
UNIT 9 **GANDHI'S VIEWS ON WOMEN**

Structure

9.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

9.2 Gandhi on Women and India's Future

9.3 Ahimsa, Satyagraha and Woman

9.4 Freedom and Women

9.5 Summary

9.6 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

9.1 INTRODUCTION

To Gandhi, women, whom we call *abala* (weak), when becomes *sabala* (empowered), all those powerless becomes empowered. To him 'to call them (women) *abala* is to condemn the inherent strength of women; in my view it is an insult to them. If we peruse the history ...we shall come across marvellous instances of bravery shown by women. They not only exhibited their bravery through arms, but by building up their moral courage they developed immense strength. If women resolve to bring glory to the nation, within a few months they can totally change the face of the country because (of) of the spiritual background (of women)'. Herein Gandhi placed importance to the role of women in independence, in the reconstruction of the society and in its over all progress.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- Gandhi's views on women
- The qualities of ahimsa and satyagraha inherent in woman
- The role and contribution of women to freedom struggle.

9.2 GANDHI ON WOMEN AND INDIA'S FUTURE

Gandhi firmly opined that 'India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women'. While narrating about women's position, he was of the opinion that just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active help."

Gandhi recognised that women were made subordinate to man through several social practices and that these have conditioned women's thought process. He writes: "somehow or other man has dominated woman from ages past, and so woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status."

Gandhi, however, has recognised the essential need of gender-based division of labour in certain areas of social lives. To him: “there is no doubt that at some point there is bifurcation between man and woman. Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread-winner. She is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the care-taker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care the race must become extinct.”

To him man has specific duties too, which are to be performed for the son's stability. In his opinion it is degrading both for man and woman that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling his companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition as there is in defending it against attack from without. The division of the spheres of work being recognised, the general qualities and culture required are practically the same for both the sexes.

9.3 AHIMSA, SATYAGRAHA AND WOMAN

Gandhi acknowledged the influence of women in his life, his mother and wife, in the formation of his opinion on women. The image of his devout mother, pious and patience personified, influenced Gandhi to a great extent. He found immense determination in her person and greatly admired the religious qualities in her. Her steadfast devotion to God and household duties impressed him thoroughly. He recollects in his Autobiography that she would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. Further, Gandhi had no qualms in admitting his follies as a husband. His wife Kasturba also came to play an important part in his life both personally and professionally. She was courageous, determined and displayed enormous patience. Even as child, she was independent in her thinking and actions which surprised and also to an extent, annoyed Gandhi as a young husband eager to establish his authority over his wife. Gandhi also acknowledges that Kasturba displayed a great resolve of Satyagraha. She would resist the undue demands of her husband with firm resolve, in a non-violent manner, while at the same time doing her duties without fail. Later she proved to be active Satyagrahi, fighting the mighty British power along with thousands of people in their fight for freedom of the nation.

To Gandhi ‘woman is the true incarnation of Ahimsa’. To him, the realities of life are to be conditioned by the practice of Ahimsa. Therefore, men and women are placed with a combination of morality and sacrifice. He recognised that women would emerge as leaders of the society because of their high moral values and sense of sacrifice that would be guided by Ahimsa and Satyagraha. He writes: “My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance of truth and ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, she will shed her inferiority complex. If she is able to do this successfully, she must resolutely refuse to believe in the modern teaching that everything is determined and regulated by the sex impulse. I have suggested...that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite

love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith."

According to Gandhi, woman is the emblem of Ahimsa/non-violence- "weak in striking...strong in suffering"; she had come to occupy a pivotal position in his plan of Satyagraha. He wanted to convert her self-sacrifice and suffering into Shakti-power. In South Africa, as well as in India's non-violent struggle for independence, women had played an equal part with men, if not greater. The deepest inspiration in his own life had been the piety and penance of his devout mother. His heart yearned for the "suppressed-half" of humanity. As he contemplated the scene around him, especially in India, a piteous spectacle met his gaze: "The physique of our girls is ruined through false modesty. We forget that the girls of today are the mothers of tomorrow. At a tender and critical stage in her development when she needs a mother's understanding love and guidance most, she is given a step-motherly treatment as if she had sinned against society in growing up and must needs be suppressed. She is made a victim of hide-bound social rules and conventions. She can't stir out, play, take outdoor exercise. The same about dress. She is made to follow the mode, put in tight laces, which deform her body and stunt her growth. She is kept in ignorance of the basic facts of life and in consequence dumbly suffers from various ailments through false modesty. The psychological harm that it does is even worse than the physical. She looks grey and old when she should be carefree and happy as a bird. It is a heart-rending spectacle. If in respect of their food, dress and conduct, conversation and reading, study and recreation, our girls could be brought up in nature's healthy simplicity and allowed to grow in freedom, untrammelled by anything but the limits of natural modesty, they would rise to the full height of their stature and once more present us with a galaxy of heroes and saints such as India had boasted in the past. I have dreamt of such a race of ideal women who will be India's pride and the guarantee of her future." He saw no hope for India's emancipation while her womanhood remained unemancipated (Joshi, 1998).

9.4 FREEDOM AND WOMEN

Gandhi has always advocated freedom for women, women's equal status in the society and their participation for the equal status in the society and their participation in the struggle for freedom of the nation. To quote him: "I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child marriages. I shudder to see a child widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed contracts with brutal indifference another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young man of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realize the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation."

The Ideal of Marriage

Gandhi was not only a Universalist, he was also an idealist. He has given a lot of importance to the spiritual dimension of marriage and the husband and wife relationship. To him, "The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to divine or universal love. The wife is not the husband's bond slave, but his companion and his helpmate, and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows-as free as the husband to choose her own path."

Child Marriage

Gandhi was against child marriage. To him it is an out of sin and breach of trust on the part of the parent. He questioned: "What is kanyadan in the case of little children? Has a father any rights of property over his children? He is their protector not owner. And he forfeits the privilege of protecting when he abuses it by seeking to barter away the liberty of the ward... The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly in his teens, can do, is to purge himself of his sin by remarrying his daughter when she becomes widowed. Such marriages should be declared null and void from the beginning." He suggested that the minimum marriageable age of a girl should be 20 years. To him: "Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of the girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of twenty who are pure and undefiled and able to stand the storm that may rage round. Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves". He suggested the youth to break the caste order to abolish the system of child marriage. He significantly has tried to eradicate social ills with social intervention. In this regard his suggestion to the Brahmin youths was extremely revolutionary. It is depicted in this reaction to the desire for child marriage of the youths. "Some Brahman students tell me that they cannot follow this principle, that they cannot get Brahman girls sixteen years old, very few brahmans keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahman girls are married mostly before 10,12 and 13 years. Then I say to the Brahman youth, "Cease to be a Brahman, if you cannot possibly control yourself. Chose a grown up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a Brahman widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of the Hindus will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your heart is not pure and you cannot master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institution a premier institution. I want you to leave up to the name of the premier institution which live must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character and what is character without elementary personal purity? Brahmanism I adore. I have defended Varnashrama Dharma. But Brahmanism that can tolerate untouchability, virgin widowhood, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of Brahmanism. There is no knowledge of Brahman therein. There is no true interpretation of the scriptures. It is undiluted animalism. Brahmanism is made of sterner stuff." Though this suggestion of Gandhi was to a Brahmin youth, it applied equally to all those youth to whom he vigorously advocated to break or abolish the practice of child marriages.

The Dowry System

Gandhi was against the practice of dowry system. To him, the root cause of this practice is linked to the practice of caste system. He suggested that this system has to go. Gandhi

was also against the system of dowry. He termed it as nothing but the sale of girls. That there should be caste even amongst the lowest categories was deplorable and he would strongly advise them to abolish all caste-distinctions amongst themselves. And in this they should bear in mind the opinion the speaker had often expressed that all caste-distinctions should be abolished, and there should be only one caste, namely, bhangis and all Hindus should take pride in being called Bhangis and nothing else.

Marriage must cease to be a matter of arrangement made by parents for money. The system is intimately connected with caste. So long as the choice is restricted to a few hundred young men or young women of a particular caste, the system will persist no matter what is said against it. The girls or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if the evil is to be eradicated. Therefore, Gandhi has emphasised the role of education and educational institutions for breaking the caste and the dowry system. He suggested that the education should help in developing a strong character that will revolutionise the mentality of the youth of the nation. He also advocated providing good education to girls and their equal say in matters of their marriages.

“There should be work done in the schools and colleges and amongst the parents of girls. The parents should so educate their daughters that they would refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying and would rather remain spinsters than be party to the degrading terms. The only honourable terms in marriage are mutual love and mutual consent.”

Gandhi felt that when child marriages were abolished, naturally there would be few, if any, young widows. As a general rule he was for one man one wife for life, and one woman one husband for life. Custom had familiarised women in the so-called higher castes with enforced widowhood. Contrary was the rule with men. He called it a disgrace, but whilst society was in that pitiable condition, he advocated widow remarriage for all young widows. He believed in equality of the sexes and, therefore, he could only think of the same rights for women as men.

The Choice of Mates and Social Interference

Gandhi had very liberal idea about the selection of mate for marriage. As he was against the caste system, he was also against the interference of the society on the choice of the individual in his/her mate selection. In his opinion, “such marriages as are interdicted in a particular society cannot be recognized all at once or at the will of the individual. Nor has society or relatives of parties concerned any right to impose their will upon and forcibly curtail the liberty of action of the young people who may want to contract such marriages. No one had a right forcibly to prevent them from marrying each other if they wanted to. Society could at the most refuse to recognise the marriage. But it was the height of tyranny to drive them to suicide”.

Gandhi was for a regeneration of new societal values. However this process of regeneration could not be done in isolation. He wanted the youth to generate public opinion for such a change. He also expected the society to be open to the change. In his own words: “Marriage taboos are not universal and are largely based on social usage. The usage varies from province to province and as between different divisions. This does not mean that the youth may ride rough-shod over all established social customs and inhibitions. Before they decide to do so, they must convert public opinion to their side. In the meantime, the individuals concerned ought patiently to bide their time, or if they cannot do that calmly and quietly face the consequences of social ostracism.

At the same time it is equally the duty of society not to take up a heartless, step-motherly attitude towards those who might disregard or break the established conventions. In the instance described by my correspondent the guilt of driving the young couple to suicide certainly rests on the shoulders of society if the version that is before me is correct."

Gandhi was in favour of inter-religious marriages. He, however, at the same time said that each party should retain his or her own religion. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths up to death, because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. As to civil marriages, he did not believe in them but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much needed reform for the sake of reform.

