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Relevance of Gandhian thought in 21st Century: A philosophical analysis

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Abstract

If we think about the past of Indian history then we can find that 'Untouchability' had a huge impact on Indian society system, but it did not end even after in so-called modern era. In 21st century its horrible impact colossal influences on our day-to-day life. It is universally true to say that people of India have been suffering by this awful system in different parts of India nobody can deny it. If we look it root cause it is vividly say that this system was introduced for satisfying only who belong to higher caste in the society and they can manipulate the social system according to their vested interests, accordingly, they can occupy great place in terms of lord of the society in every aspect. To stop this kind of Hierarchy evil system, many Indian social reformers were tried and M K Gandhi was one of them. We all, more or less know about M K Gandhi. If we talk about the name of a social activist, social reformer, and an anti-colonial nationalist who leads the nationalist movement during Indian Independence period then the name that comes first is M K Gandhi. At that time, we can find immense impact of casteism in terms of 'Untouchability' in the society in a different form. Being a social activist and social reformer, he tried to erase the social maladies by his own way. There is a miss conception about the root cause of casteism among us even in 21st century when we are sending Chandryan in moon. Someone blaming to the Vedas as well as Hindu scripture or texts as originator but there is no such proof or evidence in Hindu scripture or texts which satisfy the concept of Casteism in term of Untouchability. Gandhi was believed in God and that's why he believed that men are consist of soul or spirit and also an expression of the one reality which is God. Thus, it leads him to his next belief that men are essentially good and all men are divine being. Gandhi was believed to the concept of Karma and Rebirth as cycle which is very pertinent to this topic. First of all, in this paper, I shall try to find out lots of work which talks about How Gandhi tried to solve the problem of Untouchability? Or what was Gandhian thoughts on it? Secondly, I shall reflect his philosophy and thoughts how much relevance for key to create a violence free world which is earnestly necessary in today's environment.

Keywords: Casteism, untouchability, duty, rebirth, environment

Introductions

It is not exaggeration to say that the social system of the present age has changed a lot from the time when Gandhi ji started the Untouchability Movement. He tried hard to free the society from this social malady practice of Untouchability. But, even then, in today's society, its influence still remains somewhere. According to Lavanam Gora and Mark Lindley during Gandhi's time the society has four basic rules to follow-

1. First one was 'Untouchability'. Those who belong from lower caste, they used to treat as untouchable like some kind of disease. Even upper caste, they did not even look at the lower caste.
2. Social dining was restricted with lower caste.
3. Only endogamy marriages were allowed. Inter caste marriage was offensive and punishable deed for higher caste.
4. Most of the people follow their hereditary occupation and the lower caste was not allowed to explore to the other works, not even to take proper education ^[1]

He believed that the society cannot be freed from any bad social practice politically until the

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¹ "Was Gandhi a 'Champion of the Caste System'? Reflections on His Practices", *CSDS*, URL: https://www.csds.in/uploads/custom_files/1532340247_Was%20Gandhi%20a%20E2%80%98Champion%20of%20the%20Caste%20System%20E2%80%99.pdf.

pollution accumulated in the human mind is cleaned. He believed that in order to uproot any bad practice in the society, the beliefs of every human being need to be purified. Gandhi ji personally believe in a real egalitarian society where there will be no difference between rich and poor. That's why Untouchability was a form of social pollution for person like him who held such an ideology in life. He was associated with social constructive work to stop Untouchability because he wanted to make a safe environment for all people from different caste background. Where backward class will get respect and higher-class society will show appreciation to them for their work and existence. For him ever person is equally loved by God. That's why he names backward class or untouchables as 'Harijan' and this means children of God. Though he was against Untouchability, still he believes on 'Varṇashrama' system of society.

