

Structure**9.1 Introduction****9.2 Gandhi's views on Religion****9.3 Religious Pluralism and Secularism****9.4 Humanism and Universalism****9.5 Impact of Gandhi's Secularism on India****9.6 Summary****9.7 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

9.1 INTRODUCTION

“Sarva Dharma Samabhava” is a unique concept of Indian secularism which emerged in independent India under the impact of Gandhian thought, rooted in Hindu culture and tradition. The term ‘Sarva Dharma Samabhava’ in Hindi, India’s dominant language, means literally equal respect for all religions. It evolved in the course of state formation in postcolonial India and is often taken as an Indian philosophical contribution to political thought. The idea is quite distinct from the western concept of secularism, which advocates the total separation of state from religion in place of treating all religions equally.

While in Yervada Jail in Pune in 1930, Gandhi often dwelt upon the concept of “Sarva Dharma Samabhava” in his letters to the inmates of his Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad. Always inclined towards the goal of Hindu-Muslim unity and peace, Gandhi relentlessly sought ways for achieving such unity. His problem was how to generate a secular social space in a society where religion constituted a basic part of mass belief and behaviour (Rao, 1989).

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- Gandhi's views on religion and his respect for all religions
- The nature of religious pluralism and secularism in India
- The impact of Gandhi's secularism on India.

9.2 GANDHI'S VIEWS ON RELIGION

Gandhi's attitude to religion holds a key to the understanding of his life and thought. Gandhi believed that the function of religion was to unite rather than divide people. Gandhi's strongest bond with Hinduism came from the Gita which he called his “spiritual dictionary” and which had the greatest influence on him (Nanda, 1995, p.13). Two fundamental influences on him from the Gita came from the words *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhava* (equability). However, Gandhi had a strong rational and sceptical streak which made his religious philosophy, though grounded in Hinduism, deeply humanist and cosmopolitan. Gandhi's Hinduism was captured in a few fundamental beliefs: in the supreme reality of God, the unity of all

life, and the value of ahimsa (love) as a means of realizing God (Nanda, 1995, p. 17). He believed that the real test of spiritual progress was the extent to which one could translate one's beliefs in workaday life. What cannot be followed in day to day practice cannot be called religion.

In his days in South Africa, Gandhi had made a comparative study of religions whereby he was impressed by the underlying unity of all religions. From thereon he continued to emphasise the need for co-existence and tolerance between the adherents of different faiths. The various religions were 'as so many leaves of a tree'; they might seem different but 'at the trunk they are one.' God, Allah, Rama, Narayan, Ishwar, Khuda were descriptions of the same Being. God's grace and revelation were not the monopoly of any race or nation; they descended equally upon all who waited upon God. He held that no religion was absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or more or less perfect.

In his article 'Why I am a Hindu', written in 1927, Gandhi wrote that he found Hinduism to be the most tolerant of all religions... Its freedom from dogma gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions but... to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism... Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives (Young India 21 October 1927, quoted in Nanda, 1995, p.21). While he stressed individual judgement and conscience, he- at the same time- stressed co-existence and toleration in relations with the followers of other religions.

Gandhi believed that all people had a right to practise any religion they chose to identify with and that form of worship should not be dictated by the state. Himself a staunch Hindu, he believed that different faiths represented different paths converging on the same point, Truth. There is a religion which underlies all religions. Hence in the event of conflicting counsels from different religions, Gandhi held that Truth is superior to everything, and that which conflicts with it is to be rejected just as what conflicts with non-violence should be rejected. Similarly that which conflicted with Reason must also be rejected. Thus Truth is the religion which underlies all religions. Rationality of thought was paramount for Gandhi. He envisioned a non-violent society in which all decisions were based on consensus, arrived at by rational discussion in which each strove to look at the subject in question from the standpoint of others. This underlay his belief in religious pluralism and mutual respect and toleration which was the core of his secularism. He believed that in a multi-religious society, toleration is bound to be the guiding principle for all organised religions. This was the core of the Gandhian perspective of Indian secularism, that of 'Sarva Dharma Samabhava' meaning 'equal respect for all religions.'

In this sense, Gandhi was a deeply religious person who was ardently devoted to the search for truth which to him was the religion which underlay all religions. Experimentation and religion combined in his thought and life. It was this combination of religiosity and modern humanistic outlook in him that was constantly reflected during the course of the struggle for independence and won him the support of the masses. He tirelessly called for a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Christian unity based on a pluralistic theism with the core concept of Truth as ultimate and one.

9.3 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SECULARISM

Gandhi acknowledged the multi-religiosity and cultural diversity of India when he stated in *Hind Swaraj* that India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. It was the religious pluralism which Gandhi advocated, than anything else, that greatly affected the development of secularism in India. Gandhi's religious pluralism is well expressed in his own words: 'My position is that all religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the same innate respect for all religions as we have for our own'. He advocated not only mutual toleration but also equal respect. It required that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians be willing to respect all religions as equally right. It is pluralism, which regards all religions as the same and all gods as variations of the One, which underlies his concept of secularism.

