

## Original Research Article

## Social Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi

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### Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi has played an important role in the India's freedom struggle, and has connected all sections of society together in an acceptable manner; Gandhian ideas are philosophical in nature. No doubt Gandhi was a social engineer who tries to build a new human society where every individual can live without violence and war. Gandhiji throughout his life worked for the betterment of women, untouchables, and other weaker sections of the society. In this paper an attempt has been made to draw out the importance of Gandhian thought, and his philosophy in society. The paper contents that by his nonviolent methods Gandhian ideas and principles to some event has successes in transforming the Indian society. Further, his ideas brought gender equalities, uniformity among the people and eliminate several in human practices like untouchability, widow remarriage, and prohibition of child marriages.

**Keywords:** Untouchability, Remarriage Women, Widow, Inter- caste Marriage.

### Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi, the well-known social reformer was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1869 in Porbandar in Gujrat state. Karmachand Gandhi and Putalibai were his parents. He was like other Indian children born in ordinary background. Yet he was not an ordinary child in terms of his achievements. He fought against mighty empire without weapons and made his country free from British government. With this his social efforts and simple lifestyle made him to be called Mahatma, the Great soul. He married to Kasturibai Makhanji Kapadia at the age of 13. He went to England in 1888 to study law after the death of his father Karamchand Gandhi. Before going to London he gave promise to his mother to be non vegetarian and non-alcoholic in his life. His brother Laxmidas supported him for his further study in London. After completion of his study in England, he returned to India in the year 1891. He started practicing as a lawyer in Rajkot. After this he went to South Africa for 21 years. In South Africa he started movement for

civil rights which was nonviolent which made him a Global Leader. In 1915, he came again to India and started to organize peasants, farmers and labourers to protest against land tax and discrimination too.

In the year 1919 he became proactive leader of Indian freedom movement. He fought against British government and social evils with the help of his own moral principles. In 1922 he was sentenced to six years imprisonment as a result of his non co-operation movement against British government. In the year 1930 he started movement to break an unhuman 'Salt law' which was one of the remarkable in the history of Indian freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi was aware of social structure of nation so it was his firm belief that discrimination in society is one of the obstacles in attaining freedom from British government. Indian politics and Indian society were two different poles which would have tear down one another. After studying his efforts for social welfare, we can reasonably claim that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest soul was a man of virtues and moral values and pursued his goals throughout his life by following the path of non- violence.

### **Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment is all about giving women the power and control of their lives to become anything they want and to do what they want in situations where they were not allowed once upon a time. It refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political, and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal- right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as: Freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity, Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace, To make their own choices and decisions “{ Right to choose : To Say Yes or NO}, Have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities, Have equal social status in the society, Have equal rights for social and economic justice, Determine financial and economic choices, Get equal opportunity for education, Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias, Get safe and comfortable working environment,. Globalization and liberalization of the economy seems to have affected women workers in the country in multiple and contradicting ways. Globalization is generally thought to have increased economic opportunities for a large group of workers, especially women through linking urban centers to the global economy.<sup>1</sup>”

### **Child Marriage**

Mahatma Gandhiji was against child marriage, he considered child marriage as an immoral act that undermines our moral and induced physical degeneration. Repudiating the claim that child marriage has a religious sanction, Gandhi contends, Smritis which supports early marriage do not depict the true essence of Hinduism and must be rejected as interpolations.<sup>2</sup>” As per the official statistics sources, the overall rate of maternal mortality of was 24.5 per thousand in 1931, while as England had 4.5 per thousand maternal mortality rate. The child marriages not only debilitated mother's health but also affected country's new generation and race. Gandhi believed that no real upliftment of women is possible without bringing the radical reforms in marriage system. Most of the disabilities from which women suffered were due to the evils which had crept into the marriage institutions. The early marriages and denial of right to remarriage were the primary causes among the women's to become widows. The traditional Hindu marriage customs such as polygamy, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage and heavy dowry etc the biggest obstacles which terribly mistreats the Indian women and their development. Therefore, Gandhi believed

in the form of marriage that was envisaged in the Hindu religion.<sup>3</sup> He advocated that he had no theory of marriage that is inconstant with a belief in transmigration, rebirth or Mukti. He supported the opening of the special institutions like Mahila Ashrams for rescuing young girls who were the victims of the above evil customs, and were sold by their parents for the sake money or other social causes. Gandhiji supported educated women's and young girls to work and rescue those girls, wives and widows who become the victims of these inhuman practices. He provided his unconditional support to educated and socially active women's to cultivate an environment where in the child and early marriages would not happen. Gandhiji perceived that a child widow is not a widow in true sense. Gandhi's support to remarriage of widows was strongly opposed by the Sanatana Hindus, who claimed that remarriages is not possible in Hinduism.<sup>4</sup>

### **Widow Remarriage**

Mahatma Gandhi was firm in his views regarding child widow. If a widow is a child, that child should be duly married as he thoroughly rejects first marriage in case of a child widow. But in the name of religion, we could not understand the importance of the marriage ceremony. To force widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime.