Gandhi's thought on Varṇa Vyavasthā

Basically, we all more or less know about 'Varṇashrama' system. Before knowing about caste system, we need to know why and how caste of each person was determined through this Varṇa Vyavasthā in ancient Indian society. Varṇa refers to the function of the person in the society based on the specific duty of the individual or the person towards the society. And this division of work was done depending on the influence of certain and different Guṇa present in people. Three Guṇa can be observed in every human being. These three Guṇa are śattva, tamas, rajas respectively. According to ancient Indian philosophy, all things in nature are consists of these three Guṇa. Each of these qualities has its own form and the form of each is different from each other. The nature of sattva Guṇa is true knowledge or consciousness, the nature of rajas Guṇa is dynamic and the nature of tamas Guṇa is static. Although every object or person has these three qualities, they do not have the same predominance in all. Therefore, not all qualities are the same in every human being. The effect of different qualities can be observed in different people. The Dharma or duty of Sattvapradhana Brāhmaṇa is Yajna, Teaching, Parigraha or Acceptance of Donations etc. Kṣatriyēra is mainly under effect of rajas Guṇa and also under little effect of śattva Guṇa and the duty of man of such qualities is to participate in war, serve the people of the state etc. The Vaiśya are mainly under effect of Rajas and they also have little effect of tamas and they mainly do trade, agriculture, animal husbandry etc. The Śūdra has only tamas and their duty in the society was to do service and to take care of the other three castes. We can get this kind of Ideas from Vedas and Puranas.

Gandhi was deeply influenced by ancient Hindu traditions and that's why we can see that though he believes that Untouchability is a social pollution in the society but still he supported the Varṇa Vyavasthā. He believed that the department of social function is essential to run a society. It functions like a cooperative social order with hereditary occupations ensuring everyone play a role in this society and every one's contribution for society is very important^[2]. Without one's contribution this society can be collapsed. He believes in social harmony. He thought that each and every class help to build up the society and provide stability through their contribution as a whole and thus they maintain

the social harmony. For him if we want to uproot the real cause of Untouchability from society then we have to change our mind set for better environment. Like Plato he thought that to make an Ideal state we must need classes. Plato in his philosophy talked about three classes- Ruling class, Military class and Professional class. He believed that individual virtue is needed to make an ideal state then justice will be automatically achieved through this. Likewise Gandhi also tried to maintain the four castes of society. But he failed in his approach.

That's why he also faced criticism for not fully rejecting the caste system. Because of that he also got into debate with Ambedkar. Ambedkar wanted to establish separate electorates for Untouchables but Gandhi ji opposed him. He feared that this might lead to disunity in the society and break the social unity. But later on, Gandhi ji realized that it was his big mistake that he didn't support Ambedkar's Idea. Many scholars argue that even his idealized view of the caste system ignored its inherent inequality.

Gandhi's Philosophy

By reading his philosophy we can know that for him Dharma meant duty. To us religion should be defined by truth and non-violence. Fulfilling the practical duties of our life is our religion. No religion promotes falsehood and violence. He thinks it is very important to have tolerance and moderation in the society. He felt that the deprived sections should awaken him within themselves by practicing non-violence and satyagraha.

Gandhi considers Truth as God because in every situation and every religion 'Truth' is something which is unchangeable. Likewise, we know that about God people have their own point of view, some says that God is formless and some says that God has form; some consider God as nameless and some not, and the same way as other Gandhi ji believed that God is Truth. According to him Truth is not as ambiguous as the word God, Truth is always something clear and significant. We can reject anything, but not Truth. That's why he believed that worshiping Truth can bring every person of every religion and every caste together. For him every creature is the part of God and equally hold rights to live in this world respectfully. According to his philosophy if we want to solve the problem of untouchability then we can say that every human being belonging to every cast is a creation of this world and it is a fact. And this fact is a truth. When the world made no distinction while creating each human being, we as common people don't have the ability to differentiate among human beings. So, it can be said that Gandhi j wanted to convey that even though there are differences between people in society in terms of duty, they are not untouchables. They are performing their duties and that does not make them untouchables. He tried to make an environment where everyone will respect this Truth. No one can ignore Truth.