It could be said that Gandhi spoke of secularism from the perspective of religion, and religious pluralism in keeping with polytheistic Hinduism. Thus, it can be said that Gandhi played a very important role in transmitting a pluralist picture of secularism among the Hindus. Gandhi's religious policy, therefore, was different in the sense that inter-faith relationships and religious harmony were based on the equality of all religions rather than a separation of religion from the state. Within this framework, to be secular in politics was not to abjure one's religion altogether, but only to abjure the religious use of political, legal institutions like the government (Rao, 1989, p.33).

Gandhi's religious quest not only moulded his personality but also shaped his political techniques with which he confronted racialism in South Africa and colonialism in India. While Gandhi's advocacy of mutual tolerance and respect between different religions originally arose from his study of comparative religion, it had a practical aspect too which found expression in his leadership of struggles against racial, social and political injustice with adherents in these struggles belonging to all the major religions. Gandhi was aware of the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims, the two major communities in India and the great need for toleration. However, Gandhi's secular perspective has not been non-controversial. He has been accused of exploiting religion to rouse the masses or of using Hindu symbols which eventually contributed to the communal polarisation leading to the division of India.

Religion and Politics

Gandhi was often accused of mixing religion with politics. But he repeatedly clarified his meaning of religion thus: "Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which ... leaves the soul restless until it has found itself." (Young India, 12 May 1920, quoted in Nanda, 1995, p.24). Thus he spoke of religion which was not the Hindu religion but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature. He alone is a true devotee of God who understands the pains and sufferings of others. The divinity of man manifests itself according to the extent he realises his humanity, i.e., his oneness with his fellow men. Thus Gandhi's religion was almost akin to humanism.

Gandhi claimed that his religion was his politics and his politics was his religion. While affirming that for him there was no politics without religion, he explained that this was 'not the religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of Toleration. In 1940 he reiterated that 'religion should pervade every one of our actions,' but added, 'here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe... This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them but harmonizes them'. Thus Gandhi's concept of religion had little in common with that which generally passes for organised religion: dogmas, rituals, superstition and bigotry. Gandhian religion was simply an ethical framework for the conduct of daily life which included not only the domestic and social spheres but also the political sphere. Gandhi did not and could not accept the commonly accepted view of politics as a game of expediency taking precedence over morality. Satyagraha, Gandhi's non-violent mode of struggle for fighting against social and political oppression, was rooted in morality and had no place for untruth, secrecy, hatred and, above all, violence. It supported suffering at the hands of the oppressor rather than inflicting on him based on the abiding belief in the possibility of a change of heart of the enemy.

Gandhi saw the basic strategy of a non-violent struggle as different from that of a violent one. It was not about the use of a superior force or of overwhelming the enemy by the force of numbers but to generate those processes of introspection and rethinking that would make it possible to arrive at a readjustment of relationships between the contending parties without generating hatred and violence. Non-violence was the central issue and it was not to be compromised at any cost. Utter failure rather than a compromise with non-violence was preferable. It called for the utmost discipline of non-violence.

9.4 HUMANISM AND UNIVERSALISM

Gandhi's religious outlook was thus imbued with deep humanism and universality. His concept of 'Ram Rajya' which he occasionally used to describe the goal of Indian freedom struggle, was simply a concept of an ideal polity free from inequality, injustice and exploitation.

In furtherance of his belief in religious tolerance, Gandhi's prayer meetings were held not in temples but in the open symbolising religious harmony in that they included recitations from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi and Buddhist texts. Thus while Gandhi used the Hindu symbols and the saintly idiom, his message was always moral, humanist and cosmopolitan.

Gandhi's steadfast opposition to the Partition was well known. While personally he was deeply religious, he said that he would have opposed any proposal for a state religion even if the whole population of India had professed the same religion. He looked upon religion as a personal matter. Gandhi gave his whole hearted approval to the resolution on fundamental rights passed by the Karachi Congress which affirmed the principle of religious freedom and declared that 'the State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions', a doctrine which found a firm place in the Constitution of independent India even after the bitter partition of the country based on religion campaigned for relentlessly by the Muslim League. Thus despite his wholly religious grounding in Hinduism, Gandhi worked to establish a secular State (Fischer, 1951, p.430).

Gandhi tried to invoke his religious values into Indian nationalist politics without letting it descend into communalism. However, despite being wholly opposed to all forms of communalism and partition his use of the Hindu symbols and saintly idiom has raised doubts about their having unwittingly contributed to both. Thus Gandhi's political practice of combining Indian nationalism, with the pluralistic and religious features of the Indian society and culture has not been entirely free of problems and controversies.

His openness towards other faiths no doubt underlined his belief in the policy of religious tolerance. He was a strong votary of building trust between different religions. In this context he even believed that it was important that Hindus gained the trust of Muslims by backing their sectional demands. This led him to support the establishment of separate electorates for Muslims in 1909 and later the Khilafat, the secular credentials of which has been controversial in that it has been seen as a support to the Muslim clergy which was reactionary and divisive alienating Muslim secularists like Muhammad Ali Jinnah. At times Gandhi also courted Hindu nationalist organisations like the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha though he was a staunch opponent of the institution of untouchability.

