

GANDHI AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

A deep desire to critically engage some of Gandhi's key work and ideas in the context of contemporary global challenges provided the context for bringing this edited volume for the BA (Programme) course on "Gandhi and the Contemporary World". The present volume seeks to explore in all possible ways the relevance and effectiveness of Gandhi's ideas to contemporary India. It is over seven decades since the Mahatma (great soul) left us. As we scale new heights of progress today, there is an imperative need to recapture the spirit and human touch of Gandhi.

There is nothing new in what Gandhi said, believed or did. He himself once admitted when he said: "I have nothing new to teach the people. Truth and Non-Violence are as old as the hills" (Gandhi 1936: 49). But the genius of Gandhi is that he articulated these concepts in a way nobody had done in the past; offering entirely a new interpretation to suite the requirement of his time, and in the context of the present predicaments that the world confront today, these ideas have become pivotal to guide the human destiny .

Mahatma Gandhi left behind a prolific mass of literature on every aspect of life—political, social, economic, and ethical. Gandhi's writings consist of seven books, numerous articles and editorials in the weekly journals he edited at various times in his life. Gandhi's seven books include Hind Swaraj, Satyagraha in South Africa, Autobiography, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, Discourses on the Gita, Ashram Observances in Action, and A Guide to Health, all published by Navajivan, Ahmedabad. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG) published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Government of India, now runs into hundred volumes. Among the journals and weeklies Gandhi edited- Indian Opinion, Young India and Harijan India are prominent. Besides the voluminous writings, Gandhi's own intervention in the political and social life of India during the period of empire and thereafter in South Africa and India reveals a remarkable journey of a man build on - truth and Non-violence, love and compassion, moral courage, simplicity and integrity. His vision of enduring commitment to social justice, normative economics, religious pluralism, and relentless striving for harmony between nature and human being have become excruciatingly important in the context of today and humanity can gain much from his moral wisdom which was the basis of his action

How to contextualise our understanding of Gandhi today in the contemporary World?

Gandhi eminence was not accidental. It was attained through strict *self discipline* brought by a strong adherence to the principles of Truth (Satya), ahimsa (non-violence), aparigraha (non-possession) and brahmacharya (celibacy). These principles constitute the central pillars of Gandhi's philosophy and action. The evolution of Gandhi from a young struggling lawyer in South Africa to the Mahatma (the great soul) could be attributed on account of all the four principles that Gandhi held dearly and made a part of his praxis in life.

Gandhi's struggle did not begin in India. It began years back, during 21 years of his stay in South Africa, as a struggle for social justice, for the dignity of oppressed

against racialism. South Africa had not only prompted Gandhi to evolve a novel technique of Satyagraha for political action but also transformed him into from an ordinary being to the 'Mahatma' that we know. Before Gandhi arrived on the political scene; the world knew only two instruments of change, the bullet and the ballot. Once late Dr B. R. Ambedkar, one of the founding fathers of our Constitution, said: "It is neither by mere counting of heads nor by chopping off heads that you can bring about a political change. It is by taking cognizance of what is happening inside the head and heart that you will be able to strengthen the motivation for change." That is what Gandhi had believed.

At the core of Gandhi's thought was his concept of 'Swaraj'. Gandhi distinguished swaraj from mere attainment of independence. It meant Indian spiritual liberation through a fundamental change in each individual's moral perception. This required rather a rigorous moulding of the self and a heavy sense of responsibility. Thus, he suggested the adoption of Constructive Programme. Prosecution of constructive programme observed Gandhi meant constructing structure of Purna Swaraj. In December 1941, Gandhi published a booklet under the title – 'Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place' – in which he explained, in concrete terms, the activities which he wanted to include under constructive programme. Gandhi's constructive programme consisted of eighteen items. They included: Communal Unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, khadi, Village Industries, village sanitation, basic education, adult education, women, health and hygiene, provincial languages, national language, economic equality, kisans, Labour, adivasis, lepers and students (1941: 1-28). Gandhi wrote this pamphlet during early 1940's in the context of his growing anxiety about the future of India where he believed in the new scheme of arrangement of power the majority of Indians would remain impoverished and marginalized if the modernist and imperialist policies of empire is continued. In many ways, Constructive Programme was an important contribution in the empowerment of marginal masses through direct action outside the realm of the state. While concerns raised by Gandhi continue to be vital new challenges are mounting up today. The developments such as the rise of global terrorism, mass exodus of people across the world, environmental imbalance, rapid decline of moral, spiritual and ethical considerations, growing intolerance and conflict and violence all over the world has raised anxiety about the future of humanity in the coming years. Under the circumstances one is struck by the astonishing need to re-imagine Gandhi and apply his moral and political principles in dealing with the contemporary conundrums. In the next few paragraphs, I briefly touch upon certain areas of major concern today where Gandhi's intervention is urgently sought. They include:

Peace and Non-Violence

Today we live in a period of increased disturbance. The increased competition resulting from the accelerated process of globalization and heightened religious bigotries, fundamentalism and terrorism have turned violence into an endemic phenomenon. These developments make the commitment to non-violence particularly challenging and difficult, but it also makes that priority especially important and urgent.

Gandhi was the first in human history to extend the principle of nonviolence from the individual to the social and political plane. In his seminal work 'Hind Swaraj', the idea of non-violence is clearly elucidated wherein Gandhi emphasized in the relative moral superiority of non-violence over violence. Non-violence

(ahimsa) as introduced by Gandhi was a unique new method of resistance and opposition introduced by Gandhi during his stay in South Africa and successfully carried forward against the oppressive British rule in India. It began with Gandhi's campaign in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmadabad and taken forwards successfully in the form of active Non Cooperation and Civil Disobedience which took the Empire by surprise and ensured overthrow of the alien rule.

Non Violence was invoked with much success by Nelson Mandela during the apartheid period in South Africa and by Martin Luther King Jr in the United States. It inspired movements and leaders in many other countries like the Philippines, Poland, and Myanmar, Czechoslovakia. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Vaclav, Aung Sang Suu Kyi, Dalai Lama are other iconic figures who walked the Gandhian path to promote equality and justice for all. Across the world, Gandhi's method of peaceful protest have been put to work and given renewed meaning by civil rights campaigners, environment and peace activists, Green Party workers. Mass uprising during the Arab Spring in early 2011, the anti-corruption movement of 2011. In India also demonstrated the efficacy and relevance of Gandhian Non violence.

Ethics of Non Violence

Non-violence of Gandhi can be profoundly liberating if one were to understand its basic presuppositions. Gandhi's non-violence excludes the use of violence and is rooted in 'altruism' and compassion towards fellow humans. The Gandhi method provides a way of fighting against injustice without resorting to violence and without stirring the intense passion of hatred and revenge that usually accompany armed conflict (Cortright, 2009:19-20).

For Gandhi truth and non-violence are inseparable and truthfulness is prerequisite for a pursuit of Ahimsa. Gandhi believed that Man can only realize Truth/God by pursuing Ahimsa. Thus, realisation of truth warrants an action rooted in non violence. Non Violence wrote Gandhi "is the first article of my faith". It is also the last article of my creed (Young India March 23:1992). Unlike the commonsensical understanding of Non Violence as Non injury or avoidance of physical violence, Gandhi expands the use of it to include a number of different meanings. In Gandhi's philosophy Ahimsa is not about refraining from physical injury but he argued that ahimsa should be a principle guiding humans in their thoughts, words and deeds. "Ahimsa Gandhi wrote "is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-doer." It entailed action by adherents of nonviolence which went beyond the lofty ideal of not hurting other living creatures either in thought, word or deed, but which reflected an unqualified state of love for others, indeed all creation (Gandhi, Selected Works, Vol VI: 153.).

In the development of Gandhi's Non Violence various religious traditions and individual influences can be discerned. Gandhi was engaged in the study of the main religions of the world such as the Vedic tradition of Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. He was also deeply influenced by Plato, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Emerson, and John Ruskin who greatly contributed in building his comprehensive and humanistic understanding of non-violence. The moral strength of courage, fearlessness, forbearance and the readiness to sacrifice became the necessary elements in the journey of his life.

Among other virtues of non cooperation, civil disobedience, swadeshi, the idea of *voluntary suffering* became quintessential for Gandhi in the practice of *ahimsa* to bring about transformation. As stated by Gandhi: “Nonviolence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the putting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant. The general thrust of Gandhi’s injunction was that ahimsa cannot be realised unless you cannot calmly tolerate your opponent’. Gandhi had once said, “it is the acid test of non-violence that in a non-violent conflict there is no rancour left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa with General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend.” The principle of Ahimsa therefore involves qualities of respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from hate and a desire for peace. Non-violence necessitates complete abstention from exploitation in any form. At a time when violence has become endemic and intolerance is on the rise in India and abroad the need for nonviolence therefore become pressing.

Religious Pluralism and Communal Unity

The conflict among religions is one of the fundamental challenges of the twenty first century. Religious conflicts have resulted in precipitating hatred, violence and suffering in recent years. At a time when divisive social forces threatens to rupture the social fabric, Gandhi’s insistence on Communal Unity offers numerous lessons for our contemporary era” both in India and in the ever more globalizing world.

Gandhi had an unflinching commitment to religious pluralism and inter-faith harmony. Gandhi firmly believed that communal unity was essential precondition for freedom. In his Constructive Programme, he discusses the idea of communal harmony among the people of different faiths as essential to achieving Swaraj. The book ‘Way to Communal Harmony’, written by Gandhi also vindicates also Gandhi’s concern for harmony between different faiths. According to Gandhi every religion is said to be a path towards the Supreme Truth and he was looking out for those universal principles which transcended religion as a dogma.

Gandhi’s religious philosophy is humanistic in nature and all embracing. Gandhi strongly believes that no religion is inferior or superior to other religion. Gandhi was born in a Hindu family and was a devout Hindu throughout his life. However, he was strongly influenced by the ideas of other religions and had deep interest in comparative religion. Gandhi read the Bible, the Quran, and Bhagavad Gita. The holding of dialogue between different religious groups was a significant dimension of the practice of religious pluralism. He convened the inter-faith prayer meeting, where texts of different religions were read and sung to diverse audience.

His Hinduism was all-inclusive. In his own words:

“It is not anti Musalman, anti-Christian or anti-any other religion. But it is pro -Muslim, pro-Christian and pro-every other living faith in the world. The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e., all life coming from the one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara.” . (Mahatma Gandhi Complete Works Volume 58, p. 72.)