Marriage and Love

To Gandhi, marriage is a natural thing in life, the ideal is to look upon marriage as a sacrament and therefore to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate. Marriage in Hinduism is one of the four *ashramas*. In fact the other three are based on it.

For Gandhi, marriage is not simply for satisfaction of biological need. It has a longer function to perform. To him spiritual development ought to be given the first place in the choice for marriage, service should come next, family considerations and the interest of the social order should have the third place, and mutual attraction or 'love' the fourth and the last place in the order. This means that 'love' alone, where the other three conditions are not fulfilled, should not be held as a valid reason for marriage. At the same time, marriage where there is no love should equally be ruled out even though all the other conditions are fully complied with.

Divorce

Gandhi had firm views about divorce. He remarked that "Marriage confirms the right of union between two partners to the exclusion of all the others when in their joint opinion they consider such union to be desirable, but it confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other to one's wish for union. What should be done when one partner on moral or other grounds cannot conform to the wishes of the other is a separate question. Personally, if divorce was the only alternative, I should not hesitate to accept it, rather than interrupt my moral progress, assuming that I want to restrain myself on purely moral grounds."

Child Widow and Widow Remarriage

Gandhi was extremely concerned about the plights of widows in India. However, the conservative outlook of the Indian society has blind eye towards this social evil. Gandhi was very forceful in argument on this issue. He points out that "We cry out for cow-protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the girl widow. In the name of religion we force widowhood upon our three lakhs of girl widows who could not understand the import of the marriage ceremony. To force widowhood upon little girls is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly. Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion." Gandhi wanted that the society should rid itself of this poison of

enforced widowhood. The reform must begin with much earnestness and courage. He supported the idea of widow re-marriage.

“Widow-remarriage is no sin-if it be, it is as much a sin as the marriage of widower is. All widowhood is not holy. It is an adornment to her who can observe it. If this sister has the courage, then let her speak out her mind to her uncle and brothers and seek their help. If they cannot assist in the marriage, then the sister will have to quit their house and take refuge in some widow-remarriage institution”.

The Purdah

A long section of the Indian women has been the victims of the practice of purdah. It has resisted not only their participation in the public life, but has also deprived them of the opportunity for self-development, self-expression, social, economic and political well being; Gandhi was against the practice of purdah. The conservative view has always taken the place for the maintenance of women's chastity to strictly adhere to the practice of purdah system. To him “Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation.

And why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? We hear nothing of women's anxiety about men's chastity. Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity? It cannot be superimposed from without. It is a matter of evolution from within and therefore of individual self-effort.”

Gandhi was warned by some Muslim critics against speaking on the purdah. He had therefore some hesitation in speaking about it. But he took heart when he turned round and saw that many Hindu women observed it and that numerous Malaya Muslim women of whom he had many friends did not observe the purdah. He also knew many distinguished Muslim women of India who did not observe it. Lastly the real purdah was of the heart. A woman who peeped through the purdah and contemplated a male on whom her gaze fell violated the spirit behind it. If a woman observed it in spirit, she was truly carrying out what the great Prophet had said.

He advised women to “refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies, and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourselves, don't go in for scents and lavender water; if you want to give out the proper scent, it must come out of your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birthright. Man is born of woman; he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again”.

Population Control and Women

For Gandhi extensive human development is absolutely necessary for proper utilisation of manpower of the country. Therefore, he advocated the development of agriculture with proper land system and supplementary industry. His view on population control is unique. “If it is contended that birth control is necessary for the nation because of over-population, I dispute the proposition. It has never been proved. In my opinion, by a proper land-system, better agriculture and a supplementary industry, this country is capable of supporting twice as many people as there are today. But I have joined hands with the advocates of birth control in India from the standpoint of the present political condition of the country.”

On the question of the mother whose health is drained away by too many children and for the sake of children themselves he mentions that 'Women should have to resist their husbands. If contraceptives are resorted to, frightful results will follow, if man and woman will be living for sex alone they will become soft-brained, unhinged, infact mental and moral wrecks'.

9.5 SUMMARY

No other leader during the course of freedom struggle has given a prominent place and position to women as did Gandhi. He had immense faith in their determination, spirit of service and sacrifice. He disapproved of the male domination over women and the former's resolve to suppress the latter. He constantly spoke about the equality of men and women. He advised women to refuse to serve as men's slaves and have an identity and respect of their own. He abhorred child marriages and encouraged widow re-marriages. He wanted that women also should be given education at par with men, have access to health care and help in sustaining the traditional values and culture. Gandhi was for a regeneration of new societal values. However this process of regeneration could not be done in isolation. He wanted the youth to generate public opinion for such a change. He also expected the society to be open to the change and give a prominent place to women. Gandhi has always advocated freedom for women, women's equal status in the society and their participation in the struggle for freedom of the nation.

9.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What kind of freedom did Gandhi envisage for women?
2. According to Gandhi, women are custodians of values and culture. Substantiate your arguments.
3. Can Gandhi be called a feminist? Give your own arguments.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Bose, Nirmal Kumar., 'Selections from Gandhi', Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1948.

Joshi, Pushpa., 'Gandhi on Women', Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1988

Kheda Vartaman, CWMG, Vol. XV, pp.290-93, 21-5-1919.

Young India, CWMG, Vol.XX, pp.409-11, 21-07-1921.

CWMG, Vol.XXIV, pp.74-76, 18-05-1924.

CWMG, Vol.XXIV, pp.381-82, 13-07-1924.

CWMG, Vol.XXXV, pp.419-20, 25-12-1927.

CWMG, Vol.XLII, pp.4-6, 17-10-1929.

Young India, Vol. X, no-12, p.350, 18-10-1928.

Young India, Vol. XLII, p.340.

UNIT 10 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON DEPRESSED CLASSES

Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 10.2 Defining Depressed Classes
- 10.3 Gandhi on Depressed Classes
- 10.4 Gandhian Plan of Integrating Depressed Classes
- 10.5 Critique of Gandhi's views
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The Depressed Classes occupied a central place in Gandhi's social thought. Since childhood, Gandhi's sensitive mind was touched by the sufferings of the Depressed Classes. He was very much concerned about untouchability in the name of caste system in Hinduism. It was not Hinduism but its abuses which pained Gandhi's heart. He strongly advocated that without social and material improvement of those people who are treated as untouchables India cannot attain true 'swaraj'. Gandhi called for strengthening the social cohesiveness and therefore, tried to integrate various sections of the society for the social regeneration of India and subsequently the attainment of 'swaraj'. In this Unit we will explain, in historical context, Gandhi's views on the Depressed Classes and his articulation of concern for them. We will also discuss the methods suggested by Gandhi to address their problems and the varied responses to his approach.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you should be able to

- Define as to what is meant by Depressed Classes
- Explain Gandhi's views on Depressed Classes
- Understand Gandhi's ways of addressing the problems of the Depressed Classes
- Analyse different responses to Gandhi's attitude towards the Depressed Classes.

10.2 DEFINING DEPRESSED CLASSES

Caste being considered as an integral part of the Hindu social system promoted social hierarchy and in the name of the Shastras to maintain ritual purity, a large section of the Hindu society was categorised as untouchables. The term Depressed Classes refers to the untouchables who belong to the lowest rung of the Hindu caste hierarchy and were

referred as 'Achhuts', 'Panchamas', 'Antyajas', etc. and they were placed outside the four castes. Though these people were very much part of the Hindu social system, they were denied access to the Hindu temples and faced religious and social disabilities. Economically, people belonging to the Depressed Classes were mostly landless labourers or engaged in menial occupations like scavenging, leather work, etc. Since the last decade of the 19th century, the term Depressed Classes came into use in official parlance. V.R.Shinde, a social reformer from Maharashtra, formed "The Depressed Classes Mission Society of India" and wrote in 1906 that 'the term Depressed Classes does not include the comparatively blessed human beings, hordes of whom are still defiantly standing outside the pale of civilization in India...' (*The Indian Social Reformer*, (29 July 1906)). The socio-religious reform movements in India like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, etc. tried to draw our attention to such social disabilities and appealed for eradicating the social prejudices. There was also growing awareness among a section within the Depressed Classes to assert for removing social disabilities and ask for their rightful place in society and endow them their legitimate rights to education and government jobs. Jotirao Govindrao Phule, a shudra himself and a social reformer of the 19th century, in his book *Gulamgiri*, exposed the inhuman laws under the guise of religion to keep the lower castes always under the subjugation of the upper castes. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, who was influenced by Phule's ideas, tried to explain the hollowness of the caste system and questioned the religious basis of the origin of untouchables. The efforts made by the British government to enumerate the Depressed Classes separately in the census of India and to make special provisions for their educational and material development encouraged the mobilisation of the Depressed Classes in different provinces since late 19th century. The Depressed Classes started demanding representation in various legislative bodies, admission of their children in all schools, reservation in government jobs and expressed their solidarity towards the British for protection of their rights. Initially the British government was not keen to interfere in the socio-religious matters of the indigenous society. However, since early 20th century there was change in the British attitude towards the problems faced by the Depressed Classes and started taking pro-active policies to protect their interests. The Government of India Act of 1919 made provision for nomination of Depressed Classes in the provincial legislative councils. In the light of this brief background on the Depressed Classes, we would discuss the views of Mahatma Gandhi on them.

10.3 GANDHI ON DEPRESSED CLASSES

Till the emergence of Gandhi as the leader of Indian National Congress the nationalist leaders refrained from taking up issues pertaining to remove social disabilities. Gandhi, from his childhood days, was very much concerned with the removal of untouchability. In his opinion 'Untouchability has made Indians untouchables in the whole world and those who wanted to see the condition of untouchable Indians should go to South Africa and realize what untouchability meant' (Gandhi's speech at Ranchi, 17-9-1925). He was also of the opinion that without integrating the vast sections of the Depressed Classes in the Hindu society and without removing untouchability, it would be difficult to achieve 'swaraj'. 'Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. If the lot of the *Panchama* is not improved, when we are all suffering, it is not likely to be better under the intoxication of Swaraj.... I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange King Long for King Stork. Hence for me the movement of swaraj is a

movement of self purification'. (Untouchability and Swaraj, *Young India*, June 1924). The Satyagraha Ashram founded by Gandhi in 1915 resolved to abolish untouchability. 'In Hinduism', Gandhi said, 'there is no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. In the estimation of a Brahmana knowing and living his religion, a Shudra is as good as himself. The Bhagavad Gita has nowhere taught that a Chandala is in any way inferior to a Brahmana' (*Young India*, 1921). In reply to those who defended untouchability by referring to the Shastras, Gandhi advocated that not letters but the spirit of the Shastras which talk about universal humanism should govern our social relations. In place of using terms like 'untouchables', 'panchamas', 'antyaja', etc., Gandhi coined the term 'Harijan', meaning 'Children of God' because he was of the opinion that other expressions were derogatory. Gandhi brought the issue of untouchability at the centre of Indian politics.