Thus Gandhi's attempt to forge communal harmony in his style has ironically not been without contrary effects. Despite his indisputable belief in secularism and equality of all religions, communal divide continued and remained rooted in post colonial India (Hardiman, 2003).

The Gandhian view of secularism stressing *sarva dharma samabhava* tried to achieve simultaneously the retention and abolition of the religious category. It tries to retain it insofar as it accepts the religious commitment of individuals and groups at the level of privatised behaviour but it expects at the same time the suspension of this identity in so far as public domain of inter communal community is a political necessity of a multi religious nation (Rao, in Shakir, p.30).

9.5 IMPACT OF GANDHI'S SECULARISM ON INDIA

The Constituent Assembly was unanimous in that India was a secular state. However there were conflicting views and perceptions about what 'secular' meant. One view was that secular meant that state should have nothing to do with religion. Another view was that all religions should be treated with equal respect approximating to the Gandhian view of '*sarva dharma samabhava*'. However, despite these differences of the way 'secular' should be understood, there is agreement on the view that the state should be secular and not based on any particular religion while at the same time it does not deny the place for religious faith in the country. The view of equal respect for all religions is different from the European view of secularism which is independent of religion.

The Gandhian secular perspective is clearly reflected in the Indian Constitution founded on the principle that a secular state should not support any particular religion. But at the same time citizens were free under the Constitution to receive spiritual education of their faiths. Thus a secular state did not necessarily mean that it is anti-

religion. Secularism has meant that all citizens of the country are free to follow and propagate their faith. In practice, it has meant equal respect for all religions and freedom for all religions to grow.

Indian secularism based on Gandhi's concept of *sarva dharma samabhava* thus found a unique shape in the Indian Constitution and polity. As D.E. Smith put it, "To most Indians secular means non-communal or non-sectarian but it does not mean non-religious." It is not a separation of state and religion but rather not privileging any religion, a 'no preference doctrine' which, in political practice, meant that no special privileges be granted to any one religion. This translated into equal treatment of all religions and at the same time a separation of state from religion in that the State does not have any religious identity.

The complexity of the political practice of such a concept is reflected somewhat in the Indian Constitutional provisions for the freedom to practice and propagate one's faith, and the right of the religious minorities to establish and manage their educational institutions. The retention of religious personal laws has further added to this complex nature of Indian secularism. This has led to the charge of pseudo-secularism and minority-ism against the Gandhi-Nehru concept of secularism.

The idea of a secular state based on the concept of the equal treatment of all religions with a minimalist policy in regard to religious affairs internal to a community took shape in the course of the nationalist movement under the influence of Gandhi. The political practice of secularism in a multi-religious country like India, however, suggests the theoretical possibility of secularisation and religious toleration conflicting with each other sometimes. While the separation of the state and religion has been recognised in the Indian Constitution which clearly states that there shall be no official state religion, no religious instruction in state schools and no taxes to support any particular religion; in practice however, the State has become entangled in the affairs of religion in numerous ways (Chatterjee, 1997). In political practice, the politics of post-independent India made it easy to combine the advocacy of secularism with the practice of communalism.

Thus the Indian Constitution reflected a Gandhian position on secularism as not a divorce of religion from the State but one that gave equal treatment to all religions. The Indian concept of secularism meaning equal respect for all religions is a combination of liberalism and tolerance. This was a product of the Indian freedom struggle which was a struggle for democracy based on equality of all citizens without discrimination including on the basis of religion. The Indian Constitution guarantees such equality without discrimination through Articles 14, 15, 16 and 25. While Articles 14, 15 and 16 guarantee equality and equal treatment without discrimination, Article 25 provides equal rights to all citizens to follow or propagate any religious faith and freedom of conscience. Thus the Indian Constitution provides for equal opportunities and equal protection under the law for all citizens and is against religious discrimination. It guarantees equal status and equal opportunities for all citizens irrespective of their religion. This is further amplified in Article 29 and 30 which recognises and guarantees the right of religious minorities to establish and manage educational institutions.

Thus the secular state in India is premised on the principles of liberty, equality and neutrality. The principle of liberty is reflected in the constitutional position on the freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion of one's choice. The principle of equality implies that the State not give preference to one religion over another. The principle of neutrality requires that the State not give preference to the religious over the non-religious and that the state not involve itself with religious affairs or organisations. However, the political practice of this concept of secularism has not been free of contradictions and anomalies. A glaring example of this is the contradiction between the principle of equality and uniform civil code and the retention of religious personal laws (Chatterjee, 1998, p.362). Similarly, the separation of state and religion in that there shall be no official state religion, no religious instruction in state schools, and no taxes to support any particular religion has also been compromised. The state has become entangled in the affairs of religion in numerous ways under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution which permits extensive state intervention in matters connected with religion in the interest of social reform.