For Gandhi every major religion articulated a unique vision of God and emphasized different features of the human condition which advocates the essential spiritual unity of all mankind. He felt that true religion vitalizes and elevates the inner life of every human being. "If we believe in God, not merely with our intellect but with our whole being, we will love all mankind without any distinction of race or class, nation or religion." Despite his repeated assertions he was Sanatani Hindu he observed: My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. . . I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense."⁴⁶ He further stated "I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. Gandhi's religion thus was a rational and ethical one not based on dogma and rituals.

More revealing is Gandhi's conviction about the relative truth of all religions, as expounded in his address to the first Annual Meeting of the Council of the Federation of International Fellowships at the Sabarmati Ashram (January 13–15, 1928):

"After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that (1) all religions are true; (2) all religions have some error in them; (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible. The aim of the Fellowship should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian a better Christian (Bose, 1948: 226–27).

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Gandhi was deeply stirred by the communal divide and devoted his entire life for propounding communal harmony. Seeking for peace and unity amongst Hindus and Muslims way back in 1919, Gandhi asked them to collectively take the vow:

'With God as witness we Hindus and Mahomedans declare that we shall behave towards one another as children of the same parents, that we shall have no differences, that the sorrows of each will be the sorrows of the other and that each shall help the other in removing them. We shall respect each other's religion and religious feelings and shall not stand in the way of our respective religious practices. We shall always refrain from violence to each other in the name of religion'.

He wrote in 1920: 'I hope my alliance with the Mahomedans to achieve a threefold end – to obtain justice in the face of odds with the method of Satyagraha and to show its efficacy over all other methods, to secure Mahomedan friendship for the Hindus and thereby internal peace also, and last but not least to transform ill-

will into affection for the British and their constitution which in spite of its imperfections has weathered many a storm.' (Cited in Brown, 1972:194) But throughout he was careful to ensure that it wasn't interpreted by Muslims as a temporary political move as can be gauged from the following: 'This unity cannot be a mere policy to be discarded when it does not suit us. We can discard it only when we are tired of Swaraj. Hindu-Muslim unity must be a creed to last for all time and under all circumstances' (Young India, Dec 2, 1920).

When communal riots broke out in 1946 Gandhi walked fearlessly through the riot-torn districts of eastern Bengal, healing the wounds of the worst effected victims. Gandhi refused to celebrate independence when it came to India on August 15 1947. While the entire nation celebrated the historic moment Gandhi was in Noakhali where spade of sectarian violence had intensified. When the violence would not abate, Gandhi began a fast-unto-death in Calcutta to stop the communal killings. He ended his epic fast only after the warring sides agreed to stop killing each other and peace was achieved. Historian Sumit Sarkar has described this period of Gandhi's life for his attempts at dowsing the flames of communal hatred in the midst of partition as 'The Mahatma's finest hour' (1983: 437). Bhikhu Parekh is of the opinion that for Gandhi, Hindu-Muslim divisions were unacceptable because his idea of Indian fundamentally had as one of its elements the harmonious co-existence and co-operation of different communities which functioned and lived together while at the same time maintained their distinct ideas and roles (1989: 184).

Eradication of Untouchability

Gandhi's goal of attainment of Swaraj remains an unfinished project without the Dalit emancipation. Along with the Hindu-Muslim question, Gandhi had identified Untouchability as a serious impediment to the goal of Swaraj. Gandhi wrote in 1921, "Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among his creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves we may not plead before the throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others". (YI, 25-5-1921:165).

Despite abolition of the practice of "untouchability in 1950 under Article 17 of the Constitution of India, caste- based politics, violence and discrimination still persists in blatant and often vicious forms, in many parts of the country. Gandhi wanted to remove untouchability as he saw it as an evil imposed by man, not by any divine authority. He was certain that there was no warrant in the Shastras for untouchability. A religious book could never teach irreligion. Advaita (oneness) was the fundamental principle of the Vedas, which ruled out all distinctions between man and man. He, therefore, hoped they would not consider anybody as untouchable and would look upon Harijans as their blood-brothers and sisters (CWMG 57: 210). He wrote, Untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love (Young India, 6-10-1921). It was a devise of Satan and not a sanction of religion. To his detractors, who quoted scriptures in support of untouchability, Gandhi said, "scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth." They are intended to purify reason and truth" (Young India :19-01-1921).

In order to remove untouchability prevailing in the Hindu religion, Gandhi considered the abolition of caste as essential. He urged every Hindu not just to

abolish untouchability from their minds and hearts, but to disregard matters of caste in where they lived, whom they ate with or befriended, and whom they married. To provide the untouchables with a more positive connotation, Gandhi gave the group a new name, namely Harijan meaning 'Children of God', in an attempt to make caste Hindus see that they were all equal under God. Gandhi founded the 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' in 1932 and he ran the newspapers named Harijan to propagate his ideas on this issue. Even though he belonged to a higher caste, Gandhi took pride in declaring himself as a weaver, farmer, labourer and scavenger (Harijan, 24-09-1927). This is evident in the multifarious roles he acquired for himself in pursuance for removal of untouchability.

Gandhi pursued a more radical approach to caste as he acknowledges the question of untouchability as a deeply social question. Through the three decades of his work in India, Gandhi steadily and persistently attacked the institution of untouchability. It may be recalled that during his interim stay in India when a severe epidemic broke out in 1901, he visited the houses of untouchables and attended them. Later after his return from South Africa in 1915 whenever he visited Delhi he resided in the slum cluster of Valmiki colony amongst the poor and untouchable destitutes.

From a very early age Gandhi had begun to question the practice of untouchability. An untouchable named Uka used to clean the toilets in the Gandhi household. Gandhi's mother forbade him to touch Uka. Gandhi recalled "If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion... I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful," (CWMG, vol.19: 570.) Gradually as he evolved his attitude towards untouchability became non-compromising.

Untouchability had no place in the Ashrams that Gandhi formed both in South Africa and India. All members at the ashram ate and mingled together regardless of caste. In his autobiography, he writes that "In South Africa untouchable friends used to come to my place and live and feed with me" (Gandhi 2001: 360). At one instance when his wife Kasturba refused to clean the chamber-pot of a dalit guest, he declared that he would not stand this nonsense in his house and caught her by the hand and dragged her to the gate with the intention of pushing her out (Gandhi 2001: 225). Despite strong objection from the ashramites including Kasturba and his devoted disciple Maganlal, Gandhi admitted the untouchable family of Dudhabhai as inmates in 1915 at the new Kochrab Ashram in Ahmedabad. He did not relent even when the financial aid for the ashram was stopped. Later he adopted Lakshmi (an untouchable by birth) as daughter. When she turned adult Gandhi married her to an upper caste Brahmin defying the practice of endogamy.

Environment

Gandhi sought human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth and not merely material prosperity. Gandhi's voluminous writings are littered with remarks on man's exploitation of nature, and his views about the excesses of materialism and industrial civilization. Gandhi was not an environmentalist in the modern sense. The environmental concern as we understand today were minimal during Gandhi's time, but his ideas on development, technology, self sufficiency, village swaraj, swadeshi clearly draw his environmental concern

serving as inspiration for many environmentalists and contemporary environmental movements in India.

His idea that “nature has enough to satisfy everyone’s needs, but not to satisfy anybody’s greed” became a one-line ethic for modern environmentalism. As early as in 1909 in his book *Hind Swaraj* he cautioned mankind against unrestricted industrialism and materialism. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi articulates an extensive critique of modern civilization, and provides an alternative vision of conditions under which human life can flourish. The problem with modern civilization for Gandhi was that it made bodily and material welfare the object of life. Gandhi believed that the greatest “achievements” of modern civilisation have been weapons of mass destruction, the awful growth of anarchism, the frightful disputes between capital and labour and cruelty inflicted on innocent, dumb, living animals in the name of science and technology. He believed a science to be science only if it afforded the fullest scope for satisfying the hunger of body, mind and soul.

Heavily influenced by Ruskin and Thoreau, Gandhi was fiercely critical of modern industrial development in *Hind Swaraj*, and recommended the village as the ideal form of economic and social organization. His writings are replete with remarks on the excesses of industrial society. He had warned, as far back as in 1928, about the unsustainability, on the global scale, of Western patterns of production and consumption. “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialisation after the manner of the West,” he had said. “The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom [Britain] is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.”

Gandhi’s worst fear has become a reality. New development projects carried out in the last two centuries have resulted in large scale destruction of natural resources, socio-economic deprivation, centralisation and mass displacement of people as worst victims of new development paradigm. It is in the context of deep environmental and ecological crisis that the Gandhi vision for sustainable world gains significance today. His focuses on swadeshi, indigenous technology, village economy and austere life have become excruciatingly important today.

Today Gandhi strikes a remarkable chord with environmentalists who advocate non-violence action method for protecting environment and safeguarding the interests of the poor and the marginalized. With limited resources some of these environmental movements have initiated a new political struggle for securing human dignity and justice. They have not only revealed how the resource-intensive demands of development have built-in ecological destruction and economic deprivation but have redefined the meaning of development itself. The movement truly began with the ‘Chipko Andolan’ in 1971 and since then has undoubtedly moved the environmentalists. The Chipko Movement became a classic example of non-violent resistance and struggle by thousands of ordinary hill folk without the guidance and control of any centralized apparatus, recognized leadership or full-time cadre. The genesis of the Chipko Andolan had strong links with the Gandhian tradition. The defacto leadership of the movement came from the ranks of Gandhian Sarvodaya workers and consequently, the techniques employed by the activists were taken from or were an adoption of Gandhism Satyagraha. The most active participants in this movement included Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Dhoom Singh Negi, Ghanasyam Raturi and Indus Tikeker. In recent years the environmental activists like Medha Patekar, Vandana Shiva, Sunita

Narain, Radha Bhatt and others have taken the movement forward pursuing Gandhian ethics with some degree of success.

Concluding Remarks

Seventy years after his death, Gandhi still matters. His pioneering vision of non-violent society, sustainable world, religious pluralism, unity of humankind is needed now even more than ever before. Gandhi took a holistic view of human life and wanted all aspects of life -social, economic, and political -to be dovetailed for the creation of a just society. His mission in life was attainment of “Swaraj”. It is unfortunate that Gandhi’s messages and examples have not struck deep roots and his goal of Swaraj remains an unfinished project. The challenges today are indeed big. In the current scenario of extraordinary crisis Mahatma Gandhi acquires a greater significance than ever before. At this crucial juncture a fresh look at Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas and work become important.