"...The Congress has, from its very commencement, taken up the cause of the so-called untouchables. There was a time when the congress had at every annual session as its adjunct the Social Conference, to which the late Ranade dedicated his energies, among his many other activities. Headed by him you will find, in the programme of the Social Conference, reform in connection with the untouchables taking a prominent place. But in 1920, the Congress took a large step and brought in the question of the removal of untouchability as a plank on the political platform, making it an important item of the political programme. Just as the Congress considered Hindu-Muslim unity - thereby meaning unity amongst all the classes - to be indispensable for the attainment of swaraj, so also did the Congress consider the removal of the curse of untouchability as an indispensable condition for the attainment of full freedom. The position the Congress took up in 1920 remains the same today; and so you will see the Congress has attempted from its very beginning to be what it described itself to be, namely, national in every sense of the term" (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol.XLVIII, September 1931-January 1932).

Although Gandhi was critical of untouchability and the restrictions on inter-marriage and inter-dining in the name of caste, he was not opposed to Chaturvarna. He argued that 'Varnas...have been sanctioned by the Shastras. Whether or not people are conscious of them, they do exist all over the world as we see. There are everywhere these four classes: one to impart knowledge of God for the welfare of the world, another to protect the people against manifold dangers, a third one to carry on the work of farming, etc., to sustain the community and one class to work for these three classes. There is no feeling of high and low to this division' (*Harijanbandhu*, 19 January, 1936, CWMG, Vol.LXII). To Gandhi, in Varnashrama, each member belongs to a particular occupational group and is performing functions accordingly having equal status. At the same time he reminded that imposition of various social restrictions in the name of caste was distortion of Varnashrama. Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*, 'the moment untouchability [in its present form] goes, [the] caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve into the true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to the other, each is necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other' (*Harijan*, 7 July 1946). Gandhi's views and writings on Varnashrama have already been highlighted in one of the preceding Units.

Untouchability

To Gandhi, the continuance of untouchability meant a slow destruction overtaking the Hinduism. This is nothing but the disintegration which Hinduism is going through. As and

when this disintegration becomes rapid and imposing, it would be difficult to restrain it. Gandhi gives his argument in the following words:

“And why do I say that untouchability is a curse, a blot and a powerful poison that will destroy Hinduism? It is repugnant to our sense of humanity to consider a single human being as untouchable by birth. If you were to examine the scriptures of the world and the conduct of peoples other than Hindus, you would not find any parallel to the untouchability I have brought to your attention just now. I can well understand a person being untouchable whilst he is performing a task which he himself would feel makes him untouchable. For instance a nurse, who is nursing a patient who is helpless and bleeding... soiling his clothes and suffering from a disease giving out from his body a foul smell, such a nurse whilst she is nursing such a patient is untouchable. But when she has washed herself, she becomes as touchable as ourselves. She is not only just as fit to move in society as any of us, but she is also adorable for the profession which she follows. She is worthy of our respect and, so long as we have ranks in our society, she must occupy a very high place amongst us.”

Gandhi also gave the example of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, who belonged to the Depressed Classes but intellectually superior to thousands of intelligent and educated caste Hindus. Gandhi's argument was that the latter should not be judged because of his caste, as he deserves equal respect and dignity as any other caste Hindu for his intellectual acumen and ability. Gandhi further states,

“If we had not been habituated to think that untouchability by birth is an integral part of Hinduism, we would not conduct ourselves towards fellow human beings as many of us conduct ourselves even today.”

Gandhi severely condemned the argument that untouchability has a religious sanction and is allowed according to the tenets of Hindu Shastras. He says,

“Untouchability is a phenomenon which is peculiar to Hinduism only and it has got no warrant either in reason or in the Shastras, and what little I have studied of the Shastras and what I have been told by people who have made a deeper study of them shows that there is no warrant for untouchability by birth in Hinduism. I have not the time now to go into the Shastric precepts. Nor is it necessary at this time of the day to give you Shastric proofs for my statement. But what is necessary is that if you are satisfied that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism and that there is a danger of its destroying Hinduism, you must set about removing it.”

To Gandhi, one way of removing the curse of untouchability was to bring about a change in our everyday conduct. It does not express itself in enthusiastically touching an untouchable to prove one's sincerity to remove it. Rather, the conduct should be regulated in a manner that will make it absolutely evident to them that a better day has dawned for them all. For instance, says Gandhi,

“You will begin by taking the Harijans along with you to the temple if you are in the habit of going to a temple. But if you discover that you will not be allowed into the temple along with your Harijan companions, then if you have the living belief that I have that untouchability is wrong, you will shun that temple as you shun a scorpion or fire. You will then believe with me that such a temple is not inhabited by God” (Harijan, 20 June, 1936, CWMG, Vol.LXIII).

Going by the above arguments, one can easily understand as to how Gandhi tried to address the issue of untouchability without challenging the Varnashrama and its religious basis. To remove untouchability what he prescribes is a change in the social attitude towards lower castes by considering them as equal to others. His approach was to bring change in the minds of higher castes by exposing the hollowness of untouchability. His thinking was to remove the notion of untouchability without much change in the Hindu social structure. Gandhi wrote that regarding a brahmana and a scavenger as equals does not mean that you are not showing respect to a true brahmana that is due to him, but that the brahmana and the scavenger are equally entitled to our service, that we accord to the scavenger the same rights of sending his children to public schools, of visiting public temples, of the use of public wells, etc., on the same basis as these rights are enjoyed by any other Hindu. To Gandhi 'God is light, not darkness, God is love, not hate, God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is great. We His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures' (*Young India*, June 1924). Instead of attacking religion through religious appeal, Gandhi wanted to open the eyes of the upper castes towards the injustices and abuses in the name of the caste system. He was very much concerned about bringing cohesiveness within Hinduism when there was challenge from outside to create divisions within the Hindus.

10.4 GANDHIAN PLAN OF INTEGRATING THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

In place of constitutional safeguards and legal provision for the protection of the Depressed Classes, Gandhi gave more emphasis on educating people to treat the underprivileged as equal and to allow them into temples, schools and common wells. Gandhi firmly believed that without integrating various sections of Indian people in the movement against the British, it would be difficult to achieve political freedom. In December 1920 at Nagpur, in the Annual Session of Indian National Congress, Gandhi said, 'the movement of non-co-operation can only succeed by complete co-operation amongst the people themselves, this Congress calls upon the public associations to advance Hindu-Muslim unity and the Hindu delegates of this Congress to call upon the leading Hindus to settle all disputes between Brahmins and non-Brahmins wherever they may be existing and to make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability, and respectfully urges the religious heads to help the growing desire to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes' (Cited in A.C.Pradhan, *The Emergence of the Depressed Classes*, p.47). The Working Committee of the Congress Party later constituted a sub-committee to draw action plan for the betterment of the condition of the Depressed Classes throughout the country. In 1924, as president of the Belgaum session of the Indian National Congress, Gandhi brought a resolution asking the members to pay more attention to the needs of the Depressed Classes. The Belgaum Congress also supported the satyagrahis at Vaikom in the Travancore state where the local satyagrahis were demanding the access of the untouchables to the roads near the temple. Gandhi himself visited the place in 1925 and urged upon the local authorities to declare the road open for the untouchables. It is considered in history as the first major demonstration of the Congress volunteers for the cause of the Depressed Classes.

In 1930, when Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, he again reminded the Congress workers that the rights of the Depressed Classes cannot be overlooked for the

cause of 'swaraj'. Many leaders of the Depressed Classes being not convinced of Gandhi's approach towards the grievances of the Depressed Classes represented directly to the British government for their rightful representation in various representative bodies. In its response, the government agreed to the demand for special electorate for the Depressed Classes. Gandhi was not in favour of special representation of the Depressed Classes because he was of the view that the problem of the Depressed Classes needs to be addressed through measures of general socio-cultural improvement. So, in the Round Table Conference in London which Gandhi attended as the Congress representative, he opposed the idea of special representation of the Depressed Classes. Gandhi wrote, 'so far as Hinduism is concerned separate electorate would simply vivisect and disrupt it. For me the question of these classes is predominantly moral and religious...I feel that no penance that caste Hindus may do can, in any way, compensate for the calculated degradation to which they have consigned the depressed Classes for centuries. But I know that separate electorate is neither penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they have groaned under' (CWMG, Vol.LXIX). Gandhi vowed to resist separate electorate for the Depressed Classes threatening to take recourse to fast till death. Though in principle Gandhi was opposed to the reservation of seats, for the sake of a compromise with the leaders of the Depressed Classes, agreed to accept an agreement for reservation of seats in joint electorates between the caste Hindus and Depressed Classes. After hard bargaining the Depressed Classes leaders agreed to accept the reservation of seats in legislative bodies through joint electorate. Then finally in the Government of India Act, 1935 provision was made for reservation of 151 seats in the provincial legislatures.

People within the Congress were critical of Gandhi's emphasis on the Depressed Classes issue when the focus should be more on the Civil Disobedience movement. But for Gandhi the integration of the Depressed Classes into the Hindu society was of utmost importance. Once Gandhi was asked as to why he is not thinking for the improvement of the condition of starving peasants, as an improvement in the condition of peasants would automatically improve economic condition of the Harijans. In reply Gandhi said,

'Unfortunately the betterment of the economic condition of peasants will not necessarily include the betterment of that of the Harijans. The peasant who is not a Harijan can rise as high as he likes and opportunity permits him, but not so the poor suppressed Harijan. The latter cannot own and use land as freely as the *savarna* peasant... therefore, a special organization for the service of Harijans is a preemptory want in order to deal with the special and peculiar disabilities of Harijans' (CWMG, Vol.LVIII).