The relationship between religion and politics and its linkage with communalism has been an abiding issue in Indian politics and it has been both the cause and effect of what could be called an Indian version of secularism. Despite being a devout Hindu, Gandhi was essentially secular and struggled for Hindu-Muslim unity all his life. His secularism was sought to be an effective bulwark against communalism and fundamentalism and its practice was sought to approximate to secular ideals of justice, equality and humanist universalism in a pluralist society and culture as that of India. However, such a concept of secularism is seen to have unwittingly contributed to an unanticipated assertion of communal identities during the nationalist movement sometimes bordering on communalism. The quest for a new national identity during the colonial phase often found expression in the appeals to religious loyalties such as in the political practice of Swami Dayanand and Tilak. Gandhi's use of religious symbolism like that of the ideal of Ram Rajya could be perceived to have sharpened the religious divide though not intended.

Gandhi viewed Indian civilisation as not only plural but pluralist where plurality was a desirable end. Intolerance had no place in Gandhi's secularism which was inclusive and was based on pluralism. No religion contained all of the truth. All religions were a way of approaching the truth and truth could be found only through religious tolerance. He applauded the Indian folk culture which was inclusive and in which one could see the sharing of each other's cultural and religious life (Parekh, in Copley, p.378).

The politics of post-independent India made it easy to combine the advocacy of secularism with the practice of communalism, so much so that some began to view secularism and communalism as two sides of the same coin (Beteille, 2000, p.198). On the whole, secularism is still an unsettled issue. There is disagreement about what the secular state implies—whether it implies a severe aloofness from religion, a benign impartiality toward religion, a corrective oversight of it or a fond and equal indulgence of all religions. But there seems to be general agreement that public life is not to be guided by religious doctrines or institutions (Galanter, 1989, p.237).

On the question of whether or not Indian nationalism was compromised by the presence of large numbers of Muslims in India, Gandhi stated in Hind Swaraj that:

“India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it...If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Mahomads also live in dreamland if they believe that there should be only Muslims in India” (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.10, p.270. Quoted in Hardiman, p.159). Conflict based on the hatred of one religious group for another was considered by Gandhi as a negation of all that he defined as ‘religion’.

He paid special attention to the two issues that affected Indian nationalism most – the Hindu-Muslim conflict and the linguistic conflict. Gandhi sought to adapt modern nationalism to two principles of Indian Civilisation—Unity in Diversity and assimilation of disparate elements which he believed would make India a genuinely multi religious and multilingual nation (Parel in Baxi & Parekh,1995, p.76). In an effort to free religion of the evil of sectarianism, Gandhi made an important distinction between religion as organisation and religion as ethics and spirituality. Underlying all organised religions there is a universal ethic and spirituality which teaches the unconditional love of God and the neighbour. At the same time religion as organisation is a means to retain identity and as such is legitimate. But it follows that organised religions ought to practice toleration towards each other. Hind Swaraj teaches that there are good religious reasons for practicing toleration (Parel, 1997, p. iv)

While Gandhi’s life was dedicated to Hindu-Muslim unity towards achieving a secular political practice, paradoxically he fell victim to Hindu-Muslim communalism. Gandhi never lost faith in reason and humanity of the common people who he believed readily shared in each other’s religious and cultural lives. However, the sense of difference among the religious communities bordering sometimes on communalism did not disappear after Independence despite the policy of sarva dharma samabhava, equal treatment of all religions. On the other hand the post independence political process seemed to only strengthen the difference and divide (Beteille, 2000, p.197).

9.6 SUMMARY

The concept of sarva dharma samabhava found its apt advocacy through Mahatma Gandhi. It was his humanistic and pluralistic approach that made Gandhi see the merits in all religions and preach to the mankind the efficacy of respecting others’ faiths. Gandhi’s ideas were not understood in the right sense and it is this narrow minded approach that made him a victim of communal divide and difference. To reiterate what Parel said, Gandhi genuinely wished that India should emerge as true multi-religious and multilingual nation with harmony and tolerance. In this age of deep communal divide, Gandhi’s ideas are worth revisiting and inculcate some of the moral and spiritual values he stood for all through his life. Sarva Dharma Samabhava, in this context, is the need of the hour not only for our nation but also across the world.

9.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the views of Gandhi on religion? What did religion mean to him?
2. ‘Religion is pluralistic and humanistic’. Analyse this statement in your own words in the contemporary universal context.

3. Gandhi's secularism had a profound impact on the post-independent India. Discuss at length.

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Structure**10.1 Introduction****Aims and Objectives****10.2 India and its Cultural Diversity****10.3 Gandhi on Religion and Cultural Diversity****10.4 Inter-Faith Dialogues****10.5 Assimilation of Cultures****10.6 Unity in Diversity****10.7 Summary****10.8 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The need to have a stable identity, a cultural belonging and at the same time the desire to maintain difference lies at the core of human culture. The link between identity and recognition and the distinction between uniformity and diversity is the defining feature of cultural diversity.

The meaningful exercise of human choices depends crucially upon a cultural context. It has been argued that people must have the right to develop and bolster the culture on which human capacities and their distinctly human identity depends (Bhargava, 1991).