The chapters that comprise this edited volume are divided into 14 units. The manuscript purportedly contains a validation of the ideas of Gandhi. It will introduce students to key instances of Gandhi’s continuing influence right up to the contemporary period and enable them to critically evaluate his legacy. The broader objective of these essays is to highlight the relevance and effectiveness of Gandhian solutions for contemporary India and the world. Most of the Gandhian concerns have been flagged in the introduction. The significance of Gandhi’s framework is specifically explored in the introductory chapter. The major part of the discussion in the next units offers an exploration into the philosophical and epistemological foundations of Gandhi. The key theoretical postulates of Gandhi on Truth, Non Violence, Swaraj, Satyagraha, and Trusteeship have been elaborately discussed to gain an understanding of the Mahatma’s moral philosophy. These moral precepts as developed by Gandhi have become an integral feature of Indian and world politics. The chapters in the manuscript suggest that to understand the present world order this normative framework can be very useful. In a way Gandhian humanism and its practical application is the way forward

in a world which echoes the cult of violence, intolerance, and hatred. This aspect highlighting the significance of Gandhian ethics is brought up in the discussion in the chapters on Communal harmony, ethics and morality and education. A deeper enquiry of the Gandhian interventions in the arena of global peace, environmental sustainability is also further explored. The writings also draw upon the limitations of new ‘paradigm of development’ articulated in the people’s movement and civil society struggle against exploitation of physical and natural world. The movements in a way reaffirm the Gandhian commitment asserting also the global significance of Gandhi.

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BLOCK 1
INTRODUCTION

Pignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 GANDHI: LIFE AND TIMES*

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives*
- 1.2 Childhood
- 1.3 Years in England
- 1.4 Struggles in South Africa
- 1.5 The Struggle in India
 - 1.5.1 Khilafat Movement Post the First World War
 - 1.5.2 Non-Cooperation Movement
 - 1.5.3 Simon Commission and Salt Satyagraha
 - 1.5.4 Round Table Conferences
 - 1.5.5 Quit India Movement
 - 1.5.6 Freedom and Partition of India
 - 1.5.7 Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 Suggested Readings
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi or *Bapu* (1869-1948) as affectionately called by Indians has always been a much discussed figure in the story of India's struggle for independence. The values propagated by him still remain at the core of Indian governance and a barometer of right and wrong. Over the years Mahatma Gandhi's multifarious personality has attracted many scholars and thus we have a vast literature on Gandhi. Efforts to engage Gandhi broadly falls into study of either the historical narratives of his life and leadership or theoretical assessment of his thought. The following unit is a brief introduction of his life and times. The unit outlines Gandhi's evolution by discussing four important periods of his life (a) Childhood, (b) Gandhi's education and youth in England, (c) Gandhi's time in South Africa and (d) Gandhi's emergence as a political leader in India.

Aims and Objectives

This unit will enable you to understand

- The life and times of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The childhood days of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.
- Gandhi's education in England.
- The struggle for the rights of the Indians living in South Africa.
- Gandhi's struggle to gain independence from British rule in India.

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1.2 CHILDHOOD

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, on the coast of Kathiawad in Gujarat. His parents were Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai. Although the Gandhis, meaning grocers, were merchants (baniya) by caste, they had risen to important political positions. Mohandas's father was the chief administrator and member of the court of Porbandar, and his grandfather that of the adjacent tiny state of Junagadh. Gandhi grew up in a varied religious environment. His parents were followers of the largely devotional Hindu cult of Vishnu (or Vaishnavites). His mother belonged to the Pranami sect, which combined Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs, gave equal honour to the sacred books of the Vaishnavites and the Koran, and preached religious harmony. Her religious fasts and vows, observed without exception all her life, left an abiding impression on her son.

His father's friends included many Jains who preached a strict doctrine of nonviolence and self-discipline. Gandhi was also exposed to Christian missionaries, but Christianity was not a significant presence in his childhood. Like many Hindus he unselfconsciously imbibed a variety of religious beliefs, but had no deep knowledge of any religious tradition including his own. Gandhi was a shy and mediocre student, and completed his school education with average results. He was married to Kasturbai when they were both 13 years of age. Events in Gandhiji's life which resulted from two immature minds trying to settle into adult roles of husband and wife made him an opponent of child marriage.¹

The early years of Mohandas' childhood were spent in Porbandar. He was not far behind the other naughty children of his age, who kept names for their teachers behind their backs. He enjoyed school but would not get through the multiplication table easily. When Mohandas or Moniya as his mother called him, was seven years of age, his father became a member of the Rajkot Court. So his parents shifted to Rajkot from Porbandar. Here, Mohandas was admitted to Primary school.

Young Gandhi was a shy boy. He was very punctual. He did not like to be late to school and preferred to go back home soon after the school closed. It was only later when he was little grown up that he started playing on the streets and by the seaside. Mohandas was an unremarkable student who was so timid that he slept with the lights on even as a teenager. In the ensuing years, the teenager rebelled by smoking, eating meat and stealing change from household servants. At one time he stole some gold from his brother's armllet. He was afraid of his father. Not because of any punishment from him, but because of causing great pain to his father. He confessed to his father in writing and tried to get out of the mess.

He was ashamed of himself and with trembling hands he gave the note to his father. Gandhiji expected a violent reaction. His father was sick at that time. He sat up and read what his son had written. His eyes filled with tears and he simply tore the note up. This was not expected of his father. But the clear confession and the promise to never commit such sin again, made father forgive his son. Mohandas cried too. At the same time he felt his sins had been washed away in

the tears of his father. His first lesson in Ahimsa began here. He realised its unlimited power of transforming everything.

Childhood experiences and influences impacted Gandhi's adult life as do everybody else's. He was a deeply religious Hindu and yet respected all other religions. He realized he could not lie because he could not tolerate the enormous guilt that he felt later on.²

Mohan passed the matriculation examination of Bombay University in 1887. His father's death a year earlier had strained the means of the family. Being the only boy in the family who had persevered in his studies, its hopes rested on him and he was sent to Bhavnagar, the nearest town with a college. Unfortunately for Mohan the teaching was in English. He was unable to follow the lectures and despaired of making any progress. Meanwhile, Mavji Dave, a friend of the family, suggested that Mohan should go to England to qualify at the bar. Mohan jumped at the idea of going abroad. His elder brother had no doubt that the proposal was attractive but wondered how they could afford it. His mother was reluctant to let her youngest boy sail to an alien land to face unknown temptations and dangers. The Modh Bania caste to which the Gandhis belonged, threatened to make the whole family outcasts if Gandhi went to England. All these hurdles were, however, successfully overcome by Mohan's determination to go broad, and in September 1888, at the age of 18, he sailed for England.³

1.3 YEARS IN ENGLAND

On September 4, 1888, Mohandas left Bombay for England. Mohandas never forgot his first morning on board. He felt uncomfortable in his black suit and shirt and tie. He was quite sure that Indian attire was more suitable, but he thought he looked very impressive. On landing at Southampton he saw that all the people were in dark clothes, wearing bowler hats and carrying overcoats. Mohandas was embarrassed to find that he was the only one wearing white flannels. In London, he stayed at first at the Victoria Hotel. Dr. P. J. Mehta, a friend of the Gandhi family, was the first to meet him.

Gandhi found everything around him strange. He was homesick and almost starved until he discovered a vegetarian restaurant. He struggled to learn western manners and customs. He bought well-tailored clothes and a top hat. He spent a lot of time before the mirror, parting his straight hair and fixing his tie. He took lessons in dancing, but soon gave it up as he had no sense of rhythm. He tried his hand at playing the violin, but failed. He took lessons in French and elocution, but went to sleep. His attempt to be an Englishman lasted about three months. Then he gave up the idea. He converted himself into a serious student. His meals were simple. He avoided expenditure on transport and went on foot everywhere in London. He started to keep an account of every penny he spent. Mohandas joined the London Vegetarian Society and soon found himself in its executive council. He wrote articles for the magazine, *Vegetarian*.⁴

In the boarding houses and vegetarian restaurants of England, Gandhi met not only food faddists but some earnest men and women to whom he owed his introduction to the Bible and, more important, the *Bhagavadgita*, which he read for the first time in its English translation by Sir Edwin Arnold and his rendering

of Buddha's life-*The light of Asia* as well as the chapter on the Prophet of Islam in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*. The attitude of respect for all religions and the desire to understand the best in each one of them were thus planted in his mind early in life.⁵

The *Bhagavadgita* (commonly known as the *Gita*) is part of the great epic the *Mahabharata* and, in the form of a philosophical poem, is the most-popular expression of Hinduism. The English vegetarians were a motley crowd. They included socialists and humanitarians such as Edward Carpenter, "the British Thoreau"; Fabians such as George Bernard Shaw; and Theosophists such as Annie Besant. Most of them were idealists; quite a few were rebels who rejected the prevailing values of the late-Victorian establishment, denounced the evils of the capitalist and industrial society, preached the cult of the simple life, and stressed the superiority of moral over material values and of cooperation over conflict. Those ideas were to contribute substantially to the shaping of Gandhi's personality and, eventually, to his politics. The teachings of the Bible, the Buddha and Gujarati poet Shamal Bhatt fused in his mind. The idea of returning love for hatred, and good for evil, captivated him; he did not yet comprehend it full, but it continued to ferment in his impressionable mind.

The bar examination did not require much study and Gandhi had ample time to spare. Getting admission to Oxford or Cambridge was not possible as study at those institutions would entail long course work and much financial resources. He therefore decided to appear for the London matriculation examination. It meant hard work and sacrifice, but he enjoyed hard work. He passed in French, English, and chemistry but failed in Latin. He tried again, and this time passed in Latin too.

Meanwhile, he progressed in his study of law and in November 1888 was admitted to the Inner Temple. It was the tradition of the Inns of Court for the students to dine together at least six times each year. The first time Gandhi dined with his fellow students, he was nervous. He was sure the boys would tease him for refusing meat and alcohol. When wine was offered, he refused to have any. He did not touch the meat either, and sat there, quite content with his bread, boiled potatoes and cabbage. He was pleasantly surprised to find that his strange habits did not make him unpopular. The next time he went for the dinner, he had a pile of law books with him. He was taking the books to his room to study. The other students were amazed by his dedication to learning and very surprised to find him reading Roman law in Latin. Some friends suggested he read abbreviated versions of the law instead of bothering unduly over such tomes. Gandhi explained to his friends that he worked so hard for sheer interest in the subject, and that he wanted to acquire knowledge for its own sake.