In 1932 Gandhi established the Harijan Sevak Sangh to initiate Constructive Programme for the social and material development of the Depressed Classes. The Harijan Sevak Sangh started a journal titled 'Harijan' to create awareness in society for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. Instead of adopting a confrontationist line, Harijan Sevak Sangh believed in pursuing caste Hindus for a change of heart and strongly advocated for the removal of untouchability and wanted legislation for temple entry. Commenting on Gandhi's emphasis on temple entry movement, D.R.Nagaraj has argued that 'The political interventionist and realist in him had understood the deeper craving for temples among Harijans in the absence of other strong alternatives' (D.R.Nagaraj, *'Self-purification versus Self-respect'*, p.373). During 1933-1934 Gandhi travelled various parts of the country to educate people about the need for temple entry and removal of untouchability. In 1930s when he devoted himself to the Harijan movement he expanded its scope by incorporating the village development in it. He wrote in *Harijan*,

‘Some readers have taken exception to the way in which the columns of “Harijan” are being occupied with the development of the village industries scheme, and some other [sic] have welcomed the change in what they had thought was a monotony of presentation. Either opinion is probably hasty. Any problem connected with the welfare of village as a whole must be intimately related to the Harijans, who represent over a sixth part of India’s population. If a village gets good rice and flour, Harijans will benefit by the change as much as the rest of the population. But there is a special sense in which Harijans will benefit. Tanning and the whole of the raw hide work is their monopoly and economically this will occupy the best part of the new scheme’ (*Harijan*, Vol.11, December 1934).

As part of his Constructive Programme, Gandhi wanted to provide quality education to the children of the Depressed Classes so that they can stand on equal footing with the upper castes. He tried to arouse the conscience of caste Hindus by emphasising the equality of thought and deed. By weaving khadi and cleaning own toilet he wanted to attach dignity to such jobs. He desired to remove the rigidities in minds considering some occupations as below the dignity. He was opposed to the idea of conversion to any other religion to get rid of the caste system. He appealed to promote cleanliness, to improve methods of scavenging and tanning, to encourage parents to send children to schools, to abolish untouchability, in order to uplift the Depressed Classes. Gandhi, through village reconstruction, provided the key to improve the material condition of the poor and the socially oppressed people.

10.5 CRITIQUE OF GANDHI’S VIEWS

In his own times Gandhi faced strong opposition from a section within the Congress (considered as orthodox Hindus) for his approach towards the cause of the Depressed Classes. In their opinion, the need of the hour was political emancipation and once it is achieved social emancipation would automatically follow. They were also not inclined to go against the prevailing Hindu social system for the sake of integrating the Depressed Classes. They were opposed to any special provision for the reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes in the legislative bodies because they believed that this would divide the Hindus. Even people questioned his appeal for removal of untouchability and expressed their concern about the survival of Hinduism in the hands of Gandhi. During Gandhi’s Harijan tour during 1933-34, orthodox Hindus staged demonstrations against Gandhi in places such as Nagpur, Amaravati, Akola, Guruvayur, Belgaum, Puri, Pune, Ahmedabad, Benares, Allahabad, etc. Reporting on Gandhi’s campaign for temple entry and removal of untouchability, the official report noted: ‘As for the Sanatanists it is doubtful if Gandhi’s eloquence has converted one of them. At Poona, another centre of Hindu orthodoxy, the orthodox section of Hindus carefully avoided him. At Benares the Sanatanists publicly burnt his portrait.’ (Cited in A.C.Pradhan).

The Depressed Classes responded in different voices to Gandhian initiatives for social and material development of the Depressed Classes. Although there were people within the Depressed Classes who found in Gandhi an advocate for eradicating the social evils, many were skeptical of the outcome of Gandhian initiatives. Most prominent among such Depressed Class leaders was Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. Gandhi tried to address the problem of untouchability without attacking the caste system and through self-purification he desired to remove untouchability. Ambedkar wanted to develop an independent identity for the Depressed Classes and to do away with the caste system. Ambedkar wrote in the first issue of *Harijan*,

‘The out-caste is a by-product of the caste-system. There will be outcastes as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste-system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of this odious and vicious dogma...’ (*Harijan*, Vol.I, 1933).

To Ambedkar, more than untouchability it is important to understand the problems of untouchables. He was not agreeable to the Gandhian suggestion of treating untouchability as a religious question. Ambedkar was opposed to the paternalistic attitude of Gandhi and other Congress leaders towards the Depressed Classes and asserted that the Congress has done nothing to help the Depressed Classes in their struggle against the Hindu orthodoxy. He strongly advocated for special electorate for the Depressed Classes so that they have their own representatives in the legislative bodies to protect their interests. The book written by Ambedkar, ‘What the Congress and Gandhiji have done to the Untouchables’ familiarises one with Ambedkar’s reservations about Gandhi’s prescriptions towards the problems faced by the Depressed Classes. The Unit on Poona Pact (Course-1) familiarises the learner on the subject concerned.

D.R.Nagaraj argues that ‘one should take the village-centred vision of Gandhiji and treat it with Ambedkarite distrust of the rural society to cure its romantic excesses. The lower castes in India have nowhere else to go, and their will to transform the existing rural society should be strengthened’ (D.R.Nagaraj). While making any appraisal of Gandhi, it is essential to keep in mind that the major concern of Gandhi was to put up a united challenge against the British and for that he wanted to develop a cohesive voice based on a sense of equality and self- respect. Gandhi realised as to how the British cleverly used a social problem of the Hindus into a political weapon to stem the tide of Indian nationalism.

10.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi had the ability to harmonise and unite the differing perceptions and voices to achieve the desired goal. By being sensitive to the sufferings of the Depressed Classes and also understanding the growing social consciousness as well as the political strength of the Depressed Classes, Gandhi tried to bridge the gap between the upper and the lower castes. Without opposing the varna system and challenging the religious beliefs, Gandhi appealed to the dominant castes to learn to respect human values and treat all equally. Focusing on the removal of untouchability, access to temples, education for the children of lower castes, dignity of labour and village reconstruction, Gandhi wanted to bring about the social and material improvement of the Depressed Classes. The uniqueness of Gandhi’s social thought lies in its emphasis on social integration and equality for all.

10.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How do you define the ‘Depressed Classes’? Elaborate Gandhi’s views on them.
2. How did Gandhi envisage the integration of the Depressed Classes?
3. Critically examine Gandhi’s views on Depressed Classes.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Publications Division, Government of India.

Nagaraj, D.R., 'Self-purification versus Self-respect: On the Roots of the Dalit Movement', in A.Raghuramaraju (ed.), *Debating Gandhi- A Reader*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 359-388.

Nanda, B.R., *Gandhi and His Critics*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985.

Pradhan, A.C., *The Emergence of the Depressed Classes*, Bookland International, Bhubaneswar, 1986.



UNIT 11 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Structure

- 11.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 11.2 Gandhi on Children
- 11.3 Education of Children
- 11.4 Gandhi on Youth
- 11.5 Constructive Work and Country's Service
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Terminal Questions
 - Suggested Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's views on children and youth constitute an interesting aspect in the holistic realm of national freedom struggle. His intention was to spell out the aspects of best upbringing, parental care, and development of the intellect and good conduct that would help in evolving into a good human being. For this, the basic foundation in the childhood should be apt. To him, children were the real practitioners of truth and non-violence. Their innocence captivated Gandhi. His letters to the members of his family reveal his absolute affection for children and guidelines regarding their diet, hygiene and health. Similarly, Gandhi had an unflinching faith in the youth of the nation as the whole nation depended on their ability to achieve freedom in all spheres. He encouraged them to adopt truth and non-violence in their struggle for freedom and also advised them not to give in to vices and violence. He recommended the *ekadasha vratas* to the youth so that they could achieve purity of body, mind and soul. To him, they represented hope for the future wherein India would achieve greater heights as an apostle of truth and non-violence.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit will enable you to understand

- Gandhi's views on children
- Education of children
- Gandhi's views on youth
- The youth's contribution towards the national regeneration

11.2 GANDHI ON CHILDREN

The child is- infact all children are- unconscious worshippers of truth and hence they go on advancing. We should, therefore, become children, that is to say, we should shed all fear and worship truth. We should do that which our heart believes to be true.

Mahatma Gandhi

(Navajivan, 24-11-1929, CWMG, vol.42, pp.207-8).

Gandhi immensely loved children and viewed them as true followers of truth. Their innocence captivated him and he was often moved by their pure actions and thoughts. As he observed, 'if we could become innocent like children, and derive our meanings from innocent observations like theirs, we could spare ourselves much trouble, many disputes and much waste of time. And our intellect would become increasingly keener'. Gandhi wanted all the adults to follow this aspect of children in order to rid themselves of any problem and solve them in most amicable manner, just as a child does in innocence. He further observes that it is not easy to become like a child for it involves shedding any untruthful element in one's thought and behaviour. He says, "it is not easy for a person advanced in age to become and continue to be, like a child, innocent and simple and a conscious worshipper of truth. But it is our duty to do so. The perfect incarnation of God as conceived by Hinduism is the child Krishna. Jesus said, 'wisdom flows from the mouths of babes and sucklings. He said to those who desired salvation, become like children'" (CWMG, vol.42, pp.207-8).

Upbringing of Children

Gandhi was firm in his opinion that for the upbringing of the children, parents should have a proper of rearing and nursing of babies. Necessary care has to be taken to bring them up and monitor their growth. He said the following in this context: I am convinced that for the proper upbringing of children the parents ought to have a general knowledge of the care and nursing of babies. At every step I have seen the advantages of my careful study of the subject. My children would not have enjoyed the general health that they do today, had I not studied the subject and turned my knowledge to account. We labour under a sort of superstition that the child has nothing to learn during the first five years of its life. On the contrary the fact is that the child never learns in after life what it does in its first five years. The education of the child begins with conception. The physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception are reproduced in the baby. After birth the child imitates the parents, and for a considerable number of years entirely depends on them for its growth (CWMG, vol.39, p.165; also see *Autobiography*). Gandhi also observes thus: 'the truth is that most of us are scarcely fit to be parents. Why should those who have not learnt the science of child-care bring children into the world?' Gandhi acknowledges the role of the home environment that plays a great part during the growing up years. Children inherit certain qualities from their parents and in some cases, have successfully surmounted the difficulties of an evil inheritance. He attributes it to the purity of the soul. During his stay in South Africa, Gandhi became teacher to his children as well as to those living at Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi insisted on character building as the proper foundation of children's education; he felt that 'if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends' (CWMG, vol.39, p.267; See also *Autobiography*).

Diet and Cleanliness

Gandhi insisted on administering a proper diet to the children and that which does not hurt the delicate system of the child. In a letter to one of his associates, he writes thus: 'a mother should know how to take care of the children's teeth. Their food not be very soft and should not contain too much starch. They should have sugar and jaggery in very

small quantity only. Instead they may be allowed to suck juice from lots of sugarcane in the season. When the season is over, the children may be given fruits containing sugar, like figs, *munakka*, dates, etc. moreover, the mother should stand by the side of the children when they brush their teeth in the morning and teach them to clean the teeth with the babool stick vigorously...they should be taught to gargle properly after every meal and to massage the teeth and gums with their fingers' (CWMG, vol.53, pp.224-5). Substituting sugar for jaggery is harmful and should be avoided. Children should be fed increasing quantities of fresh fruit to keep them in the best of their health, strength and vigour. Gandhi advises against giving caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee to children.

