

BOOK REVIEWS

Shashi Joshi, *In Gandhi's Ark*

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In the year 2018, India as a nation was celebrating 150th anniversary of M.K. Gandhi's birth. The Government of India had decided to commemorate the birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, at national and international level, to propagate his message. Presently, the nation is also running on the biggest festival of democracy (elections-2019) which is celebrated across the length and breadth. Given the present political and social scenario, this work is a timely outcome and can be of great help to understand the vision of the Gandhi about religion, tolerance and acceptability of the faiths.

The author has been able to put forward fine distinctions between religion and faith and has done it with clarity. The work revolves around the personality of Gandhi and his catholicity, openness to religious ideas, belief and practices, mainly Christianity. The book is a well done piece focusing on the relationships of Gandhi with his Christian friends, which evolved overtime through discussions, agreements and differences on the religion and spirituality. In these exchanges they understood each other and while discerning their religious boundaries they made crossings into each other's faith, significantly gaining from each other. The efforts of all the three actors were significant and they indicate their engagement with the religious quest. The developments in and around the individuals (Andrews, Verrier Elwin & Gandhi) regarding religion, inner transformation and the coming of faith have been treated passionately. The fineness of the arguments (to & fro) and understanding on the issues of conversion have been treated justly, where none aims fusion.

The major content distributed over seven chapters mainly talks about Gandhi, Charlie Andrews, Verrier Elwin and Christianity. The religion is the main theme running across the work. The affinity between Charles Andrews and Gandhi has been done well, and their exchanges and ideological positioning on religion have been explained extensively. In which 'for Andrews,

religion was nothing but the love of Christ...for Gandhi, religion was nothing but Ram-Naam' (p. 36). The intimate ways of greetings exchanged between these friends indicate a lot to the confidence, friendliness and bonding shared by them.

The chapter on 'Gandhi's Religion' is a way forward to get an insight into the religion of Gandhi which was *dharma* of non-violence, to become good human, perform right actions, 'to act little by little on one's spirit...a medical treatment', 'transformation of soul', exercise a lived ethics, a code of conduct with moral and existential value, shedding arrogance to become 'humbler than the dust', *ahimsa* (action based on the refusal to do harm), compassion extended to all living beings, 'prayer is an unflinching means of cleaning the heart of passions' and shall be 'combined with upmost humility'. The distinction between God and faith (at work) is an interesting spark to get deeper insight into Gandhi's religion. The strength of his own faith made him to expose the cruelty inflicted on the cows and going further on it he called the cow worship 'an ignorant fanaticism' (p. 69). Gandhi was inspired by Aristotelian values, but his religious quest made him to understand other religions better and helped him to become a good human being everyday, thus, fulfilling the purpose of religion in life.

The following chapters bring forth the interactions that took place between Gandhi, Elvin and Andrews. They all had their own independent ideas about religion and their thoughts become visible in their actions, on the issue of converting Gond tribe to Christianity. As, Elvin notes, 'I did not have the least desire to preach my religion to anyone, still less to convert the Gonds to Christianity'. Whereas Andrews extends, 'you will be doing no good at all to them or to us if you over idealize them...have you not gone too far in following Bapu about "conversion"?' The coordination and the support extended by these three fellows to each other on the issues of social significance are brought out well. The chapter 'Gandhi, the West, and

Christianity' seems to be an exercise done in haste where most of the interactions (V.D. Savarkar, Nelson Mandela) have been treated briefly.

The position of Gandhi on religion made many feel that he is 'a person open to all religions or even lack of religion' (xiv). The impact of Gandhi's persona on the Christian world and vice versa, is narrated through the study of photographs, lectures, letters and biographies. The impact of Gandhi's persona over the individuals made them to put Gandhi as an equivalent of Christ and Messiah (p. 2). The different comparatives of Gandhi with Christ came up in different times at diverse stages and in different contexts such as world war-I (conscious keeper), post-war period (preoccupation with peace) and his assassination, but this interesting theme has not been explored much.

This work is an easy read and will be of great help to understand the position of Gandhi on religion, faith, position against conversion and cow. The mega narrative does not subsume the minor stories that come in every now and then. The work would have been of great interest if the other contemporary Christian friends of Gandhi would have been taken on the research ark. A great miss in the work is S.K. Rudra (a second generation Bengali Christian) who was the first Indian Principal of a missionary College, namely St. Stephens.

To conclude, it is truly a new, noble and original book.

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