After a short trip to France, he prepared for the final law examination. The results were soon declared. He had passed with high marks. On June 10, 1891, Gandhi was called to the bar. He was admitted as a barrister and the next day was formally enrolled in the High Court. The following day, June 12, he sailed for India. Gandhi's three-year stay in England was eventful. Those were days of great intellectual activity, and there was tolerance for every school of thought. The country as a whole was a living university. As Gandhi sailed for home on the S.S. Assam, he felt that, next to India, he would rather live in England than any other place in the world.⁶

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Briefly describe Gandhi’s childhood years and his early stay in England.

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1.4 STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

When Gandhi reached Bombay he learnt that his mother had died. The news had been deliberately kept back from him to spare him the shock in a foreign land.

After spending some time in Rajkot he immediately took in hand the education of his little son and of his brother’s children. He decided to set up a legal practice in Bombay. He stayed in Bombay for a few months where he had a small case, but when he rose to argue it in the court, his nerve failed him and he could not utter a word.

Having failed to establish himself in Bombay, Gandhi returned to Rajkot where he started practice again. He still did not make much progress and was unhappy and could not get in sync with the atmosphere of petty intrigue that was rampant in the small states of Kathiawar. During this time an offer came from Dada Abdulla & Co. to proceed to South Africa on their behalf to instruct their counsel in a lawsuit. According to Gandhi this was a godsend opportunity. Gandhi jumped at it and sailed for South Africa in April 1893 intending to stay for a year but staying on for twenty-one. It was in South Africa that a shy, timid, inexperienced, lawyer, came into clash with forces that made him to tap into his hidden moral resources and turn misfortunes into creative spiritual experiences.

Dressed in a frock-coat and turban Gandhi landed in Durban where his client Abdulla Sheth received him. Almost at once the first thing he sensed on arrival was the oppressive atmosphere of racial snobbishness. A large number of Indians were settled in South Africa, some as merchants, some in other professions, a large majority of them were indentured labourers or their descendants. They were all looked down upon as pariahs by the white settlers and called coolies or samis. Thus a Hindu doctor was a coolie doctor and Gandhi himself a coolie barrister. After about a week’s stay in Durban Gandhi left for Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal. There his presence was needed in connection with a lawsuit. A first class ticket was purchased for him by his client. When the train reached Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, at about 9 p.m. a white passenger who boarded the train objected to the presence of a ‘coloured’ man in the compartment and Gandhi was ordered by a railway official to shift to a third class. When he refused to do so, a constable pushed him out and his luggage was taken away by the railway authorities. It was winter and bitterly cold. Gandhi sat and shivered the whole night in the waiting-room, thinking whether he should fight for his rights

or go back to India. He decided that it was cowardice to run away without fulfilling his obligations.

The next evening he continued the train journey, this time without any incident, but a bigger mishap awaited him on the journey from Charlestown to Johannesburg which had to be covered by stagecoach. He was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside, while the white conductor sat inside with the white passengers. Gandhi pocketed the insult for fear of missing the coach altogether. On the way the conductor who wanted a smoke spread a piece of dirty sack-cloth on the footboard and ordered Gandhi to sit there so that the conductor could have Gandhi's seat and smoke. Gandhi refused. The conductor swore and rained blows on him, trying to throw him down. Gandhi clung to the brass rails of the coach box, refusing to yield and unwilling to retaliate. Some of the white passengers protested at this cowardly assault and the conductor stopped beating Gandhi.

Though his main concern in Pretoria was with the lawsuit, Gandhi's sense of social justice had been aroused by his personal experience of the brutalities to which his countrymen were subject to. He therefore lost no time in calling a meeting of the Indian community in Pretoria which consisted largely of Muslim merchants. This was his first public speech which he delivered successfully. He encouraged his countrymen to observe truthfulness even in business and reminded them that their responsibility was all the greater since their country would be judged by their conduct in a foreign land. He asked them to forget all distinctions of religion and caste and to give up some of their unsanitary habits. He suggested the formation of an association to look after the Indian settlers and offered his free time and services.⁷

The position of Indians in the Transvaal was worse than in Natal. They were compelled to pay a poll tax of £3; they were not allowed to own land except in a specially allotted location, a kind of ghetto; they had no franchise, and were not allowed to walk on the pavement or move out of doors after 9 p.m. without special permit.

Gandhi had been working hard at the lawsuit for which he had come to South Africa and had gained a sound knowledge of legal practice. He made two discoveries: one was that facts are three fourth of the law; the other, that litigation was damaging to both parties in a suit and therefore the duty of a lawyer was to bring them together in a settlement out of court. In this particular case he succeeded in persuading both Abdulla Seth and the opposing party, Tyeb Seth, to accept arbitration. Having completed his work in Pretoria, Gandhi returned to Durban and prepared to sail home, but at a farewell dinner given in his honour someone showed him a news item in Natal Mercury that the Natal Government proposed to introduce a bill to disfranchise Indians. Gandhi immediately understood the ominous implications of this bill which according to him was the first nail into their coffins and advised his compatriots to resist it by concerned action. The Indian community convinced him of their helplessness without him and begged him to stay on for another month. Gandhi agreed, little realizing that this one month would become twenty years.⁸

With his usual earnestness Gandhi then and there turned the farewell dinner into an action committee and drafted a petition to the Natal Legislative Assembly. Volunteers came forward to make copies of the petition and to collect signatures all during the night. The petition received good publicity in the press the following

morning. The bill was however passed. Undeterred, Gandhi set to work on another petition to Lord Ripon, the Secretary of State for Colonies. Within a month the mammoth petition with ten thousand signatures was sent to Lord Ripon and a thousand copies printed for distribution. Even The Times admitted the justice of the Indian claims and for the first time the people in India came to know of the hardships of their countrymen in South Africa. Gandhi realized that if he had to extend his stay in South Africa he would not accept remuneration for his public services and estimated that he needed about £300 to meet his expenses. He therefore enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court of Natal.

Three years' stay in South Africa persuaded Gandhi that he could not now desert a cause he had so warmly espoused. He therefore took six months' leave to visit India and bring his family back, but it was no holiday. He visited many cities in India and worked hard to rouse interest of the editors of papers and eminent public men in the unfortunate condition of Indians in South Africa. He published a small pamphlet on the subject. Though it was a very sober and restrained statement of the Indian case, a distorted summary cabled by Reuters created considerable misunderstanding in Natal which was to have unpleasant consequences later.

When plague broke out in Rajkot, Gandhi volunteered his services and visited every locality, including the quarters of the untouchables, to inspect the toilets and teach the residents better methods of sanitation. During this visit, he made the acquaintance of veteran leaders like Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee and the great patriot, Tilak. He met the wise and noble-hearted Gokhale and was greatly inspired by him. He addressed a large public meeting in Bombay. He was due to speak in Calcutta also, but before he could do so an urgent telegram from the Indian community in Natal obliged him to cut short his stay and sail for Durban with his wife and children in November 1896.

When the ship reached Durban, it was put into five day's quarantine. The European community, misled by garbled versions of Gandhi's activities in India and by a rumour that he was bringing shiploads of Indians to settle in Natal, were angry and threatened to drown all the passengers. However, the passengers, including Gandhi's family, were allowed to land unmolested, but when Gandhi came down a little later and his identity was discovered, an infuriated mob fell upon him, stoning, beating and kicking him and would probably have killed him if a brave English lady had not come to his rescue. News of this cowardly assault received wide publicity and Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of States for the Colonies, cabled an order to Natal to prosecute all those who were responsible for the attempted lynching. Gandhi refused to identify and prosecute his assailants, saying that they were misled and that he was sure that when they came to know the truth they would be sorry for what they had done.

It was during this second period in South Africa that Gandhi's mode of living underwent a change, albeit gradual. Formerly, he was anxious to maintain the standard of an English barrister. Now he began, in his methodical but original fashion, to reduce his wants and his expenses. He learnt laundering and became his own washerman. He could now iron and starch a stiff white collar. He also learnt to cut his own hair. He not only cleaned his own chamber-pots but often of his guests as well. Not satisfied with self-help, he volunteered, despite his busy practice as a lawyer and demand of public work, his free service for two hours a day as compounder in a charitable hospital. He also undertook the education at

home of his two sons and a nephew. He read books on nursing and midwifery and in fact served as midwife when his fourth and last son was born.

Gandhi visited India again in 1901 to attend the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress and had the satisfaction of seeing his resolution on South Africa approved. He was however disappointed with the Congress. He felt that Indian politicians talked too much but did little. He deplored the importance given to the English language in their discussions and was pained to see the unsanitary condition of the latrines in the camp. After staying for a few days in Calcutta as Gokhale's guest, he went out on a tour of India, travelling third class in order to study for himself the habits and difficulties of the poor. He observed that the extreme discomfort of third class travel in India was due to much of the indifference of the railway authorities as to the dirty habits of the passengers themselves and suggested that educated persons should voluntarily travel third so as to reform the people's habits and be in a position to ventilate their legitimate grievances. The diagnosis as well as the remedy suggested was characteristic of his approach to all social and political problems—equal emphasis on duties as on rights. Gandhi was not destined to work in India yet. Hardly had he set up his practice in Bombay when a cablegram from the Indian community in Natal recalled him. He had given them his word that he would return if needed. Leaving his family in India he sailed again.

He had been called to put the Indian case before Joseph Chamberlain who was visiting South Africa. Chamberlain did not lend an ear to Gandhi and the Indians' petition. The situation in Transvaal was unfavourable for the Indians, so Gandhi decided to shift to Johannesburg as an advocate of the Supreme Court. He had stayed on specifically to challenge European arrogance and resist injustice. He had no malice in his heart but only wanted to right wrongs.

Founding of “The Indian Opinion”

About the middle of 1903, it had occurred to him that, if the South African Indians were to be brought into closer association with each other and with their European fellow-colonists, and to be politically and socially educated, it was absolutely necessary to have a newspaper, and, after consultation, he provided the greater part of the capital for its inauguration, with the late Mr. M. H. Nazar as editor, and thus the Indian Opinion was born.