Gandhi deemed it essential for parents to pay special attention to the cleanliness aspects. The following points should be kept in mind in this context:

- (1) Their teeth should be clean. They should be made to rinse them every morning and again before retiring at night.
- (2) Their hair should be clean. It should be cut short and washed and brushed every day. No oil need be used.
- (3) Their nails should be clean, clipped from time to time and always washed clean.
- (4) Their clothes and shoes should be neat and tidy.
- (5) Their satchels and books should be clean; they should handle books with clean hands.

We need hardly add that it will accrue to the benefit of the children if these rules are kept in mind and made to follow them.

Gandhi observed that physical tidiness and cleanliness should be the first lesson as cleanliness will ensure that children do not get infected with contagious diseases.

Parental Care

Gandhi believed that a child's health depends greatly on the condition of the mother. A mother should have a healthy diet in order to ensure the good health of the child. Gandhi advises not to give medication drugs to the child in case of a child's illness as it will be risking its life due to the toxic effect of the medicine. Gandhi also advises against getting panicky in case of a child's illness as it will have a harmful effect on the child's health. Gandhi advocates a higher role for father as the child learns to observe the behaviour of parents in the growing up years. Parents are endowed with a delicate responsibility of bringing up the children; therefore, it is mandatory for the parents to conduct themselves with purity of conduct so that they can teach the children the virtues of purity and honesty. Thus the parents have the responsibility of ensuring their children's physical and mental well-being. It is very important for parents to exercise self-control so that the young minds are not corrupted by indecent thoughts and actions. The ideal way to achieve this is to practise 'Vanaprasthashrama'. Gandhi wants parents to conduct themselves thoughtfully so that children follow them taking them as role models. India's future, Gandhi said, lies in the hands of parents. Gandhi wanted parents to teach children the virtues of truth and non-violence. He gives the example of Prahlada, a virtuous child of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, who resisted his father's cruelty calmly and not violently. Gandhi was also against the separation of young children from their parents.

Obedience to Parents

“It is one’s duty to obey one’s parents. They are one’s teachers. They are God. Shravana achieved his salvation by regarding his parents as God. While obeying his father’s orders, Rama gave up his kingdom”. Gandhi believed in conducting with devotion towards parents; he considered obedience to them as the greatest virtue. The very impression of the mythological figure Shravana made a permanent imprint in his mind during his childhood and he made constant efforts to live up to this ideal all his life. He acknowledged that whatever he achieved in his life was due to his devotion to his parents and the fruit of their blessings. He called for establishing a pure environment where the children would have complete faith in their parents. Children should strictly obey their parents and should consult them regarding their actions and clear doubts whether it is conforming to one’s moral duty. He was strictly against belittling parents and disobeying the parents’ commands. Where there are differences between the parents and their offsprings, they may be endured or both should conduct themselves by tolerating mutual differences. Also, parents should not expect their grown up sons and daughters to always obey them. He strictly forbids the parents to desist from threatening their children either through blackmailing them emotionally or by being obdurate.

Child Marriages

Gandhi thoroughly discouraged child marriages as the age is not ripe for the boys and girls into a matrimonial relation. At a young age the physical and mental capacities of the children do not develop and this renders them incapable of handling the pressures that come with the marriages. Gandhi’s experience of his early marriage at a tender age and the resultant difficulties made him discourage this practice vehemently. Early marriage would also divert the attention of the young children towards physical intimacy, which, in itself, is detrimental to the growth of the children. He called upon the parents not to compel their children to enter into a marriage when they are unprepared for it; young boys and girls should be attending school or constructive workshops and not be saddled with the duties of a household. Where parents insist on not following this, he did not find it unreasonable if the children disregarded parental authority and followed the light of reason and conscience (Young India, 3-1-1929).

Preference for Male Child

Gandhi considered the preference for male child as invidious and wrong and that the birth of a son or a daughter should be welcome alike. He writes in Harijan thus: ‘Hindu Shastras certainly show a marked bias in favour of the male offspring. But this originated at a time when physical warfare was the order of the day and adequate man-power was a sine qua non of success in the struggle for existence....but if we regard marriage as a sacrament, there is room in it only for one offspring, and that is why in our shastras, the first offspring is described as dharmaja, i.e., duty-born, all subsequent issues being referred to as kamaja, i.e., lust-born. I make no distinction between son and daughter’ (Harijan, 5-6-1937). Gandhi further notes that, ‘in this age when men and women are supposed to have and should have equal rights they should be rated equally. Why should there be such jubilation at the birth of a son? And why should there be sorrow when a daughter is born? Both of them have an equal right to live. The world can go on only with the existence of both. But a belief which has taken deep roots from ancient times cannot be suddenly wiped out by one or more individuals writing against it. Only when knowledge that enables us to distinguish between good and bad spreads in Hindu society

and women are truly respected will such incidents be averted' (Harijanbandhu, 26-9-1937; from Gujarati translation).

11.3 EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

To Gandhi, good education of children was of utmost importance for it sows in them the seeds of humanity, love and respect that would enable them to become good human beings upon their growth. The basics should start from religious sources as these values are taught to one from the very childhood; a child also observes traditional practices at home and follows up with them throughout his or her life. Gandhi advocated an education that insists on character building and spirit of service.

Religion

Gandhi remarks that all those who have firm faith in their religion are strong, not weak. He suggested that the boys and girls should be taught that they are not weak. Children have their religion to strengthen them. Following any religion means belonging to God. 'We must inculcate this in our children from the time they start showing some understanding. You must tell your children that the place of religion is in their hearts and it is not in your power to protect it. I have taught my children that they must protect their own religion' (Speech at Prayer Meeting, 30-9-1947, New Delhi). Gandhi felt that children should be conveyed the message of Gita at a very young age as it is the prime time to understand and imbibe such concepts.

Development of Intellect

Gandhi felt that little children do not need the assistance of the books so much as they need the assistance of teachers. Since there is a shortage of trained teachers, the primers should be designed to assist the teachers rather than children. He wanted that the literature for children should be a universally accepted original contribution to the methods of teaching children of a country so vast and so poor as ours. He did not approve of expensive European models as they serve little purpose in this regard. A gentle and vigilant teacher should gently coax and teach the children habits of discipline 'so that their reason, being freed from the control of their senses, would become from the very childhood their guide'. It is no discipline to tell the children to follow a hero. No habit is cultivated thereby. The children who are taught to slavishly do things become sluggish. And if perchance another schoolmaster displaces from the throne their hearts the hero presented to them by the predecessor, they are likely to become unhinged and useless in after-life. Whereas, if from the very commencement, whatever is placed before them is reasoned out for them, and then examples of great men having done noble deeds placed before them to strengthen their resolve or support their reason, they are likely to develop into strong hardy citizens who, under difficult circumstances, will be able to render a good account of themselves (Young India, 29-7-1926). This is precisely how their intellect would develop. Further children should be educated in a way to inculcate the sense of morality and make them freedom-loving and self-reliant. Teacher should establish a spiritual relationship with the children and give them proper moral instructions. This is the key to education. Children's education should consist of physical, mental and spiritual aspects and this would compensate the existing deficiencies in the education system. Teachers should teach and encourage students to give up the practice of untouchability so that the inherent deficiencies in the social system are wiped out.

Corporal Punishment

Gandhi, in reply to a school teacher's question regarding following the non-violent way of handling the erring students said the following: 'I am quite clear that you must not inflict corporal punishment on your children or pupils. You can punish yourself, if you like and are qualified, in order to melt your children's or pupils' hearts. The non-violent method invariably succeeded. When a bond is established between a teacher and his pupils, the latter will generally yield before their teacher's suffering for their sake. Non-violence does not compel you to keep in your school a student who does not carry out disciplinary rules' (Harijan, 13-7-1940; CWMG, vol.72).

Child Labour

Gandhi suggested imposing prohibition against employment of children of school going age in factories. He opined that childhood be spent in acquiring education and not in working in factories to sustain the family from the effects of poverty. Child labour is now a major factor of menace wherein thousands of children in India are employed in factories to earn livelihood. Trafficking of children has become a common offence that robs children of their innocence and makes them work through hard labour at a tender age.

Spinning

Gandhi recommended spinning for children too. He wanted that women and children up to the age of twelve to spare time for spinning and other processes of khadi production. Even if children devoted four hours to cleaning, carding and spinning, enough khadi could be produced. Gandhi envisaged this task for children with the simple aim of inculcating the spirit of service and sacrifice, which he associated with spinning to be inculcated at a young age. This, in turn, would prepare them for not only the political freedom but also the social and economic freedom through spinning khadi. Spinning and charkha, for Gandhi, symbolised the nationalist spirit.

Similarly he also requested the parents to give their children 'education in the essentials of the dharma (moral duty), teach them non-cooperation with sin and the use of the weapon of non-violence and obtain their blessings in this sacred task (freedom struggle)...the Viceroy's goodwill will not help us to win swaraj but the blessings of the pure-hearted children certainly will' (Navajivan, 11-9-1921).

11.4 GANDHI ON YOUTH

In an individual's life, the time of youth constitutes the most crucial phase for it is in this phase that the possibilities of following a disciplined way of life or go towards a wayward behaviour determines the way of life or future course of action. Therefore, Gandhi wanted the youth to engage in constructive work, educate the villagers and imbibe morally superior values. To Gandhi, the youth are the agents of social change. They have the capacity to establish an ideal society based on the immortal principles of truth and non-violence. Gandhi had an important message for the youth which would be studied under various rubrics in the following paragraphs.

Violence and vices

One of the most telling effects of violence, according to Gandhi, reflected in the violent methods they choose to settle scores or conflicts. Reacting to the assassination of Mr.Saunders, a British official killed by the youth and the subsequent violent reaction on

some leaders of Punjab, Lajpat Rai, Gandhi has openly criticised the revengeful tactics that involved violence. He found their intentions misplaced, having no relevance as violence begets violence. He stated emphatically that the freedom of the nation cannot be attained by resorting to violence. He observed that 'the temple of freedom requires the patient, intelligent and constructive effort of tens of thousands of men and women, young and old. Acts such as we are deploring decidedly retard the progress of this quiet building. When it does nothing else, it diverts the attention of the countless builders' (Young India, 27-12-1928). His Hind Swaraj is an account of his message to the Indian Youth whose motives were misplaced while deciding the methods of attaining the independence. He also advised the youth not to give in to the evils habits like drinking as these habits cloud the reasoning and wisdom of the youth. He suggested the path of morality, spirituality, non-violence and self-discipline. According to Gandhi, the seven social sins include:

- Politics without principles
- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce without morality
- Science without humanity
- Worship without sacrifice

He warned the youth not to drift apart and observe the above-mentioned factors as crucial to understand. As has already been mentioned in some of the lessons in the previous courses, Gandhi suggested '*Ekadasha vratas*' to be observed by the youth to lead a disciplined life.