### **Caste System**

In the year 1933, Gandhi thought of untouchability as a social evil and felt it is necessary to abolish the system to make an ideal society where there will not be any place for injustice in terms of human capabilities. Untouchability was the major concerning problem for him in those days. He did not believe in rebirth, so he said, "if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable so that I may feel their problems. According to him 'Varna System' assigns duties and not the rights. He believed that Varna system of distribution of occupation was functional to the society. According to him the occupations were hierarchical and fruits of labour were identical irrespective to the Varna. He called untouchables as Harijan or children of God and efforts for their liberation. He started Satyagraha to secure the entry of untouchables into the temples, tanks, roads, and access to public wells and schools. In order to provide dignity to the work of the sweepers he himself took up the task of cleaning toilets. Untouchability is a religious issue was the belief of Mahatma Gandhi. So he sought to abolish this custom of untouchability and not the caste system. According to him no any Varna has superiority over the others. Every varna should be treated equal and important so that cast discrimination will be abolished and equality can be sustained in the society. He also strongly convinced Indian National Congress party to support and include his idea of removal untouchability from society to achieve the dream of social equality.

### **Inter-caste Marriage**

Mahatma Gandhiji who returned to India after spending over two decades in South Africa, travelled around major parts of India in railway's third-class compartments and fasted against violence thrice, and once for Hindu- Muslim unity.

In short, this was the first Gandhi who walked on the earth before 1930. The first Gandhi believed that "law of heredity is eternal" argued that changing it could create "disorder" and "chaos" in society and fought with B.R. Ambedkar.

He was against interdining, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, so much so that he prevented his one son Manilal from marrying Fatima, a Muslim girl, in South Africa in 1926, and made the other son, Devdas, wait for five years before the latter could marry Lakshmi, daughter of C. Rajagopalachari, a

Brahmin. Before he allowed Devdas to marry Laxmi in June 1933, Gandhi changed his views on interdining and inter - caste marriages.

“Restriction on interdining and inter- caste marriages is no part of the Hindu religion...Today, these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society.”<sup>5</sup>

The statement refuted what the Mahatma had said in 1920: “Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for rapid development of the soul.”

MK Gandhi feared that his earlier views might be misunderstood by posterity. Between 1930 and 1935, Gandhi supported two inter-religious marriages. First he backed the marriage of Humayun Kabir, writer and Bengali politician, with Shantilata Dasgupta in 1930 , and later in 1935 approved of Braj Kumar Nehru, marrying a Jewess, Magdoina Friedmann, alias Shobha from Budapest. Apparently, Gandhi’s views on the caste system, interdining and intermarriages changed drastically between 1927 and Sept 20, 1932, when he first sat on a fast against untouchability in Yerwada jail of Poona. In fact, they kept evolving till he breathed his last on January 30, 1948. The opinion of the Father of the Indian Nation evolved greatly on hereditary occupations as well. While in the period around the early 1920s he never tired of counting the advantages of following hereditary occupations, later he went as far as calling Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras mere lables.

What is remarkable is that the apostle of non- violence never made a fetish of consistency in his views.

“Toward the end of his life, Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948) said he had, many times, found himself in the wrong and therefore changed his mind and that his writings should be destroyed along with his body when it was cremated, because there was a risk that people would conform mistakenly to something he had written.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Untouchability**

While addressing the question of social equality, Gandhi rejected the caste difference among the different sections of the society. He was against the untouchability or commonly known as out castes and Varna’s. Gandhi perceived that the prevalence of untouchability among Hindus could be a denial of the principles of Gospel that could broke the pride of the Indian people. The evil practice like untouchability was the product of society that badly violets the human code of conduct. Gandhi from his childhood was totally against the untouchability and related evils. On evils like untouchability Gandhi has articulated “Love of people fetched the objects of untouchability early into my life. My mother aforesaid, you should not bit thid boy, he’s untouchable. <sup>7</sup>” Further, “Why not I inquired back and from that day, my revolt against this began.” Gandhiji fought a massive war against untouchability throughout his his political career, his movement against untouchability got stronger and stronger day by day, he even sacrifice his entire life for this noble cause. The fight against untouchability immersed the reunication of his spouse and religion. However, apart from his personal troublesome, he remained strong and consistent against untouchability, and aspired to remove this in human practice in the minds of common masses through his writings, speeches and actions. Gandhi worked for the betterment as well as upliftment of Harijans and fought for their temple entry that ultimately compelled higher castes Hindus to open up the temple for the Harijans. The temple entry inculcated the feelings of uniformity and heals the wounds of Harijans, and made them believed that they are not outcastes before God.<sup>8</sup>”

## Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi was a charismatic personality, and source of inspiration for the common masses. He appeared as a messiah for the oppressed people. Gandhiji through his non-violence method wanted to replace the discriminatory Indian social structure into ideal social order. His support to non-discriminatory social order helps in widespread the development and inter connectedness of caste based Indian society. His ideas and thoughts helped in removal of several customary evils, unrest and injustice and gender inequality from the Indian society. His dream of futuristic society was based on equal opportunities irrespective of differences in caste, colour, creed, religion, and gender. Right from the beginning, Gandhiji stood in favour of common masses but he shows his special concern to Ati-Shudras, Untouchables, and women class. He coined a special term “Harijan” to show his concern and love towards the suppressed groups of the society. He had faith in women’s inherent capacity of non-violence. The experience of women participation in politics from his days in South Africa till the end of his life demonstrates that the women’s never broke his expectations. With the help of Gandhian ideas and inspirations, the women’s fought a massive battle for their rights both in and outside their homes. Gandhi adopted the good ideas of all religions; his love towards communal harmony helped him to become a man of morality and a firm believer of God. In the concluding remarks, it can be observed that the communal belief of peacefulness that appeared from the Gandhian philosophy has appeared a major means to eliminate many types’ of evils, and hurdles from the Indian society.

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