Gandhi often pondered deeply over the kind of life he should lead in order to dedicate himself completely to the service of humanity. He realized that absolute self-control or *Brahmacharya* was necessary for the purpose, for one “could not live both after the flesh and the spirit”. So, immediately after his return from the Zulu campaign in 1906, he announced his resolution to take a vow of absolute celibacy to a select group of friends.

This step was taken under the influence of the *Bhagvad Gita* which he had been reading regularly every morning for some time and committing to memory. Another doctrine of the Gita which influenced him profoundly was ‘non-possession’. As soon as he realized its implications he allowed his insurance policy of Rs.10,000 to lapse. Henceforth he would put his faith in God alone. Next to the Gita, the book which influenced him most deeply was Ruskin's *Unto This Last* which his friend Polak had given him to read one day in 1904. What Ruskin preached, or rather what Gandhi understood him to preach, was the moral

dignity of manual labour and the beauty of community living on the basis of equality. Since, unlike Ruskin, Gandhi could not appreciate an ideal without wanting to practice it, he immediately set about to buy a farm where such a life could be lived. Thus was founded the famous Phoenix colony, on a hundred acres of land, some fourteen miles from Durban, but Gandhi could not stay long at Phoenix as duty called him to Johannesburg where, later, he founded another colony on similar ideals, at a distance of twenty-one miles from the city. He called it the Tolstoy Farm. In both these ashrams, as settlements organized on spiritual ideals are known in India, the inmates did all the work themselves, from cooking to scavenging. Extreme simplicity of the life was observed, reinforced by a strict code of moral and physical hygiene. No medicines were kept, for Gandhi who had earlier read Adolf Just's *Return to Nature* believed profoundly in natural cure. Every inmate had to practise some handicraft. Gandhi himself learnt to make sandals. From 1907 Gandhi and the rest of the Indians struggled with the Black Act of General Smuts. Gandhi was jailed thrice. It was his time in jail praying and undergoing privations that Gandhi was able to harden himself for further struggle which was waiting in the future for him.

He foresaw that a showdown with the South African Government was sooner or later inevitable and knew from his own individual experience that no brute force could quell the spirit of man ready to defy and willing to suffer. What he could do himself he could train others to do. Individual resistance could be expanded and organized into a mass struggle in the prosecution of a moral equivalent of war. He had read Tolstoy and Thoreau's use of the term 'civil disobedience' did not seem to express Gandhi's own concept of ahimsa as a positive force of love, nor did he like the use of the phrase 'passive resistance'. The concept was now clearly formulated in his mind but the word to describe it was wanting. His cousin Maganlal Gandhi suggested *Sadagraha*, meaning holding fast to truth or firmness in a righteous cause. Gandhi liked the term and changed to Satyagraha. Thus was evolved and formulated Gandhi's most original idea in political action.⁹

In 1911 things seemed to settle down, but the Union government went back on its promise and even nullified all non-Christian marriages and now Kasturbai too joined the struggle. The Satyagraha which was Gandhi's form of non-violent protest spread rapidly. In January, 1914 a provisional agreement was worked out between Gandhi and Smuts and the main Indian demands were conceded too. In 1914 on Gokhale's request Gandhi sailed to India.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss in what ways Mahatma Gandhi contributed to the struggle for the rights of the Indians living in South Africa.

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1.5 THE STRUGGLE IN INDIA

In April 1893, Gandhi had sailed for South Africa, a young and inexperienced barrister in search of fortune. In January 1915 he finally returned to India with no possessions and with only one ambition and purpose that is to serve his people. He didn't know India, its people or their problems well. He therefore promised his 'political guru' Gokhale, that he would spend the first year in India studying the country, with 'his ears open but his mouth shut'. After one year of roaming India, Gandhi settled down on the bank of the river Sabarmati, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, where he founded an ashram in May 1915. He called it the 'Satyagraha Ashram'.

Gandhi's first public address in India was on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Banaras Hindu University in February 1916, which was attended by many distinguished persons and princes and the Viceroy himself. Speaking in English he shocked them all by expressing his 'deep humiliation and shame' at being compelled to address his countrymen in a language that was foreign to him.

His first Satyagraha in India was in Champaran, in Bihar, where he went in 1917 at the request of poor peasants to inquire into the grievances of the much exploited peasantry of that district. The peasants here were forced by British indigo planters to grow indigo on 15 per cent of their land and part with the whole crop for rent. The indigo farmers of the area found a champion in Gandhi and Gandhi embarrassed the magistrate into releasing him. The incident taught Gandhi the power of peaceful Satyagraha and the masses. The report of the committee of which Gandhi was a member went in favour of the tenant farmers. The success of his first experiment in Satyagraha in India greatly enhanced Gandhi's reputation in his country. Similarly, Gandhi took up the cause of the textile mill workers in Ahmadabad. He refused to touch food till the matter was amicably solved. At the end of three days, both parties agreed on arbitration amid general rejoicing.

Soon the agrarian trouble in the Kheda district of Gujarat began. The peasants who were on the verge of starvation were being forced by the Government to pay the usual tax. Gandhi advised Satyagraha and persuaded all the peasants, the well-to-do as well as the poor, to take a pledge not to pay any tax until those who could not pay were granted respite. The no-tax campaign lasted for about four months at the end of which the Government suspended the tax for the poor peasants.

1.5.1 Khilafat Movement Post the First World War

Gandhi had agreed to support the British during their fight in the First World War, but the British failed to fulfil their promise of granting India independence post the war, and as a result of this the Khilafat Movement was launched. Gandhi realized that Hindus and Muslims must unite to fight the British and urged both the communities to show solidarity and unity, though his motives were questioned by many Hindu leaders. Despite the opposition from many leaders, Gandhi managed to gather the support of Muslims, but as the Khilafat Movement ended abruptly, all his efforts got wasted.

1.5.2 Non-cooperation Movement

Non-cooperation Movement was one of Gandhi's most important movements against the British. Gandhi urged his fellow countrymen to stop cooperating

with the British. He believed that the British succeeded in ruling over India only because of the co-operation of the Indians. He warned the British not to pass the Rowlatt Act, but they did not pay any attention to his words and passed the Act. As soon as it was announced, Gandhi asked everyone to start civil disobedience (boycott, picketing etc.) against the British. The British began suppressing the civil disobedience movement by force. He urged people to show unity, non-violence and respect for human life, but the British responded aggressively to this and arrested many protesters. On 13 April 1919, a British officer General Dyer, ordered his forces to open fire on a peaceful gathering, including women and children, in Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh. As a result of this, hundreds of innocent Hindu and Sikh civilians were killed. The incident came to be known as 'Jallianwala Bagh Massacre'. This cowardly massacre of the innocent was followed by the declaration of martial law in the Punjab, with wholesale arrests, floggings and the inhuman order. The events of that day which have been called by Sir Valentine Chirol as that "black day in the annals of British India" marked a turning point in the history of the Indian struggle. The moral prestige of Britain received a fatal blow. Henceforth, Gandhi could not keep away from the battlefield of Indian politics.

The concept of non-cooperation became very popular and started spreading through the length and breadth of India. Gandhi extended this movement and focused on Swaraj (independence). He urged people to stop using British goods. He also asked people to resign from government employment, quit studying in British institutions and stop practicing law in courts. However, the violent clash in Chauri Chaura town of Uttar Pradesh, in February 1922, forced Gandhi to call off the movement all of a sudden. Gandhi was arrested on 10th March 1922 and was tried for sedition. He was sentenced to six years imprisonment, but served only two years in prison.

1.5.3 Simon Commission and Salt Satyagraha

During the period of 1920s, Mahatma Gandhi concentrated on resolving the differences between the Swaraj Party and the Indian National Congress. In 1927, British appointed Sir John Simon as the head of a new constitutional reform commission, which was popularly known as the 'Simon Commission'. There was not even a single Indian in the commission. Agitated by this, Gandhi passed a resolution at the Calcutta Congress session in December 1928, calling on the British government to grant India dominion status. In case the British did not comply with this demand, they were to face a new protest of non-violence demanding complete independence or 'Poorna Swaraj' for the country. These demands were rejected by the British. The Indian flag was unfurled by the Indian national Congress on 31st December 1929 at its Lahore session on the banks of river Ravi. January 26, 1930 was also celebrated as the Independence Day of India. The British failed to give into these demands and soon they levied a tax on salt and thus the 'Salt Satyagraha' was launched in March 1930, opposing the tax levied on salt. Gandhi started the Dandi March with his followers in March, going from Ahmedabad to Dandi on foot. The protest was successful and resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931.

1.5.4 Round Table Conferences

Post the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Gandhi was invited to round table conferences by the British. While Gandhi pressed for the Indian independence, British questioned

Gandhi’s motives and asked him not to speak for the entire nation. They invited many religious leaders and B. R. Ambedkar to represent the untouchables. The British promised many rights to various religious groups as well as the untouchables. Fearing this move would divide India further, Gandhi protested against this by fasting. After learning about the true intentions of the British during the second conference, he started another Satyagraha, for which he was once again arrested.

1.5.5 Quit India Movement

As the Second World War progressed, Mahatma Gandhi intensified his protests for the complete independence of India. He drafted a resolution calling for the British to Quit India. The ‘Quit India Movement’ or the ‘Bharat Chhodo Andolan’ was the most aggressive movement launched by the Indian national Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was arrested on 9th August 1942 and was held for two years in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, where he lost his secretary, Mahadev Desai and his wife, Kasturba. The Quit India Movement came to an end by the end of 1943, when the British gave hints that complete power would be transferred to the people of India. Gandhi called off the movement which resulted in the release of 100,000 political prisoners.

1.5.6 Freedom and Partition of India

The independence cum partition proposal offered by the British Cabinet Mission in 1946 was accepted by the Congress, despite being advised otherwise by Mahatma Gandhi. Sardar Patel convinced Gandhi that it was the only way to avoid civil war and he reluctantly gave his consent. After India’s independence, Gandhi focused on peace and unity of Hindus and Muslims. He launched his last fast-unto-death in Delhi, and asked people to stop communal violence.

1.5.7 Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

The inspiring life of Mahatma Gandhi came to an end on 30th January 1948, when he was shot by a fanatic, Nathuram Godse, at point-blank range. Nathuram was a Hindu radical, who held Gandhi responsible for weakening India by ensuring the partition payment to Pakistan. Godse and his co-conspirator, Narayan Apte, were later tried and convicted. They were executed on 15th November 1949.¹⁰

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss the various political movements launched by Gandhi in India to gain Independence.