Gandhi was also against the youth adopting the culture that has violence inherently. He rues about the cultural and political degradation of the west and warns the youth not to adopt these as role models. As he said, 'my hope lies in the youth of the country. Such of them as are prey to the vice are not vicious by nature. They are helplessly and thoughtlessly drawn to it. They must realize the harm it has done them and society. They must understand too that nothing but a rigorously disciplined life will save them and the country from utter ruin. Above all, unless they visualize God and seek His aid in keeping them from temptation, no amount of dry discipline will do them much good' (Young India, 9-7-1925). Gandhi had message for the students too that has been dealt with in one of the following Units.

Disregard for age

Gandhi felt it is quite natural that the youth has little patience with the older generation. Due to the gap, the attitudes and thoughts differ between both the generations. At the same time, he was against the belittling of the elders by the youth for no reason or on the reasons of outdated thinking of the older generation. He states that 'it is the fashion in some quarters nowadays for the young to discredit whatever may be said by old people. I am not prepared to say that there is absolutely no justification for this belief. But I warn the youth of the country against always discounting whatever old men or women may say for the mere fact that it is said by such persons. Even as wisdom often

comes from the mouths of babes, so does it often come from the mouths of old people. The golden rule is to test everything in the light of reason and experience, no matter from where it comes' (Harijan, 28-3-1936). Gandhi himself set an example of such devotion to elders much before he became a prominent public figure. His devoted service to his father and his firm resolve not to break the vows administered to him at the behest of his mother before leaving for England for higher studies stand as good examples to emulate.

National Militia and Military Training

Gandhi supported the idea of national militia only under swaraj because people cannot be made to adopt non-violence under compulsion. Therefore, it is necessary that they learn the ways of meeting national crisis by non-violent means. He said that 'it is one thing to adopt non-violence for a specific purpose in a time of crisis, and quite another thing to advocate its adoption by all for all time as a philosophy of life. But I lack the strength for such a mission. I may not therefore resist the formation of a national militia'. Gandhi considered the militia as unnecessary but had doubts about convincing others about it. At the same time, Gandhi disapproved the idea of the youth taking military training from then government as most likely that would have to be used against their own brethren. Since they owe allegiance to the Military, they would be compelled or ordered to train guns at their own countrymen. They would come under the hypnotic spell of the force and conform to it under all circumstances, sometimes even against national interests. The youth, under the oath of allegiance to the corps, would be more loyal to the British (Young India, 10-1-1929). Post-independence, Gandhi preferred to have a minimum armed force for the country.

11.5 CONSTRUCTIVE WORK AND COUNTRY'S SERVICE

The Constructive Programme, Gandhi's blueprint for the social regeneration of India, has provided a great opportunity to the youth to take part in the constructive work and do immense service to the nation. Gandhi especially called upon the youth to undertake the task for they are the real torchbearers of the future, in whose hands India had great future. Gandhi wanted the youth to make village life their goal and not the city life. He wanted that the rural life, which has its roots in the ancient civilisation of India, be redeemed by the youth of the nation as he felt that real progress of India lies in its villages. Gandhi felt that it could be possible only if the youth of the country would undertake this onerous task to 'reconstruct their life and pass every day of their vacation in the villages surrounding their colleges or high schools' (Young India, 7-11-1929). He called upon the youth 'who are dissatisfied with their existing surroundings and outlook to study these two great national institutions (All-India Spinners' Association and National Educational Institutions) which are doing silent but most effective constructive work and which present the youth of the country an opportunity both for service and for honourable maintenance...let them penetrate the villages and find an unlimited scope for service, research and true knowledge' (Ibid.,). Gandhi aimed at national liberation and development through constructive work. He remarked that 'today the reins of the nation are in the hands of the youth. It is up to them to strive unitedly for the independence of the country' (CWMG, vol.42, p.352).

Gandhi believed that every nation depends a great deal on its youth. Youth organisations

help a great deal in going ahead with good work. He said that 'it is helpful to have good young men coming forward, for it is they alone who can venture to experiment. The members of these youth organizations will be able to achieve many great things, if they work with sincerity and with the sole intention of doing the right thing for their country' (Indian Opinion, 28-4-1906). He observed that 'a nation whose youths discard restraint, courtesy, humility and tolerance courts destruction. Their responsibility is greater than that of old people because the latter have given whatever they could or as much as they wished to give (to the nation). Youths are today shaping the new order and making fresh contributions' (Navajivan, 5-12-1926; CWMG, vol.32, p.388).

He called upon the youth to contribute towards education, prohibition, health and hygiene and teach the villagers the benefits of all these. He also felt that it is their duty to take up such constructive work. To undertake such service, Gandhi suggested to the youth to banish all evil thoughts from their mind and take up service of the country as the motto of their life. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reports that 'he (Gandhi) referred to non-cooperation movement as nothing but a movement for self-purification and advised them (youth) to surrender themselves to God's will (CWMG, vol.27, pp.11-12). He advised them to take up spinning and use the charkha with a spirit of sacrifice and service and spiritually achieve communion with God in the process.

In the course of national freedom struggle, Gandhi assigned greater role to the youth especially in the non-cooperation movement. He said that 'they can supply recruits in large numbers in the civil disobedience campaign. They can, moreover, help to carry the message of independence to every nook and corner of the land. They can usefully picket foreign cloth and liquor shops. Those of its members who are unable to participate actively in the present campaign can render good service in the realm of social reforming, popularizing khaddar and swadeshi articles, in pushing forward prohibition propaganda, etc.' (*The Hindu*, 25-3-1930; CWMG, vol.43, pp.117-8). Gandhi advised the youth to 'shed moral weakness and speak out their thoughts with courage and yet with humility and restraint' (CWMG, vol.38, p.139). In his address to the youth during the Youth week at Ahmedabad, Gandhi advised the students not to 'insult the teachers or utter bitter words. Harsh words do no good. They will only create bitterness. And if there is hard work combined with courtesy, you will do credit to yourselves and your name will be cherished in future history. Be courteous at heart as well. Your struggle is a peaceful one, and whatever the provocation, you may not cross the limits of peacefulness' (*Prajabandhu*, 13-1-1929, translation from Gujarati; CWMG, vol.38, pp.334-335). Most importantly, Gandhi wanted the youth to help the farmer in elevating his miseries. Though he found the youth having enthusiasm to do such service, he cautioned the youth not to carry on just with fervour but serve the farmers with patience, self-confidence, physical strength, capacity to withstand heat, cold, etc., and the willingness to get training (Navajivan, 22-12-1929; CWMG, vol.42, p.303).

11.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi's fondness for children made him express his views on each and every minute detail regarding their upbringing, education, health, cleanliness and finally their little but valuable contribution towards freedom struggle via simple tasks like assisting in spinning. He wanted that the best of education-physical, mental and spiritual-be provided to them so that they would become good human beings in their life. His views on the youth depict with much clarity as to how he envisioned a greater role for them not only in the political

struggle for independence but also in the social and economic regeneration of India. Apart from that Gandhi envisaged a strict code of conduct for both young men and women thus giving immense importance to the character building. To him, only those who have purity in character can contribute towards the all round development of the self, community and subsequently of the nation.

11.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. 'Children are the true practitioners of truth and non-violence'. Enumerate Gandhi's views on children in this context.
2. What are Gandhi's views on children's education?
3. What role did Gandhi envisage for the youth in the national regeneration of India?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi (Select Volumes).



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 12 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON LABOUR

Structure

12.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

12.2 Economic Ideals of Gandhi

12.2.1 Trusteeship Theory

12.2.2 Bread Labour

12.2.3 Dignity of Labour, Labour Rights and Duties

12.3 Views on Industrial Relations

12.3.1 Conflict between Labour and Capital

12.3.2 Employer-Employees Relationship

12.3.3 Trade Unions

12.3.4 Workers' Struggle: Strikes

12.3.5 Conflict Resolution

12.4 Other Working Provisions

12.4.1 Wages and Profit

12.4.2 Working Hours

12.4.3 Working Conditions

12.4.4 Child and Women Labour

12.5 Relevance of Gandhi's Views on Labour in the 21st Century

12.6 Summary

12.7 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Gandhi's views on labour are part and parcel of his basic economic ideas evolved from his broad political, sociological and philosophical ideals. These ideals are directed to the moral development of human beings, real economic progress, provision of basic needs for life and existence, economic self-sufficiency and the guarantee of economic freedom, justice and equality. Further, most of his views on labour have been guided by his strong belief in the trusteeship theory deep rooted in the 1st verse of Isopanishad and *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita*. Thus, it is desirable to have a background of the basic economic ideas of Gandhi and an introduction to his trusteeship principle. Gandhi's views about labour are scattered in his writings. In this Unit, for the sake of simplicity of analysis, these views will be presented under the sub-heads – bread labour, industrial relations, conflict between labour and capital, dignity of labour, employer-employee relationship, trade unions, rights and duties of labour, strikes, conflict resolutions, wages and profit, working conditions, working hours, child labour, women labour, etc.

Aims and Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the economic ideals of Mahatma Gandhi
- Understand the basic tenets of trusteeship theory
- Explain Gandhi's views on different dimensions of labour
- Understand the Gandhian views on conflict between labour and capital and measures to resolve the conflict.
- Examine the relevance of Gandhi's views on labour in the 21st century.

12.2 ECONOMIC IDEALS OF GANDHI

Truth, non-violence and sarvodaya based maximisation of social welfare that invariably includes individual welfare, is the guiding principle of all social action and policy in Gandhi's stream of thought. To him, welfare includes material as well as spiritual. Full employment, economic equality and swadeshi constitute three major objectives of Gandhian economic system. Therefore, he advocated reduction in economic inequalities. To Gandhi, wealth does not mean welfare. His is the economics of basic human needs including food, clothing and shelter. He was against the concentration and acquisition of wealth beyond a point. According to him, it was necessary to voluntarily reduce wants particularly when majority of the people are living below poverty line. Gandhian economics is highly interlinked with ethics.

