdom of God is within you which Gandhi wrote ‘overwhelmed’ him he found additionally a welcome emphasis on the importance of an inner strength rooted in profound morality and utter truthfulness and a reflection of his own conviction in the superiority of nonviolent passive resistance to evil. Both these thinkers and others too were deeply disturbed Gandhi thought by the manner in which western civilization had moved away from its Christian moorings seduced by industrial technology and culminated by the power and violence of the modern state.

The idea of performance of one’s duty within a moral framework undertaken willingly and in full awareness is absolutely fundamental to Gandhi’s conception of what it is to be human put otherwise it is work ethic that defines our humanity self-incurred abstinence from work is a vice. Leisure is a physical necessity but only within limits, for it is natural to experience fatigue in both intellectual and physical work.

The most concrete expression of such a work ethic is bread labor which Gandhi work literally means labor for roti he called it a divine law and acknowledged in many scriptures to a people famishing and idle the only acceptable form in which God Dore appear is work and promise of a food wages God created man to work for his food and said that these who ate without work were thieves

Inspired by his own religious tradition and by his reading of the works of certain non-Indian scholars Gandhi evolved a clear notion of a work ethic. Its key elements it seems to me are



self-reliance bread labor a balancing of physical and mental actives limitation of personal wants without loss of dignity and a blending of self-interest and altruism.

Weber a protestant ethic-

Gandhi's work ethic reminds ones of max Weber discussion of the protestant ethic (weber 1930) between 1904 and 1905 weber published three essays on the emergence of what he called the spirit of capitalism in the west he traced its beginnings in large part to the religious anxiety that their faith in predestination generated among pious puritans regarding their fate was it damnation or salvation. In the hope of receiving some intimation about the same in the pursuit of secular activities they led ascetic built active liver seeking success in their economic pursuits making profits and using their sarongs more for expanding their enterprises than for consumption and thus accumulation the surpluses that are essential for the growth of capitalism.

Modern, western capitalism weber clarified is characterized by rational market oriented organization of industry and free labor and separation by technological input and formal legal and administrative procedures. Its ideological basis was the Calvinist doctrine of a centric world created by god for is own glory, within which the individual must dedicate himself to work for the achievement of go's purpose. As in Gandhi's formulations although in a significantly distinctive manner, there is in weber's formulation of the puritan's predicament of utter loneliness no option except the selfless performance of one's duty which must be deemed as self-rewarding.

By the twentieth century capitalism had emerged weber noted the care for external good's was to have rested on the saint's shoulders like light cloak which can be thrown aside any moment but it has fatefully become to due course an iron cage from which there was no escape but from which religious asceticism it self had perhaps finally escaped weber elaborated his prognosis by once again emphasizing that the pursuit of wealth it stripped of its religious and ethical meaning tends to become associated with purely mundane passion which often actually give it the character of sprat (weber 1930)

Gandhi and Weber on the western civilization and capitalism-

Gandhi too wrote about this same civilization and its last for material goods in Hind Sawaraj worming that these who are intoxicated by modern civilization are not likely write against it. In such a civilization unbridled great overtakes genuine needs and technical efficiency replaces absolute values rational restrain morality and religion are ignored in 1947 about a year before his death he had observed that although never many in number capitalists have employed machine power regardless of the interests of the common man and that is why our condition has deteriorated today.

Gandhi drew pointed attention to the consequences of modern medical interventions which is his judgment encourage bodily appetites and weaken the mind. The mind/ soul-body relationship as conceptualized by Gandhi may be called hierarchical so that the mind/soul encompasses the body this combination ensures total wellbeing these ideas are indeed very similar to Weber on the subject of the technical control of human life. Civilization is not an incurable disease however Gandhi writhe contradicting carpenters. A significant difference between Gandhi and Weber is that at though both were pessimistic about the fate of western



civilization Gandhi rejected the notion of historical inevitability in the affairs of humanity at large and therefore was unlike weber who was convinced of the irreversibility of rationalization as a historical process on optimist.

For the realization of the ideal of sera which is the same as compliant non egoistic identification with the welfare and indeed the suffering of others Gandhi considered absolute truthfulness non-violence non-possession and soon as essential credentials of the satyagrahi capital in itself is value neutral it was noted above in the context of the puritan ethic discussed by weber's what bestows value and it is how and for what purpose it is used for egoistic self-aggrandizement violently or for self-less common good not-violently.

The point father was to recognize that although we are all born equal--- have a right to equal opportunities nevertheless we have not all the same abilities society must not lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulated wealth (Dusgupta 1993).

As in weber's thinking so in Gandhi's too wealth in itself is value neutral. In his own pithy words one riper can purchase for us poison of nectar of such supreme values as sera and trusteeship did not yet absolve one of the imperative of moral means good ends do not justify bad means.

Gandhi and Weber on politics and ethics -

Gandhi subscribed to the holistic view of social action no area of activity least of all politics could be considered exempt from moral imperatives for him politics was the yoga dharma of our time that is the mast appropriate means of serving social purposes in the modern age. The orientation had to be wholly altruistic. A politician must pre-eminently have weber contended three qualities namely i) passion ii) a feeling of responsibility and iii) a sense of proportion (Weber 1948). All those three qualities can be illustrated by reference to Gandhi public life be passion weber means it seems to me the ability to sincerely attend to a public cause with absolute intensity and this is what characterized for example Gandhi his efforts on behalf of the untouchables or Harijans (as the Datits were then called). A sense of proportion can be illustrated by recalling that Gandhi maintained that although the ideal was equal distribution of wealth he was practical enough to concede that one would have to settle for equitable distribution.

The framework of the operation of the ethic of responsibility in Webers discussion is political action Webers himself was however uncomfortable with this dichotomy although he has set it up it one makes any concession at all to the principal that the end justifies means it is not possible to bring an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility under one roof or to decrees ethically which reds should justify which means (weber 1948). The two types of ethics are he concluded not absolute constructs but rather supplements and only in unison do they constitute a genuine man a man who can have the calling for politics there is no wall of separation between means and ends---- this is a proposition that admits no exception (young India, 17 July 1924 Quoted in Bose 1948).

As a public figure Gandhi was an excellent exemplar of the ethic of responsibility as weber defined it. The traditional terms for this inner conviction or compulsion are atmanah, trusti, priyam, icchitam and so anon that is personal satisfaction or conscience. Ti is considered



one for the signs or sources of dharma moral conduct in authoritative texts such as the Manusmriti (Manusmriti olivelle 2004). Weber was deeply interested in the comparative study of the ethical traditions of the west on the one hand and India and China on the other. He mistakenly considered brahmanical ethics completely situational locking in any absolutes beyond the notion of traditionally defined social obligations within this framework however there is a conflict between actions that takes consequences into consideration represented by Arjun's stand at the beginning of Mahabharata war.

Gandhi wrote – to me God is truth and love God is ethics and morality--- god is conscience his rejection of the acquisitive society also was for him a matter of conscience or of the ethic of ultimate ends as weber would have put it. The appeal to one's conscience entails the unremitting exercise of critical self-examination which was an inalienable post to Gandhi's life in the hope of self-knowledge.

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