But this was not the only philosophical concept that supported his untouchability movement. Apart from this, one more philosophical concept of his was non-violence which contributed significantly to this untouchability movement. Non-violence is one of his famous philosophical concepts, which we find mentioned in many places while talking about freedom struggle. But it was not only for the freedom struggle, it was a concept that ushered in a renaissance in society. When we talk about non-violence, Gandhi ji said that he discovered non-violence while

² Nishikant Kolge, Gandhi against Caste.

pursuing truth.

According to Gandhi ji, Truth and non-violence are two sides of the same coin. That is why it is absolutely impossible to separate truth and non-violence from each other. If truth is the end, then non-violence is the means. So, to know the truth we have to complete the journey through non-violence. Gandhi ji's policy of non-violence was inspired by the Jain philosophy. He believed that every human being should stay away from all kinds of violent activities. He also believed that every human being is a part of God hence there is divinity in every human being. So, it can be said that every human being is essentially good and divine. So, every man should give equal respect to every man and every creature. That is only possible through the practice of non-violence. Since every man is a part of God, the basic and essential quality of man is non-violence. Even the positive aspect of non-violence is love. By love he meant one kind of feeling of oneness. This love, according to him, is an energy that can deeply cleanse the human mind and make a person's character more beautiful and stronger. But love and non-violence are not possible for everyone to practice. Only mentally strong people can practice this love and non-violence in their life. He believed that the most powerful force in this world is love. Hey love can conquer any situation. Only a real person can solve all adverse situations with love. So, he wanted to build a society where every person loves everyone from the heart and deep. So, he wanted to eradicate the untouchability system of society through love and non-violence. He wanted to clean the pollution of violence from deep in the mind of every person in the society and through love and non-violence to make the society a better society where every person respects every person for his work, or insults and thinks untouchable.

Conclusion

We can now come to the conclusion after studying so far that Gandhiji's philosophy never promoted untouchability. However, much he supported casteism, the concept of untouchability was to him a disease of society. He believed that every human being is a divine being. God resides in every human being. He also thought that our identity is possible only through our work. Everyone has certain duties in this society. And each one of us has to perform that duty. Similarly, cast divides everyone's work or duties for everyone. Belittling someone based on their work is a wrong practice. It is not possible to run this society properly if everyone does not fulfil everyone's duty. And since he practiced non-violence, it was like a sin for him to support such kind of practice of untouchable attitude towards other people. And he never accepted such revengeful act. He wanted to change the sincere mentality of people with such ideas. His intention was a very noble move but unfortunately it was not possible to execute it. Ambedkar, another contemporary philosopher of his time, was fighting against castism and untouchability. Both of them had the same objective, but their paths were different. That is why he respected Ambedkar's ideology but could not fully accept and support it. But later he realized that he was wrong. He also thinks that if both of them had taken initiative for this work then untouchability could have been eradicated from the society today.

But we can say that his idea was a very noble idea. He wanted to make people pure in mind and non-violent. To support his efforts, every human being must practice on

non-violence in mind and recognize that every human being is a part of God. Not only that, every job we do is equally honorable. To accept his idea, we have to accept that everyone's work in this society is equally important. No one's work is small or big and it is very wrong to consider a person honorable or untouchable based on someone's work. A man never becomes honorable or untouchable because of his actions, his mentality makes him honorable or untouchable. It is not possible to practice non-violence in every human being because it requires hard work and likewise giving equal value to every human action requires a very big-hearted mentality which is not possible without practicing non-violence vow. Thus, if every man respects every man and his work or duty there will be no problem of untouchability in the society. And it was Gandhiji's aim to establish such a social order where every man could live shoulder to shoulder with every man with dignity. After all, we should think that we all are brother because we are pertaining same reality and Atma. We should remember that human service is to God service. These principles may make a situation in human mind for crate a peaceful environment in favour of us and without which anything cannot be possible in an all-around successful manner.

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