"Economics that hurts the moral well being of an individual or nation is immoral, and therefore, sinful. True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics" (Ghosh, 2007).

Gandhi advocated decentralised and market-negotiated economic system wherein economic decisions are taken by individuals. Under such a system, private property exists and production is owned by either private firms or by cooperatives of workers and farmers. Material incentives for the least paid numbers of the society and moral incentives for elite have been recommended as motivating force in the production process. Gandhi was against the use of labour-supplanting machinery in a labour surplus economy like India. Machinery is permissible if it does not deprive masses of people of the opportunity of labour, if it increases efficiency, and does not make people slaves.

In Gandhi's view, true economics cannot ignore moral values. The basic purpose of his meta-economics was to achieve economic self-sufficiency by restricting meta-needs. His idea was to save the labour force from being de-humanised by the onslaught of industrial civilisation of his time.

12.2.1 Trusteeship Theory

Trusteeship theory is deep-rooted in the 1st verse of Isopanishad and is the guiding principle in the Gandhian scheme of thought to resolve the labour problems. The theory envisages that rich should hold all their property in trust for the poor and expand it for their benefit. Similarly, each labourer should consider himself to be a trustee for the welfare of his fellow labourers. Thus, the trusteeship theory is not unilateral and does not

imply superiority of the trustee. It is perfectly a mutual affair and each believes that his own interest is best safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other. This extension of trusteeship principle is based on Bhagavad Gita's following verse:

“May you propitiate the Gods and may the Gods propitiate you, and may you reach the highest good by this mutual propitiation”.

‘There is no separate species called Gods’, according to Gandhi in universe, ‘but all who have the power of production and will work for the community using the power, are gods-labourers no less than the capitalists’ (Harijan, 25-6-1938). To Gandhi, truth and non-violence have been basic means to address labour problems.

12.2.2 Bread Labour

Labour had four components (i) Bread Labour (ii) Intellectual labour, (iii) Labour as an instrument for self-actualisation, (iv) Labour as a method of service to others. The term ‘Bread Labour’ coined by T.M. Bondaref, (a Russian Writer) and widely published by Tolstoy was well accepted by Gandhi. He stipulates that “man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands”. According to Gandhi, the principle of bread labour is identical to the principle of sacrifice contained in the 3rd chapter of *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* that ‘...he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food’. A man does not have the right to eat without doing any physical labour. According to Gandhi, minimum physical labour must be performed by everybody from the philosopher to ordinary labour. Obligation of bread labour by all, in the eyes of Gandhi would obliterate the conflict between capital and labour and the rich would deem themselves only trustees of their property. Further, it also minimises our wants. Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But physical labour is necessary and nobody should be exempted from it.

The performance of labour or work in the spirit of *Yajna* as depicted in *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* leads to self-actualisation. ‘*Yajna*’ refers to an act directed at the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it. Performance of all activities of life in the spirit of renunciation dedicated to the cause of society leads to freedom and immortality.

12.2.3 Dignity of Labour, Labour Rights and Duties

Gandhi had high respect for the dignity of labour and firmly believed that labouring with one's body i.e. with hands and bodies is the law of one's being and there was no reason why one should hesitate and feel dissatisfied with one's labour. A nation may do without millionaires and without its capitalists, but it can never do without its labour.

To receive higher wage for his labour is labourer's right and to work to the best of his ability for the wages he receives is his duty. Since Gandhi, during his experiments, found that labour discharges its obligation more effectively and more conscientiously than the master who has corresponding obligations towards the labourers, it becomes necessary for labour to find out how far labour can impose its will on the master. The best way, in this regard according to him is that, labourers should understand their rights and the methods to get them enforced. For that they need proper education and training. He should remain non-violent even under grave circumstances of provocation. Drinking and gambling must be given up entirely.

12.3 VIEWS ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The relationship between the worker on the one hand and his/her employer on the other constitutes the industrial relations. How the management treats its workers and how workers work in the interest of their employers is the essence of industrial relations. The trade unions and employers/employers' associations are the principal parties in industrial relations. Government also plays an important role in protecting the interests of workers and helping to resolve the conflicts whenever they arise. The strikes by the trade unions and lockouts by the employers are the important form of industrial disputes/conflicts. Therefore, the ways and means of resolution of industrial conflicts/disputes become the important components of industrial relations. Gandhi offered his views on all these dimensions of industrial relations. Let us begin with his views on conflict between labour and capital.

12.3.1 Conflict between Labour and Capital

Conflict can broadly be divided into four categories: economic, political, social and methodological. The conflict between rich and poor, between labour and capital, between highly developed and backward regions and between the rural and urban areas are economic in nature. Gandhi recognised the conflict between the working class and the capitalists. He witnessed the exploitative nature of capitalist method of production in terms of dehumanised working conditions, alienation of workers, unfairly low wages and high incidence of unemployment caused by use of labour saving machinery. Conflict between labour and capital arises precisely due to two reasons – dependency with unequal power relations and goal incompatibility; dependency and unequal power, in the sense that the workers have to sell their labour power to earn subsistence and reproduce their labour power, which is a perishable commodity. The workers have low opportunity cost and do not own the means of production. Their bargaining power is much weaker and is completely dependent on their capitalist. This gives the capitalist the opportunity to exploit the labour. Thus, the exploitation of factory workers by way of payment of lower wages than what their productivity permits is the important source of conflict between workers and management. Capitalism distorts human dignity, liberty and equality. The workers are dehumanised, deprived and frustrated (Ghosh, 2007).

The goal incompatibility envisages that capitalists want to maximise profit but the labourers want to maximise higher wages and better working conditions. Genesis of conflict, according to Gandhi, is more due to the imbalance in the system where material factors are given excessive importance at the cost of moral factors.

12.3.2 Employer – Employee Relationship

Gandhi advocated harmonious relationship between employers and employees with strong support to fair and just treatment to the workers. He vehemently argued for payment of fair wages to the labourers and went to the extent that “A labourer should prefer a state of utter starvation rather than to work at insufficient wage making it impossible to observe the primary laws of morality”. At the same time he insisted that the workers are obliged to treat the business of their employers as their own business and devote their honest and undivided attention.

Regarding employer-employee relationship, Gandhi viewed that workers' success lies in the success of the employees, and in their defeat, the defeat of employers. If workers' demand for hike in wages is accepted by the employers, it will satisfy the workers and

they will remain ever grateful towards them. It will be beneficial for both of them. Gandhi, therefore, advised the employers to willingly regard workers as the real owners of the concerns which they have created. They should consider it as their duty to equip the employees with sound education drawing out the intelligence dormant in them. Workers have to realise their strength that no part of the world can do anything without workers. However workers' success depends upon their truthfulness, courage, sense of justice and control over anger etc.

Gandhi was of the opinion that whereas it is quite proper on the part of the labourers to insist upon their rights and privileges, it is imperative for them to recognise the obligations that every right carries with it. They can have the right to insist upon adequate wages, human treatment from their employees, proper and good sanitary lodgings and they are duty bound to fulfil their commitments and obligations to the organisations they are working in. "If workers make a demand merely because they feel they have the strength to do so, regardless of the employers' condition, it will mean that they have succumbed to the modern demonical justice. Mobilising forces by employers against the workers is like raising "an army of elephants against ants."

In the event of destruction resorted to by the strikers in their enterprises, the mill owners are advised to offer the full control of the concerns to the strikers. In this manner, the employers would not lose anything and their action will avoid opposition and will earn the blessings of the workers. It would be an intelligent use by the capitalists of their resources and honest dealing in regard to the employees whom they would have converted into honourable partners.

Exploitation of the poor can be prevented not by destruction of a few millionaires but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-cooperate with their exploiters. It will convert the exploiters and will ensure equal partnership among them. According to Gandhi, capital per se is not evil. It is its wrong use that is evil. Capital in some or other form will always be needed. However, capitalists will exist only as trustees.

12.3.3 Trade Unions

Labour plays a crucial role in Gandhian economics. He favoured the formation of trade unions in different places. The activities of trade unions should be based on non-violence, truth and arbitration. Trade unions are expected to safeguard the rights and interests of their members. They should arrange for the education- both general and scientific- for both men and women through night schools. Hospital, crèche, maternity home should be attached to every centre and education for the children of labour need to be arranged. They should be able to support themselves during strikes.

Gandhi organised labour in Ahmedabad on the basis of non-violence and democratisation and demonstrated it as a role model to run all the trade union organisations on the lines of Ahmedabad model. Trade unions should aim to elevate the labour to its deserved status. The intellectual and moral height of labour should be raised by sheer merit to make him a capable master of means of production.

12.3.4 Workers' Struggle: Strikes

Strikes, in Gandhi's opinion, are an inherent right of the workers for the purpose of securing justice. However, the moment the employers accept the principle of arbitration, resorting to strike must be considered as a crime. As labourers become organised,

strikes must be few and far between. As the labourers' mental and collective development progress, the principle of arbitration replaces the principle of strikes. To seek justice without resorting to violence, and by an appeal to the good sense of the capitalist by arbitration is lawful means. A strike should be spontaneous and be not manipulated. There should be perfect cooperation amongst the strikers. It should be peaceful and there should be no show of force. The strikers should take up work either singularly or in cooperation with each other, in order to earn their bread.

For successful strike, there must be a perfect correspondence between labour, the labour leader and the adviser of the labour leader. If the perfect correspondence lacks, the strike is bound to fail. The secret of success, according to Gandhi, lies in the indispensable golden rule that labourers must find their own support. The workers' struggle depends solely on the justice of their demand and the rightness of their action. Even if the demand is just and the workers use injustice to get the demand fulfilled, tell falsehood, cheat or coerce, they will fail in spite of all their sufferings. Gandhi was against mixing of political and economic strike. "Political strike must be treated on their own merits and must not be mixed with or related to economic strikes."

During the lockouts resorted to by the employers, the workers should not:

(i) remain idle as idle resort to mischief, (ii) pass time by sleeping during the day or in gambling, (iii) go to the mills during the continuance of the lock-out. They should (i) utilise some of their time in cleansing their houses (ii) spend time in reading books and increasing their knowledge and also teach the illiterates, (iii) those who know the art of tailoring, cabinet making or wood carving and engraving can find work for themselves, (iv) spend their time in learning some new and easy occupation.