Evaluation of what constitutes the essence of identity and difference in relation to the other varies, however, not only from one culture to another, but also at different points of time in the same society. Such shifting cultural concerns are reflected in nuanced discourses on cultural relativism, cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism. Recognition and acknowledgement of the worth of many ways of life, not one, is an affirmation and acceptance of the values of each culture and this underlies the social discipline that comes of mutual respect for differences. 'Pluralism is the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathising and deriving light from each other. Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is possible only because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them' (Isaiah Berlin, quoted in Madan)

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The concept and meaning of cultural diversity
- India's cultural diversity
- How Inter-faith dialogues and assimilation are linked to diversity.

10.2 INDIA AND ITS CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There is hardly any country in the world today which is not marked by cultural diversity. India is among the most diverse societies with a plurality and diversity of cultures which marks it out as perhaps the largest multicultural society in the world. People from all the major religions in the world—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians (Parsis) constitute its vast population. Although Hindus constitute the majority of the population, India is home to the second-largest population of Muslims in the world. The diversity is coupled with enormous cultural diversity that is based on such factors like language, caste, and ethnicity. According to the 1991 census, there are 114 spoken languages in this country; of these, 22 were spoken by more than one million people. The state lists 630 communities as Scheduled Tribes. There is diversity even among these groups and many of the identified communities are said to be internally heterogeneous, comprising several smaller different tribes. But the issue of identifying these groups is far from complete and many other smaller groups continue to be included from time to time. There is a vast religious and cultural diversity in the country. When India attained independence in 1947, the political leadership and the framers of the Constitution kept this diversity in view while deliberating a framework that would provide for an amalgamated yet culturally a diverse nation-state that is based on the principle of unity in diversity.

The multi-religious and multicultural character of the Indian society is deeply rooted in history from the pre-independence period. The Independence movement against a colonial regime sought to unite the nation through its culturally diverse people together towards a nationalist goal. It was a struggle for acquiring a national identity; it sought to unify the groups belonging to various religious and cultural groups within a nationalist fold. Though, during the course of the nationalist struggle many culturally diverse groups were jointly and gradually consolidated on a nationalist platform, there emerged sharp differences between the Hindus and Muslims that increasingly got projected as antithetic. Quite often the issues of religious identity and the politics of difference between the two communities came to the fore; the other cultural differences of various groups were active but not so sharply projected. During the course of the nationalist movement, it was one of the challenges that Gandhi was perennially engaged with. The problem of the Hindu-Muslim unity was one issue that he foresaw as the main area of extremely divisive implications which needed both short-term and long-term Redressal. In spite of herculean efforts, this issue remained unsettled and the heart-rending partition of the country signalled the difficulty of unifying both these communities. Gandhi's unifying project was thus relegated to the background and the challenges, even after independence, continue to face the Indian polity and society.

It was not religion alone that captured India's attention. There were other issues like caste, language, tribe that proved to be equally challenging. Gandhi engaged himself with the question of mitigating differences based on caste and removal of untouchability which he unfalteringly opposed and the eradication of which he ardently pleaded. Nevertheless, these issues still continue to throw as many challenges that test the cultural diversity and multiculturalism in the post-independent India.

10.3 GANDHI ON RELIGION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Gandhi considered religion as an integral part of the cultural structures of society. Religious diversity, therefore, is not incompatible with cultural diversity in other domains of society. Gandhi often used religious idioms for conveying his social and political messages as these made sense to most Indians to whom a language of modernity remained as foreign as the English tongue. Gandhi's ideas showed the way in which deep genuine religious beliefs could be combined with genuine belief in cultural diversity and multicultural democracy (Bagchi, 1999 in Bhargava, p.226).

Gandhi firmly believed that every religion has its full and equal place. This could be said of culture also. His view of the composite religion and culture accorded a full and equal place for each and respect for the other. This in his view characterised the compositeness of religion or culture. "We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth" (quoted in Parel, 1997).

Gandhi believed that pluralism and cultural diversity based on such equality of space for each culture leads to composite oneness which is the test of composite culture. But such composite oneness is symbiotic rather than relativist. It does not mean the inclusion or acknowledgement of cultures in a hierarchical order. Such a hierarchical accommodation of other cultures would only result in benign insularity based on respect for cultural distance, or an empirical togetherness that would not stand the test of tenacity under pressure (Madan).

Gandhi understood the logic of religious pluralism better than anyone. He stated in Hind Swaraj that India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. Himself a staunch Hindu, he believed that different faiths represented different paths towards Truth. He believed that religions are different roads converging on the same point. He however described Hinduism as the 'most tolerant of all religions' because it enables one 'to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths.' Who is to judge such 'goodness'? Gandhi rejected the authority of tradition even when it is regarded as revealed as might be claimed by different religious groups. Ultimately, the only guide is moral reason or the inner voice, or to be true to one's 'eternal self'. Gandhi maintained that the religion that he considered the source of value was not Hinduism or any other known religion, but one that transcended them all, that of Truth, Reason and Morality. He did not name it, but one could describe it as universal, spiritual and humanistic.