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1.6 SUMMARY

Mahatma Gandhi proposed the acceptance and practice of truth, non-violence, vegetarianism, Brahmacharya (celibacy), simplicity and faith in God. Though he would be remembered forever as the man who fought for Indian independence, his greatest legacies are the tools he used in his fight against the British. These methods inspired several other world leaders in their struggle against injustice. His statues are installed all over the world and he is considered the most prominent personality in Indian history. The word Mahatma is often mistaken in the West as Gandhi's first name. His extraordinary life inspired innumerable works of art in the field of literature, art and showbiz. Many movies and documentaries have been made on the life of the Mahatma. Post the Independence, Gandhi's image became the mainstay of Indian paper currency.

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1 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should highlight the influence of family, friends and religion on Gandhi's early learning.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Discuss the importance of Satyagraha movement, the role of Indian Opinion in shaping public opinion.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Highlight the contribution of NCM, CDM and the Quit India movement.



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UNIT 2 GANDHI'S CONCEPTION OF MODERN CIVILIZATION AND ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY*

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
Aims and Objectives
- 2.2 Gandhi's Idea of Civilization
- 2.3 Modern Civilization and Loss of India's Freedom
- 2.4 Critique of Industrialization and Mechanization
- 2.5 Education as Critique of Modernity
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Key Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Readings
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi was a mass leader and his beliefs affected generations to come. As such it is a good idea to attain a sense of civilization as he perceived it. In his mind he was very clear as to the differences between the Western civilization and the Indian civilization. He was a strong critic of the western mode of living and sense of morality. He did not believe that the scientific and technological advancement by the West constituted progress. Most of the words and symbols Gandhi invented and used in his long political and philosophical struggle against the British and the Western materialism were symbols of Indian tradition on the one hand and a critique of modern Western civilization on the other. These words and symbols have more than one meaning. They also present multiple messages and the most important among them was a critique of modernity. These essentially Indian words and symbols were used by Gandhi as critiques of and to counter the three important concepts of nationalism, industrialism and western education, which form the very core of modernity in India. All these suggest that Gandhi refused to accept 'modern civilization' which he designated and described as 'Western civilization' and most of the values it stood for. He actively countered them with words, symbols, concepts, traditions, values and in all, the very philosophy which is essentially Indian.

Aims and Objectives

This unit will enable you to understand

- Gandhi's ideas and perspectives on modern western and Indian civilizations.
- His critique of industrialization and mechanization.
- His use of Indian symbols like Khadi to counter modern civilization.
- His ideas of education that best suited India.

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2.2 GANDHI'S IDEA OF CIVILIZATION

Gandhi explained in detail his ideas and concepts of civilization, positive and negative features of Western civilization i.e., modern civilization, and comparison and contrast between Indian and Western civilizations in many speeches and writings especially in *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote in Gujarati in 1909 on his return voyage from London to South Africa. It came out in two installments in the same year in the Gujarati edition of *Indian Opinion*, the weekly published by Gandhi in South Africa. It was issued as a booklet in Gujarati in 1910 and was banned by the British authorities on the charges of seditious content. Undaunted by this move of the imperial authorities, Gandhi later developed the ideas he expressed in *Hind Swaraj* further and enriched them by new contributions throughout his life. His views emanated mainly from his reaction to events and his attempt to give encouragement to many social reforms and political movements. A uniformity existed in his thoughts and this uniformity in Gandhi's thoughts arose from a moral approach and a desire to lead active and creative life not for the sake of himself but for the sake of his countrymen.

Gandhi regarded violence un-Indian, something alien to Indian civilization and he makes his opinions amply clear in *Hind Swaraj*. In a sense, the aim of *Hind Swaraj* was to confront the anarchist and violence-prone Indian nationalism with an alternative to violence derived from Gandhi's earliest experiments with *Satyagraha*. Gandhi mentioned that *Hind Swaraj* was written in order to show that his countrymen were following a suicidal policy of violence, and that if they look back to their own glorious civilization, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianized or lose their interest in controlling India. Furthermore, in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi depicted 'the dichotomy between the spiritual, moral superiority of Indian society, and the violent, politically corrupt nature of European states'. While condemning the 'brute force' of Western power, Gandhi distanced himself from the militant nationalists because they supported violence which he considered a suicidal strategy as it would provoke 'organized violence' by the ruling authority.

Hind Swaraj was a detailed commentary on Western civilization that thrived on material power.

In the *Hind Swaraj*, he launched an attack on every aspect of western civilization in order to prove how evil and how harmful it was. The text also contains Gandhi's alternative to modern civilisation and a programme of action and behaviour that Indians must follow to make that alternative a reality. Gandhi equated modern civilization with the western one because the west was the principal site of all that is considered modern. What he actually attacked was a particular form of western civilisation, the one that emerged with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

According to Gandhi, modern Western civilization is characterized by the many negative features like greed, aggression, colonialism, imperialism, war technology, inequity, exploitation, poverty, extravagance and luxury, bodily comforts, unbridled individualism and vulgar materialism, immorality, valueless and commercial education, alienation and so on. These were thoroughly criticized by Gandhi. Before explaining these features in detail and their impact on social, economic, political and moral aspects of modern human life, and Gandhi's overall

critique of Western civilization scattered throughout his extensive works, it is better to know what Gandhi meant by civilization -both Western and Indian himself. According to Gandhi, "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves."¹¹

In the chapter titled "Civilization" in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi provided an elaborate explanation about his ideas on modern (western) civilization. He elaborated as to what state of things is described by the word 'civilization'. He writes, "Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life. The people of Europe today live in better-build houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly, they wore skins, and used spears as their weapons. Now, they wear long trousers, and, for embellishing their bodies, they wear a variety of dresses and instead of spears, they carry with them revolvers containing five or more chambers. If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilized out of savagery. Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labour. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in wagons. Now, they fly through the air, in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that, as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part, of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motor-car will be in waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a test of civilization. Formerly, special messengers were required and much expense was incurred in order to send letters; today, anyone can abuse his fellow by means of a letter for one penny. True, at the same cost, one can send one's thanks also. Formerly, people had two or three meals consisting of home-made bread and vegetables; now, they require something to eat every two hours so that they have hardly leisure for anything else. This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion. This civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so. This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad. This civilization is such that one has only to be patient

and it will be self-destroyed. According to the teaching of Mohammed this would be considered a Satanic Civilization. Hinduism calls it a Black Age.”¹²

Gandhi greatly admired and hence greatly glorified the Indian civilization. But, while admiring the Indian civilization, Gandhi was not unaware of the fact that India of his days was not exactly like he described it. He was quite aware of the darker side of the Indian society and the social evils prevalent in it-child marriage, child widows, teenaged mothers, sati, not allowing widows to re-marry, denying education to women and girls, female infanticide, polyandry, existence of the practice of Niyoga, where, girls dedicate themselves to prostitution in the name of religion, goats and sheep killed in the name of religion, untouchability. He candidly regarded those defects as defects. He declared that nobody mistook evils of Indian civilization for ancient civilization. He recognized the attempts that have always been made in the past to remove those evils and believed that such attempts would be made to remove them in future too. He admitted that Indian civilization too like other civilizations was not perfect in every sense, but according to him Indian civilization has a tendency to elevate the moral being, and the Western civilization propagates immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God. Gandhi declared that ‘India is unique. Its strength is immeasurable’.¹³ He also draws our attention to the historical fact that when other civilizations succumbed, the Indian civilization has survived many shocks. Gandhi himself worked tirelessly throughout his life against various social evils prevalent in the Indian society especially untouchability and called the untouchables ‘children of God’ or ‘harijans’.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for the tips for your answer.

1) Discuss Gandhi’s idea of civilization

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2.3 MODERN CIVILIZATION AND LOSS OF INDIA’S FREEDOM

Gandhi opined that Indians distancing themselves from their civilization which was essentially spiritual and, instead, moving towards the material richness on which the Western civilization was based on was the inner and fundamental cause for India losing its freedom. He condemns the fratricidal attitude of Indian princes that gave an opportunity for the British to enhance their military presence here. He also cites the animosity between Hindus and the Muslims of India who were at daggers drawn at each other, also as a potential opportunity the East India Company got and thus the Indians created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. And Gandhi concludes that, “hence it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost.”¹⁴

Gandhi was of the strong opinion that when Indians would realize the greatness of their civilization and take to their ancient roots they would be able to shed the disease of slavery. This was because he believed it was a period of weakness that Indian civilization went through that allowed the British to take control of India. Gandhi believed that the British had introduced the modern railways, telegraph, western education, professions of lawyers and doctors etc. not to benefit the Indians but to further impoverish them.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Critically evaluate Gandhi's arguments against modern civilization.

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2.4 CRITIQUE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MECHANIZATION

Gandhi believed that industrialization had given rise to a violent concept of nationalism in the West. According to him industrialization had divided the society into haves and have-nots and created not only economic inequality but also brought about moral deprivation such as greed and enslavement of the working class. Gandhi's critique is directed at the heart of the urban industrial vision. His condemnation of Western civilization was based on the roots of this civilization-Machine. It was the domination of Machine, the root cause of the malaise that afflicted India. According to him it was machine that has impoverished India. As such the concept of 'Khadi' or the spinning of cotton yarn on wooden charkhas was adopted by Gandhi not only as a weapon against western industrialization but also to promote the concept of 'Swaraj' and 'swadeshi'. He vociferously opined that when Indian people wore and took up things made indigenously everyone would gain pride in our lost civilization. Earlier saints like Kabir had propagated this idea through their rustic songs.

Gandhi declared in unequivocal terms that his Swadeshi chiefly centered on the hand-spun Khaddar and extended to everything that could be and is produced in India. In this sense, Khadi was reversion to that glorious civilization which India had nurtured before the Europeans arrived. During the years of his withdrawal from active politics in mid-1920s, Gandhi devoted himself to the propagation of Khadi turning it into a cult, as a strategy of nation-building from the grassroots. He suggested a Khadi franchise for the organization and even envisaged a "yarn currency."¹⁵ Gandhi's almost emotional attachment to the spinning wheel should have baffled both the British and Western educated town-bred Indians. It was obvious as they were unable to grasp the incredible poverty of Indian villages.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss Gandhi’s critique of industrialization and mechanization.