12.3.5 Conflict Resolution

A struggle fought on the basis of true justice is beneficial to both sides. According to Gandhi, a struggle based on truth coupled with a sense of justice having no malice towards the employers is not only bound to succeed but will also generate good relations between the workers and the employers. To Gandhi in a struggle for truth, both sides need not be followers of truth. Even if one side keeps to the truth, the struggle for truth will succeed. If we fight non-violently and do not lose courage, we are bound to succeed in the end. Cooperation between labour and capital work wonderfully. But that can happen only when labour is intelligent enough to cooperate with itself and then offer cooperation with capital on terms of honourable equality.

These conflicts can be resolved by educating the workers, and building organisation among them and thereby enabling them to realise their strength. Organised and enlightened labour can only dictate their terms. Gandhi believed that strong hearts, enlightened minds, and willing hands can brave all odds and remove all obstacles. The capitalists and labourers have to seek and win the cooperation of each other. However, this does not mean that labourers should accept exploitation. Workers' internal strength will make exploitation impossible.

The root cause of conflict between labour and management, according to Gandhi, lies in misconception and ignorance about each other's duties and obligations. The moment the management realises its true function and labour its inherent strength, the struggle ends and relations become cordial. In order to fulfil their real functions, capitalists are expected to act as servants of society and not as exploiters. Their wealth, power and brains must

be utilised for the welfare of workers who toil and sweat for them. As trustees of the society, capitalists are expected to look after their material and moral welfare. Believing in the fundamental equality of the capitalists and labourers, Gandhi argued to change the attitude of capitalist section. Similarly, Gandhi advised labour to shed their inferiority complex and realise their true worth and dignity. All conflicts between capital and labour end, if the labour is made aware of the fact that without its collaboration capital is utterly helpless. The sensitisation of labour towards its labour power will enable it to dictate its terms to the capitalists. Keeping in view the inter-dependent nature of capital and labour in the production process, Gandhi was of the view that capital and labour should supplement, help and come close to each other in unity and harmony. Gandhi does not believe in the supremacy of one over the other. By way of mutual cooperation, both can progress.

Gandhi was against the political use of labourers. Labour strikes may be resorted for the betterment of labourers and regulation of prices of their products. However, due care needs to be taken to ensure that: (i) the cause of the strike must be just, (ii) there should be practical unanimity among the strikers, (iii) strikers should be able to maintain themselves during the strike period without falling upon union funds, (iv) there is not enough other labour to replace strikers.

In the following situations, Gandhi suggested, not to take recourse to strikes.

- (i) if the capitalists are open to arbitration,
- (ii) if there is not a real grievance,
- (iii) if the persons concerned are not able to support themselves out of their own savings or by engaging in some temporary occupations such as gardening, spinning and weaving.
- (iv) strikers must fix an unalterable minimum demand and declare it before embarking upon the strike. In Gandhi's view, there is no room for violence in terms of intimidation, incendiarism or otherwise in civil strike.

If an employee or a group of employees go on leave without proper sanction constitutes violence, according to Gandhi, due to committing a breach of contract of his service.

12.4 OTHER WORKING PROVISIONS

12.4.1 Wages and Profit

Gandhi was of the view that enough wages should be paid to the workers. Enough wages, according to him, refer to the wage level that enables them to maintain themselves and to educate their children decently. Resorting to non-violence and appeal to the good sense of the capitalists by arbitration are lawful means to get enough wages. Gandhi was of the view that the profits of the big concerns must bear relation to the wages of the workers. As labourers become more organised, they will fight for due adjustment of prices of manufacturers to the making of which they contribute so much labour. Thereafter there will be no question of mills charging exorbitant prices just to swell the shareholders' dividends irrespective of the interest of the working man or the consumer. There should be a respectable proportion between dividends, wages and prices.

12.4.2 Working Hours

Gandhi advocated the reduction of working hours from twelve to ten. He was of the view that reduction of working hours from twelve to ten will put labourers in better health and it will not reduce the total output. "When mill hands learn to identify themselves with the interest of the mill-owners, they will rise and with them will rise the industries of the country". He, therefore, argued that the mill owners reduce the hours of labour to ten and the mill hands to give as much work in ten hours, as they have been doing in twelve.

12.4.3 Working Conditions

Gandhi was of the view that workers should devote their hike in wages in education of their children and the hours saved in reading the books. The employers may open economical restaurants for the working men where they can get pure milk and wholesome refreshment. They can open reading rooms and provide homeless amusements and games for them. The unions should also attempt to arrange and create similar type of facilities. Mere increase in wages need not necessarily satisfy the workers. What is important is by what means they get wage increases and how they spend it. A satisfactory solution of the condition of labour must include the following:

- (i) The hours of labour must leave the workmen some hours of leisure.
- (ii) They must get facilities for their own education
- (iii) Provision should be made for an adequate supply of milk, clothing and necessary education for their children.
- (iv) There should be sanitary dwellings for the workmen.
- (v) They should be in a position to save enough to maintain themselves during their old age.

12.4.4 Child and Women Labour

Gandhi was against child labour. The children upto the age of 16 years, according to him, must be in the schools and they should not be engaged in earning wages. The engagement of child labour reflects their misuse and a sign of national degradation and hence should be stopped.

Similarly Gandhi preferred women to be good householders and devote their time in looking after the family and children in a better manner. He was of the view that labouring of husband and wife for mere maintenance reflects national degradation. According to him, it is like a bankrupt living on his capital.

12.5 RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S VIEWS ON LABOUR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The relevance of Gandhi's basic principles i.e. non-violence, truth, satyagraha, cooperation, and trusteeship as a means to attain harmonious industrial relations and resolve the conflict between labour and capital in the 21st century are questioned on the following grounds:

- (i) The proposition of trusteeship theory as a way to solve most of the labour problems is based on the belief in essential goodness of human nature whereas in practice, we observe selfishness in human nature. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to put many of the Gandhi's ideas into practice.

- (ii) When a few who ought to hold the economic power in trust for others from whom they derive it, use it for their own cause, and to the detriment of the rest, the inevitable result will be the deprivation of the few. Under such a situation, Gandhi's advocacy for trusteeship theory and cooperation between employer and employee will not work.
- (iii) In the materialistic worldview wherein maximum consumption, utility maximisation, wealth acquisition and expansion are highly valued, the success of trusteeship theory and Satyagraha appears to be difficult.
- (iv) The caste-ridden social stratification and vote bank politics in the name of caste and religion further widens the gap between different communities making Gandhian way of solving the problems more difficult.

The experiment with truth and non-violence was proposed to be carried out in a system that became explosively violent and aggressive not only during alien rule but also against the internal socio-economic inequalities, exploitation and injustice. Even Gandhi himself could not control the mob-violence in the case of outbreak of violence in August 1942.

In spite of the above arguments, certain Gandhian views on labour are/ will be relevant in the 21st century in the following manner.

- (i) In the wake of rapid changes in the information technology and consequent speed up of globalisation process, competition has become a key factor for entrepreneurs' survival in the global market. For that bringing efficiency and productivity have become unavoidable for entrepreneurs, which in turn, demand the cooperation between employers and employees. It is, therefore in the changed context of 21st century challenges that Gandhi's view about cooperation between employers and employees has become highly relevant. Similarly, in order to update the workers with the fast changes in the technology, workers need to be trained and retrained from time to time.
- (ii) The developed countries have opted for the materialistic approach as a way of life and the developing countries are being tempted to move towards that direction. A careful scrutiny of the facts will reveal that this materialistic approach, to a significant extent, has been instrumental in generating the passions for more and more goods. The roots of today's serious problems (like climatic change, environmental degradation, widening gap between the rich and the poor, jobless growth, tensions, etc.) lie in adhering to this approach in an unquestioning manner. In such a situation, Gandhi's advice to control the excessive consumption and minimising the wants is the need of the hour and highly relevant.
- (iii) Gandhi was not simply an ideologue. He was a practitioner and demonstrated the efficacy of non-violence, truth, Satyagraha and cooperation, by putting an end to the labour exploitation of Indigo workers under 'Tinkathia' system in Champaran by way of satyagraha and non-violent means. Organising the labour in Ahmedabad and his several movements in South Africa for the cause of labourers illustrate the working of his ideas in practice.
- (iv) Gandhi's ideas against child labour are relevant and international agencies like International Labour Organisation and UNICEF have passed conventions against child labour. Various NGOs and other national and international agencies have also been working towards the elimination of the child labour.
- (v) Similarly, Gandhi's views on wages and strikes have been well-endorsed by different organisations and are and will be relevant in the 21st century.

12.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi's views on labour are part and parcel of his economic ideals and trusteeship theory based on truth, non-violence, non- possession and welfare of all. As a background, it is desirable to have an overview of his basic economic ideas and trusteeship principle in mind before knowing Gandhi's views on labour. In the Gandhian stream of thought, economics and ethics are interlinked. Trusteeship theory has been the guiding force for harmonious relationship between the employer and the employees. Labour has four components – (i) bread labour (manual labour), (ii) intellectual labour, (iii) labour as an instrument, and (iv) labour as a method of service for others. Gandhi had high respect for the dignity of labour. The dependency of labour on capital with unequal power relations and goal incompatibility are the two important reasons for the conflict between labour and capital. Gandhi advocated cordial relationship between capital and labour by way of fair and just treatment to the labourers. He favoured the formulation of trade unions in different places. He recognised the strikes as an inherent right of the workers for securing justice with the rider that the moment employers accept arbitration, strike must be considered as a crime. He was for the payment of enough wages to the workers and a respectable proportion between dividends, wages and prices. Gandhi advocated reduction of working hours from twelve to ten hours. He was against child labour, and argued for improvement in working conditions. Gandhi's views about cooperation between the employer and employees, elimination of child labour, workers' right to strike, curbing consumption, fair wages to the workers etc. are/ will be highly relevant in the 21st century.

12.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. State the meaning of the term 'welfare' in Gandhian perspective.
2. Identify the different components of labour.
3. State the important labour rights and duties identified by Gandhi.
4. Give two fundamental reasons for the conflict between labour and capital.
5. List the Gandhian prescriptions for harmonious industrial relations. How can a strike resorted by the workers be successful?
6. How can a conflict between management and labourers be resolved?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Ghosh, B.N., *Gandhian Political Economy* (Alternative voices in contemporary economics), chapters 5 and 6, pp. 115-174, Ashgate Publishers (TD, Hamshiri (England), 2007.

Hingorani, Anand T., (ed), *Gandhi for 21st century*, vol. 17 – Capital and Labour by M.K. Gandhi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 1998.

Gandhi, M.K., *Bread Labour* (The Gospel of work) compiled by Ravindra Kelkar, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960.

Sriman Narayan., *Relevance of Gandhian Economics*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1970.

Diwan, Romesh, and Mark Lutz., (ed), *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985.