As a sincere believer in the worth of all religions, Gandhi acknowledged the enormous influence of the moral content of Christianity as depicted in the Sermon on the Mount on his own thinking in which, he declared, 'Jesus has given a definition of perfect dharma.' Similarly, he considered Islam as having been supremely influential in the making of 'India's national culture' through its emphasis upon the 'oneness of God' and 'the brotherhood of man'. His moral sensibilities were deeply influenced by the tenets of Jainism which is well documented in the biographies and other studies. Thus the key idea in Gandhi's religious thought is '*participatory pluralism*', and it overcomes the limitations of the hierarchical model. (Madan). This idea found vivid

expression when he stated in Noakhali in 1946 when he told one of the small gatherings: 'I am a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh... and so are you all'. He tirelessly called for a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Christian unity based on a pluralistic theism that was tied to the concept of Truth as ultimate and one. Rationality of thought was paramount for Gandhi. He envisioned a non-violent society in which all decisions 'were based on consensus, arrived at by rational discussion in which each strove to look at the subject in question from the standpoint of others.'

10.4 INTER-FAITH DIALOGUES

Gandhi's inclusive philosophy was not a passive acceptance of religious and cultural diversity, but a well reasoned and active engagement with it. Gandhi always examined and made a critical reflection about other positions, critical self-reflection of his own position involving normative evaluations and judgements. The Gandhian philosophical orientation provides the possibility of keeping the dialogue open, possibilities of reaching out to the others, and cooperation through critiques, judgements, interventions, resistance, presenting constructive alternatives and many other ways towards transformation. Thus Gandhi's activist philosophy integrated both theory and practice with a high relevance for the concerns of the contemporary times.

In his focus on religious conflict arising from his chief concern of Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi was perennially engaged with the quest of how to achieve inter religious dialogue in a multi religious setting as in India. Inter religious transformative dialogue is possible only with goodwill and respect for other religions which is an essential feature of religious pluralism. The acceptance of freedom to interpret one's own truths while accepting the possibility of the truths of others underlies such pluralism and it challenges the position of dominant religions in the early 21st Century (Allen, 2008, p.xiii).

Gandhi was convinced that inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue helps to get to know the other better and fosters mutual understanding making it possible for working together giving each an insight into how others think. Gandhi earnestly tried to promote the spirit of inter-religious dialogue in both thought and action. Gandhi acknowledged that religion provokes opposite passions which get articulated divisively but he was certain that this is not inherent in religion and it can be reformed. Whatever form the religious belief in the divine power might take, it is subject to the test of reason and experience. For Gandhi there is truth in every religion but none represents the Absolute Truth. All religions represent relative truth. This is because Gandhi held that the culture remains the point of reference for every religious belief and this influences their points of view. They remain embedded in culture and their experiences and insights are articulated in local cultural idioms which are inherently spatially limited. Every religion has an inescapable, local, historical and cultural basis. This is because they occur in an inherently imperfect human language which can never fully express transcendental truths.

All religions therefore represent the relative truth, presenting a particular point of view which, for that reason, is necessarily limited. Since no religion or culture is perfect in representing the truth, it benefits from a dialogue with others. Such dialogue gives us access to the great treasures of other religions and cultures, deepens our understanding of God and human life, and facilitates a less relative and more

universal religion and culture. It sensitises us to the very different ways in which human beings seek to make sense of the world and thus to the rich diversity of human thought and practice.

To Gandhi, truly religious persons hold all religions dear for three important religious reasons: their love of God whose grace has made all religions possible and whose expressions they are; their love of their fellow human beings to whom their respective religions mean much; and because other religions contribute to their own spiritual growth (Parekh, 2008, p.8). For Gandhi religious plurality is based not merely on tolerance or respect for other religions out of a feeling of resignation or condescension from a distance and relative indifference but is based on 'sadbhava' or goodwill towards them and is based on a genuine feeling for them to flourish. A truly religious person, therefore, delights in religious plurality as an important ingredient in one's own spiritual growth. Similarly, a culturally diverse society is an expression of the acceptance of the literary and artistic creations of other cultures based on sadbhava or goodwill and not merely tolerance.

Gandhi also stressed the need for freedom and integrity within religious and cultural groups. Every religious community should respect and accommodate within itself unresolved differences for the sake of freedom and integrity. Every religion should have the freedom to interpret its central truths and borrow what is valuable in others. Since no religion represents the whole truth about God, it should be open to a transformative dialogue with others in a sense of genuine humility failing which it has the danger of becoming dogmatic and self-righteous. This, in turn, arrests its own growth, breeds intolerance and violence. A religion that encourages violence against others is guilty of 'sin against God'. The greater the scope for compassion as a way of life, the more religion it has. This is not just a moral and political necessity but also a religious requirement. This will enable all religions to see each other as partners in a shared spiritual quest with the ability to live in peace and goodwill towards each other and help them to cope with misguided religious rivalries and conflicts.

Every religion should be open to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to have universal assent. Gandhi rejected any religious doctrine that did not appeal to reason and was in conflict with morality.