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2.5 EDUCATION AS CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

Basic education was arguably the most important arena for the introduction of modernity in India. Designed as it was by the colonial masters, besides remaining generally detached from Indian tradition, it was also oblivious to the needs and problems of the teeming millions in the countryside. Gandhi’s basic education scheme was primarily a system of rural education and handicrafts constituted the medium of instruction. Spinning and weaving was Gandhi’s preference among the crafts and so his entire pedagogy and educational philosophy was intermeshed with his khadi-based approach to life.

Gandhi was critical of the Western system of education for much of what it stood for. He felt that it was wholly unsuited to India’s needs, and was a bad copy of the Western model. He further said that the then education system had, by reason of the medium of instruction being a foreign language, sapped the energy of the youths who had passed through our schools and colleges and had produced an army of clerks and office-seekers. He was of strong opinion that it had dried up all originality, impoverished the vernaculars and had deprived the masses of the benefit of higher knowledge which would otherwise have percolated through the intercourse of the education classes with them. This education system created a gulf between educated India and the masses; it stimulated the brain but starved the spirit for want of a religious basis for education and emaciated the body for want of training in handicrafts. He alleged that this system criminally neglected the greatest need of agricultural training.

Gandhi would have sounded as quite harsh and radical to the educated Indians as he castigated their educational training and their values and told them they were traitors to their motherland by being willing victims of the education system in vogue. It is an interesting fact that, despite their opposition to British rule, most of the nationalists did not reject the British rule. At the same time most other nationalists did not reject the British system of education outright, since they viewed it as a means by which India could become a materially advanced nation. Gandhi, however, thought differently from the beginning of his political career. He wanted to make education self-supporting, train the bodies of the children as well as their minds and pave the way for a complete boycott of foreign yarn and cloth. Moreover, the children thus equipped will become self-reliant and independent.¹⁶

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.
- 1) Discuss Gandhi's critique of modern education.

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2.6 SUMMARY

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The multiple influence on Gandhi both from the Western (Tolstoy, Thoreau, Ruskin) and Indian (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jain philosophy) requires discussion.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Western/modernist mode of development privileges the fulfillment of bodily (material) needs. This point needs elaboration.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) The deepening of inequality, increased alienation and environmental decay

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

It is not correct to conclude that Gandhi was against all the currents of modern civilization and that he wanted to return to the past, essentially Indian. Often he made an exaggerated attack on modern civilization for its ills. As far as the social organization was concerned, Gandhi was a religious and social reformer. He fought against such practices as hereditary priesthood, untouchability against the so called low castes and the denial of entry to temples to them. He conducted many campaigns, based on social equality and scientific spirit for the cause of these social reforms. The socio-economic changes that took place in Gandhi's times and later in India and the emergence of new social classes helped the popularization of modern ideas which Gandhi tried to spread in his times. With regard to the negation of violence and the prospects of conducting social and political movement, Gandhi was ahead of his times and was referred as the "Prophet of the Atomic Era."

Gandhi's concept of modernity and civilization revolved around the concepts of:-

- a) Swaraj- Swaraj means self-governance or self-rule. He described his idea of an ideal socio-economic order in the words: "Independence must begin at the bottom, thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers." The focus was on political decentralization.
- b) Swadeshi- Swadeshi according to Gandhi simply meant using one's own country made local goods. Gandhi also gave an economic, political and social dimension to the term 'swadeshi' and used it as a weapon against the British rule.
- c) Ahimsa- Ahimsa or non-violence to Gandhi was essential and hence he also criticized Western civilization on the grounds that it promoted violence.

- d) Khadi- *Khadi* according to Gandhi evoked memories of India's great past before the British mills drove weavers out of business and onto impoverished farms. *Khadi* thus served as an appropriate example of independence and identity.

Gandhi was critical of pursuit of materialism, opposed machines and centralization of production, and favoured, on the contrary, a life of labour for everyone in the society, concisely contained in his concept of 'bread-labour'. He believed in the ideal of economic self-sufficiency of the villages. The modernity that Gandhi foresaw for India was that of a spiritual ascendancy and strong moral values. He believed all Indians should respect and be large hearted enough to accept human beings with virtues and flaws. Modernity according to him was never an accumulation of goods and commodities but the gathering of values which took a person closer to '*parameshwar*' (God) which was the most significant of all truths.

There were occasions when Gandhi remarked on modern western civilization being yet 'a good idea.' He was not against modern civilization in total, but had a deep suspicion of the material progress in the West and in concept of modernity. He was aware that there were elements in modern civilization, like democratic political philosophy, that could be useful to India. In the preface to the English edition of *Hind Swaraj*, he even urged his countrymen to adopt such positive aspects of modern civilization to drive out the English



UNIT 3 GANDHI'S CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT*

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
Aims and Objectives
- 3.2 Inequitable Development
- 3.3 Violence and Development
- 3.4 Development Destroying Environment
- 3.5 New Concepts of Development
- 3.6 Gandhi's Vision and Critique of Development
- 3.7 Summary
- 3.8 Suggested Readings
- 3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or is the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change. The existing methods of measuring development in terms of economic progress, industrialization, consumption of energy and urbanization have become insufficient and have failed to address the various issues that are the source of misery to the people of this world.¹⁷

Gandhi has had tremendous influence on current development thinking. Most of those influenced fall under the counter-modernist or the postmodernist school. The influence of Gandhi's thoughts cuts across fields of policy, activism and development practice as well. Since the popular method of analysis of Gandhi and the Gandhian, has increased its saleability, especially in the West, it hardly helps us to understand the real nature of Gandhian leadership of an interest-based political movement in its competitive context.¹⁸

Aims and Objectives

This unit will enable you to understand

- Inequalities due to the current methods of development.
- Development leading to violence.
- Development having a destructive effect on the environment.
- New concepts of development (sustainable development).

- Gandhi's vision and critique of development as a solution to the problems associated with development.

3.2 INEQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

The mainstream model of development has continued to breed inequality. It has not only created vertical inequalities, but also horizontal inequalities with some factions benefiting from development in most of the societies. Thus, the fruits of economic growth are being enjoyed and retained by a small section of the elite resulting in inequitable development. This was and is a universal problem and Indian society has been no exception to it. The process of development has also resulted in the widening of North-South divide in which the developed countries of the North get the major share of the benefits of development. The countries of the South are left to fend for themselves which has slowed their economic progress. The problem of inequality is both intra and inter-society and this has become too prominent to be ignored by the ruling elite. A number of measures are being undertaken to tackle the ever growing problem of inequality throughout the world.

If we take the example of India, India initiated a number of measures after independence including Integrated Rural Development Programme, Tribal Welfare Schemes, reservations for economically and socially deprived sections of the society, Employment Guarantee Schemes and the Cash Transfer Scheme. All these measures were supposed to contribute to inclusive growth resulting in elimination of widespread inequality both in economic and social terms. Not only that, India also entered into a new phase of economic policies in 1991 characterised by Globalisation and liberalisation. It aimed at hastening the process of development which could at least lessen the problem of inequality, if not end it. Now it is more than obvious that all these measures have failed to tackle the problem of mass poverty and inequality. Contrary to the claim of the Government for taking a large section of people above poverty line, the problem of mass poverty and inequality remain as uncontrollable as ever.¹⁹

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) What is development? How do the current methods of development create inequalities?

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3.3 VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Many analysts believe that there is a close relationship between development and violence. The problem of violence has taken an endemic form, particularly because development led to the uprooting and displacement of large sections of

people including tribals, indigenous communities, fishermen, migrant labour, and these turned out to be the worst victims of development. They were gradually deprived of their traditional sources of livelihood. In the process of industrialisation, millions of people were and are still forcibly robbed of their land without any proper scheme for their rehabilitation. Such forcible ousters not only create physical suffering but also psychological disorientation.

These people are forced to the edge of desperation due to such processes. Many times some of these groups, out of extreme suffering and helplessness, resort to violence. Thus, a vicious and never-ending cycle of violence is being created which is getting difficult to tackle. Rapid phase of urbanisation, unbridled and forcible acquisition of land for mining, construction of big dams, hydro-electric projects, mammoth real estate businesses etc., have become primary sources of displacement of people in most of the societies. A clear-cut message is going to the dispossessed and downtrodden people that the present model of development only promotes the interests of the elite. For example, in India the increasing violent movements of Naxals or Maoists in different parts of the country is becoming the most serious internal security threat to the country. These resentments of the people are being exploited by groups which ideologically stand for violence and class war. Even though the Government seems to be aware of the different dimensions of the problem, the dynamics of development hardly leave it with any other alternative than to continue with its present policies. Thus development and violence go hand in hand.²⁰

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) How does development lead to violence?

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3.4 DEVELOPMENT DESTROYING ENVIRONMENT

Apart from leading to inequitable development and growing violence, the present development pattern continues to create ecological/environmental imbalances causing a serious threat to the very existence of human society. Climate change, ozone layer depletion, global warming, melting of the polar ice, and rising of sea levels and pollution are the consequences of mainstream industrial development. The Governments all over the world are aware of the ill effects of global warming. However, the various steps taken by them to mitigate the emission of greenhouse gases have failed to produce the desired results.

In fact, the current state of environment is quite disturbing. It has been evident from the continuous rise in earth’s mean surface temperature. All living beings

are experiencing the ill-effects of global warming and ozone layer depletion. It is obvious that the present pattern of development which requires high consumption of energy, without which it can hardly sustain itself. This has led to rapid depletion of major energy sources like coal, petrol, water etc. and encouraged many countries to go for nuclear power, which has its own disadvantages. Thus, it is clear that sustained availability of energy has become a thorny issue which is bound hamper any prospects of smooth development in the long run.²¹

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) How does development have a destructive effect on environment?

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3.5 NEW CONCEPTS OF DEVELOPMENT

It is due to the above mentioned problems of mainstream development that new concepts and ideas began to emerge to address the problems related to environment and development and find appropriate solutions. Development has started being viewed in a holistic perspective. As early as 1972, the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, proposed that we should consider the 'Gross National Happiness' as the best index of development instead of relying on the usual Gross Domestic Product. He emphasised the need to take a holistic approach towards methods of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing of the people. This new approach subsequently became a part of the popular discourse on viable model of development. Subsequently, in the context of growing disparity and divide between the countries of North and South, sustainable development and the idea of inclusive growth became popular concepts particularly in the West. The Brundtland Commission's definition of Sustainable development contains within it two key concepts. i) the concept of 'needs', in particular, the essential needs of the world's poor, that should be given priority and ii) the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. According to the Commission the major objective of development is satisfaction of human needs and aspirations. Thus it reversed the earlier idea of economic growth based on GDP and per capita income. This idea was further fine-tuned by emphasising new notions of human development.