Thus Gandhi's plea for inter-religious dialogue, understanding, and goodwill was socially oriented and stood on pluralist grounds which is made possible because of the common concerns of different religions and which is necessary because they represent particular and limited visions of God which will benefit from a creative interaction. This is because all interpretations are humanly mediated, and communicated in inherently inadequate human languages articulated in particular historical and cultural contexts which are bound to be partial and limited. Religions and cultures are thus not rivals but partners sharing fundamental interests. Gandhi's religious pluralism respects both the individuality of each religion and creates deeper bonds between them. "Just as preservation of one's own culture does not mean contempt for that of others, but requires assimilation of the best that there may be in all the other cultures, even so should be the case with religion" (Iyer, 1987, Vol.1, p.451).

Such composite thinking was reflected for instance in Gandhi's stand on the national language issue involving the controversy on Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu when he

stated that “It cannot be Persianised Urdu or Sanskritised Hindi. It must be a beautiful blend of the simple forms written in either script.” (Gandhi quoted in Krishna Kumar, 1991). His plea for Hindustani however did not sustain and faded out from the affairs of the state in the years following independence (Krishna Kumar, 1991, pp.188-189).

10.5 ASSIMILATION OF CULTURES

Gandhi stated that no culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive. What is important is that cultures should blend with each other with utmost freedom and benefit from interaction with each other. Preservation of one’s culture should not mean contempt or destruction of the other. As in the case of religion, so is the case with culture. Different cultures are like so many leaves of the tree. Cultural diversity and their growth enrich human existence. Hence cultures should rejoice in each other’s presence and progress. In his autobiography, Gandhi stated “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any” (Gandhi, *The Story of My experiments with Truth*).

Gandhi also relentlessly worked for the uplift of the dalits, adivasis, and poor peasants with his life long concern for ensuring dignity and fairplay to these communities. However, his views and political practice in this sphere have been somewhat controversial. Particularly his fight against untouchability and his attempts to reform Hinduism from within, on the caste system front has not been without controversy. He staunchly and unconditionally opposed untouchability. His views and political practice on this issue left no doubt about Gandhi’s stand. However, those in the dalit movements had their reservations on Gandhi’s viewpoint. The contours of these discontents were projected in the growing distance between Gandhi and Ambedkar during the course of the national movement though it never became too pronounced openly then (Nagraj, 1993, p.2). His use of the term ‘Harijan’ for the ‘untouchables’ has been subjected to severe criticism in the post-independence period. His use of the religious idiom and symbols of Hinduism during the course of the struggle for independence likewise have been quite controversial (Hardiman, 2003, pp.123-155).

Gandhi’s post modern vision of nationhood is one based on decentralized local control, assimilation and tolerance of cultural differences and above all non-violence. (Nicholas F.Gier, 2008 in Allen, p.126). Gandhi showed that the existence of deep religious beliefs is not incompatible with cultural diversity and multicultural democracy.

The quest for self identity was an important component of the vision of independent India and this was expressed in both progressive and sometimes regressive ways. An identity as such is not something sacred, a value in itself – its real life situation may have all kinds of negative, ugly features within that limit or diminish human beings struggle against which has to be a part of the larger struggle without (Randhir Singh, 1991, p.116).

While on the one hand Gandhi spearheaded the movement for independence bringing together diverse streams of thought and binding together the culturally diverse groups, the very same quest for self-identity and cultural diversity found expressions in the negative features of the revivalist movements during the course of the national

movement. The events of independence and partition brought a near-complete marginalization of Gandhi and Gandhism (Omvedt, 1994, p.226).

10.6 UNITY IN DIVERSITY: INDIA'S APPROACH

India's experiment with creating political unity out of unequal and diverse social order has not been without problems. The establishment of a democratic political order in India after independence was indeed a major achievement and it was premised on inclusion of all and exclusion of none. But it was accommodative rather than homogenising and assimilative seeking to reconcile the identity of the new nation state with the culturally diverse groups constituting an overarching national identity. Moreover the perceived gap between formal democracy and substantial democracy due to the glaring inequalities in society has increasingly led to unrest and tension in society in general. The spread and deepening of democracy is not considered as uniform for all the groups and communities with the resulting erosion of faith in institutions of the state (Kumar Suresh, 2005, p.33).

In the post-independence period the identities of language, religion, caste and tribe have been used and appealed to increasingly for the mobilization of political support so much so that these diversities have acquired a sharp political presence and have become instruments of adversarial politics (Beteille, 2000, pp.161-165). In order to make a political claim, cultural identities have often been created or revived while drawing on cultural traits of an earlier historical phase but assuming specific forms. The changing contours of cultural assertion articulated in the political arena have often led to what could be characterised as the 'politics of cultural diversity' (Mahajan, 1995, p.361).

Historically the community identities are prior to our identity as political citizens of India. It is pointed out that Indians see themselves first and foremost as members of a caste, tribe, village, and religion. These community identities constitute people's self-understanding and shape their social and political choices. Even after so many years of independence, social and political conflicts around the issues of religion, caste and tribe based community identities have not diminished. On the other hand, social conflicts have increased and so have incidents of communal violence. Ethnic, regional and linguistic identities have asserted themselves pro-actively and caste continues to be the most important variable covertly and overtly. There is a demand for caste census and caste-based Khap Panchayats are active in some states. All these pose tremendous challenges to our polity and society.