From the above discussion, one can easily deduce that some of the intellectual minds of the world have partially come to realise the significance of some of the seminal ideas propounded by Gandhi in his work Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule and other subsequent writings. However, it goes without saying that some of the new ideas of development as discussed above are no more than an attempt to sustain the western capitalist model which has created most of the problems

afflicting the humankind today. Moreover, all these endeavours also appear as a ploy to hide the stark realities of North-South divide which could be bridged only by a more radical vision of development which Gandhi proposed in his life time.²²

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the new concepts of development.

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3.6 GANDHI’S VISION AND CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT

Gandhi did not work out a tangible model of development, but presented a way of life which could manifest into a broad philosophy of development. His relational world view underlined the significance of interdependence and interconnectedness of elements in the universe. His entire philosophy of life was unique and based on the understanding that no human being, could look upon himself/herself as the sole custodian of earth and its resources. Gandhi viewed life as an opportunity for self-realisation. Since human beings are social and life has to be lived in society and not in seclusion, human being has to deal with innumerable problems which involve challenges and opportunities. To him the most important element in human person is spirit or soul. He looked upon human body as an instrument. He believed that giving primacy to body hampers the assertion and growth of spirit. One’s perception of wants, access to resources, utilisation of resources and interaction with other beings and nature had therefore to be viewed and pursued keeping in mind the ultimate goal of life. We have to constantly introspect on the relation between our lives and nature, what we consume in terms of energy, food etc. and what we receive from nature. We have to find out whether we are making legitimate and proper use of it in relation to our objective and responsibility to society. We have to effectively utilise our time to fulfil our objective without making too many demands on the environment. Gandhi placed before people a lifestyle or art of living and also demonstrated its practicability by living his own life quite in tune with these principles. The application of Gandhi’s philosophy will allow human beings to satisfy their basic needs without harming interests of fellow beings. In its best form, it helps to lead a better life.

Gandhi’s philosophy of life calls for an alternative development pattern which is in harmony with nature and the eco-system. Gandhi’s model of development deals with whole spectrum of life in which the political, economic, social, spiritual cannot be separated, but for easy analysis one has to look into different components of his model of development.

Gandhi differs from many mainstream economists in his economic ideas. Most of the economists mainly concentrate on the material side of human life. Gandhi made a clear distinction between 'economic progress' and 'moral progress' and believed that, when people refer to economic progress, they mean material advancement without limit and by real progress they mean moral progress. He asserted that though he was not well versed with modern economic thinking such as that of economists Adam Smith and others, but one could arrive at a point where a small voice could become one's guide for one's thought and action without requiring any external proof or evidence. In other words, for Gandhi, the inner voice of a purified soul is as good as God's voice and one's inner voice could only be heard if one is able to identify oneself with the entire creation and adopt a life of *aparigraha*. (non- possession). He found the basic flaw in the modern economic thinking that it prompted the people particularly the elite to worship money instead of God which becomes the main stumbling block of moral progress. He further added that the real measure of a well ordered society is "not the number of millionaires it owns, but the absence of starvation among the masses." Gandhi referred to the gospel of Mark in support of his ideas where it said, "Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Thus it is clear that Gandhian economic ideas marked a definite departure from mainstream economic thinking.

The entire Gandhian economic thinking is the development of a non-violent economy and its long term sustenance. To achieve these ends Gandhi developed novel ideas like voluntary reduction of wants with emphasis on fulfilment of basic needs of the people, production by masses instead of mass production, bread labour, yajna, trusteeship, swadeshi, and use of machinery with a human face. It is clear that Gandhi presents a totally new vision of development which can replace the western model of development which is marked by its overemphasis on expansion of human wants with urbanisation and industrialisation as its major tools resulting in emergence of atomised and ego centric individuals devoid of all spiritual quests and totally ignoring the community spirit. Such individuals are driven by only bodily comforts as the ultimate goal of human life. All these lead to mad rush for excessive consumerism resulting in overexploitation of finite resources of the earth.

Today as we know humankind is faced with a conflict between insatiable human wants and finite resources. Gandhi reversed the entire process by presenting a viable, concrete development model. He tries to bring a true balance between the finite natural resources and human wants by making a clear distinction between human need and greed. He never glorified poverty as such which results in all kinds of human misery and human degradation. In fact, he stood for total abolition of poverty by ensuring self-generating and self-sufficient economic order. Gandhi by emphasising his innovative concept of 'oceanic circle' tried to bring together individual freedom with community concerns from village level to the global level.

Gandhi's real strength lay in the fact he did not only formulate abstract ideas, but he presented a practical and logical model by reversing the order of mass production by introducing the idea of production by masses. Such a decentralised economy marked by intensive use of labour, instead of replacing it with machinery, could really tackle some of the problems afflicting the present system, like

unemployment, automation, alienation and, large scale industrialisation. The local resources are utilized to produce swadeshi goods would constitute the backbone of such a decentralised economy in which the village would form the basic unit. Absence of work ethics is one of the basic challenges under the present system as it is taken as a matter of drudgery and compulsion. Besides, all over the world people prefer mental work to menial work, thus creating unbridgeable gulf between elites and masses. Inspired by the *Bhagavat Gita*'s concept of incessant work engaged even by God and service to the fellow beings in the Sermon on the Mount, Gandhi took work ethics at a high philosophical and spiritual level. In such a scenario the differentiation between mental and menial work gets automatically wiped out. By undertaking scavenging work Gandhi wanted to establish the dignity of labour in a society like India which was historically marked by hierarchy. Not only that, going a step further, he made physical labour as a precondition for earning one's bread, and that is the real meaning of his concept of bread labour. Taking a further clue from the *Bhagavat Gita* he offered a new and innovative interpretation of the concept of Yajna. He made it clear that it should be compulsory for every individual to contribute to the social good and take only that much of his share which he really needs. He went to the extent of saying that anyone who does not contribute his share to social good and yet takes more than his share is nothing less than a thief. His concept of Yajna is a unique attempt for the continuous renewal of resources given by the nature while giving an equitable share to every member of the society. In such a view of development the individual and social needs are wedded to each other.

Management and ownership pattern of the institution of private property has been one of the most conflicting issues in modern times. There has been a long history of debate on this issue between the liberals and Marxists. While liberals emphasized on private management and ownership, the Marxists have stood for state ownership under the guise of social ownership. Gandhi was aware of flaws of both these schools of thought. According to him capitalism breeds selfishness inequality and excessive profiteering; Marxism leads to totalitarianism under their most obscure principle of dictatorship of the proletariat. Through his theory of trusteeship, Gandhi tries to find a way out from the faults present in both the systems. Trusteeship offers a model of management and ownership of private property which curtails the excesses of both the system while retaining the individual initiative with promotion of social good. This would give a new meaning and perspective to both the individual and the society.

Gandhi's model of development also incorporates his concept of decentralised polity which is a necessary part of his whole scheme. Both liberal and Marxist political systems suffer from two major defects. One, the system of political representation fails to reflect popular will of the people. Two, despite their claims that the system benefits everyone right from the grass root levels, the system actually become top-down, thus putting a question mark on their democratic credentials. In the process, the people at the grass root level hardly play any meaningful role in the decision-making process. Gandhi being the champion of the common man was acutely conscious of these limitations. Hence, he strongly pleaded for a decentralised polity coupled with a decentralised economy. This would really give control of power to the people at the grass root level. In such a design of popular polity direct democracy was functional only at the level of the lowest unit based on adult franchise and direct elections. However, election to the higher bodies would be of indirect nature in which the elected representatives

of lower units would elect the higher ones. Gandhi truly believed that such a people-based polity would ensure democracy with greater amount of accountability. Besides, his development model based on decentralised economy could be propped up and supported by such a people-based politics as even the planning process would be bottom-up instead of top-down. This would help minimise the role of bureaucracy and involvement of people in the development process.

Today most of the societies in the world are beset by social and religious divisiveness which are one of the biggest obstacles in the path of development. This has led to the emergence of a new concept of multiculturalism as a countermeasure to social and religious divisiveness and to ensure social, cultural and religious harmony. However, such an approach is misplaced and primarily based on a feeling of tolerance rather than a belief in harmonious co-existence. It is becoming more and more obvious that Gandhi's concept of *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* (equal respect for all religions) provides a better framework for harmonious living of different religious groups and communities. Widespread and wholehearted acceptance of such an approach would ensure that a lot of society's resources are diverted towards providing a better way of life for the people. In short, social harmony based on Gandhi's religious and cultural world view could ensure an inclusive development leading to an equitable and just society.²³

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is Gandhi's idea of development? Critically Analyse.

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3.7 SUMMARY

Gandhi can be called a futurist in this sense as he was aware of the flaws in the system of development and what would be the future consequences of unequal distribution of wealth between different classes in a society. Today science and technology have taken unprecedented strides, and yet millions live in utter poverty; basic human rights are denied to them, powerful nations dominate over the powerless ones and innocent people become victims of terrorism. It is in this dismal situation that Gandhian viewpoint becomes useful. The mainstay of Gandhi's philosophy is that the human values and not the market should govern life. Service of the growing millions, the poor or *Daridra* is important. Gandhi puts forth a humane face of development. Gandhi aims at what we may call sustainable development, balanced development of body, mind and soul. Gandhi had realized that human development is not just material or economic; it has to be moral, it should be able to instil the values of equality, liberty and dignity in

the people; it must provide people with courage to protest against injustice. His emphasis on decentralization, community based economy, self-sufficiency, handicrafts, rural development, and use of low capital intensive appropriate technology indicate his vision for a self-sufficient economy.

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3.0 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should highlight that development is not just economic growth. The other aspects include social, political and psychological well being.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) The aspect of inequality must be highlighted.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Different sources such as climate change, ozone layer depletion, global warming, melting of the polar ice, and rising of sea levels and pollution should be highlighted

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) Your answer should include sustainable development and the focus on Gross Human Happiness instead of GDP

Check Your Progress Exercise 5