10.7 SUMMARY

It is to be noted that the above-mentioned developments, however, do not in any way diminish the legacy, relevance and influence of Gandhi. Gandhi's thought and actions are significant, relevant and urgently needed for addressing problems of the twenty first century (Allen, 2008, p.viii). Gandhian philosophical orientation relates to major twenty-first century concerns, of the need to empathise with and understand the religious, philosophical, ethical, cultural, economic and political views of others including those considered as irrational, immoral, enemies, threats, terrorists or evil elements. Gandhi's philosophical approach such as pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance, empathy, compassion, non-violence, and respect for the diverse approaches

and views of other philosophical, religious, political and cultural orientations are seen as remarkable, relevant and urgently needed characteristics for possible solutions in the conflict ridden present day world. The contemporary world is besieged by dominant, religious, political, economic and cultural divisions defined by their absolute anti-pluralist, exclusivist, intolerance of others' views, lack of empathy and compassion, justification of endless violence and ethnocentric lack of respect or contempt for the diverse approaches of others. Gandhi, and Gandhian ideas and political practice show the way but call for a resolute commitment to the cause of truth and the readiness to face the challenges therein.

10.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of cultural diversity? Has India been able to tread on this path successfully?
2. Elaborate your views on Gandhi's thoughts on religion and cultural diversity.
3. How important are inter-faith dialogues to maintain the cultural diversity of a nation?

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Structure**10.1 Introduction****Aims and Objectives****10.2 India and its Cultural Diversity****10.3 Gandhi on Religion and Cultural Diversity****10.4 Inter-Faith Dialogues****10.5 Assimilation of Cultures****10.6 Unity in Diversity****10.7 Summary****10.8 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The need to have a stable identity, a cultural belonging and at the same time the desire to maintain difference lies at the core of human culture. The link between identity and recognition and the distinction between uniformity and diversity is the defining feature of cultural diversity.

The meaningful exercise of human choices depends crucially upon a cultural context. It has been argued that people must have the right to develop and bolster the culture on which human capacities and their distinctly human identity depends (Bhargava, 1991).

Evaluation of what constitutes the essence of identity and difference in relation to the other varies, however, not only from one culture to another, but also at different points of time in the same society. Such shifting cultural concerns are reflected in nuanced discourses on cultural relativism, cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism. Recognition and acknowledgement of the worth of many ways of life, not one, is an affirmation and acceptance of the values of each culture and this underlies the social discipline that comes of mutual respect for differences. 'Pluralism is the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathising and deriving light from each other. Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is possible only because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them' (Isaiah Berlin, quoted in Madan)

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The concept and meaning of cultural diversity
- India's cultural diversity
- How Inter-faith dialogues and assimilation are linked to diversity.

10.2 INDIA AND ITS CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There is hardly any country in the world today which is not marked by cultural diversity. India is among the most diverse societies with a plurality and diversity of cultures which marks it out as perhaps the largest multicultural society in the world. People from all the major religions in the world—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians (Parsis) constitute its vast population. Although Hindus constitute the majority of the population, India is home to the second-largest population of Muslims in the world. The diversity is coupled with enormous cultural diversity that is based on such factors like language, caste, and ethnicity. According to the 1991 census, there are 114 spoken languages in this country; of these, 22 were spoken by more than one million people. The state lists 630 communities as Scheduled Tribes. There is diversity even among these groups and many of the identified communities are said to be internally heterogeneous, comprising several smaller different tribes. But the issue of identifying these groups is far from complete and many other smaller groups continue to be included from time to time. There is a vast religious and cultural diversity in the country. When India attained independence in 1947, the political leadership and the framers of the Constitution kept this diversity in view while deliberating a framework that would provide for an amalgamated yet culturally a diverse nation-state that is based on the principle of unity in diversity.

The multi-religious and multicultural character of the Indian society is deeply rooted in history from the pre-independence period. The Independence movement against a colonial regime sought to unite the nation through its culturally diverse people together towards a nationalist goal. It was a struggle for acquiring a national identity; it sought to unify the groups belonging to various religious and cultural groups within a nationalist fold. Though, during the course of the nationalist struggle many culturally diverse groups were jointly and gradually consolidated on a nationalist platform, there emerged sharp differences between the Hindus and Muslims that increasingly got projected as antithetic. Quite often the issues of religious identity and the politics of difference between the two communities came to the fore; the other cultural differences of various groups were active but not so sharply projected. During the course of the nationalist movement, it was one of the challenges that Gandhi was perennially engaged with. The problem of the Hindu-Muslim unity was one issue that he foresaw as the main area of extremely divisive implications which needed both short-term and long-term Redressal. In spite of herculean efforts, this issue remained unsettled and the heart-rending partition of the country signalled the difficulty of unifying both these communities. Gandhi's unifying project was thus relegated to the background and the challenges, even after independence, continue to face the Indian polity and society.

It was not religion alone that captured India's attention. There were other issues like caste, language, tribe that proved to be equally challenging. Gandhi engaged himself with the question of mitigating differences based on caste and removal of untouchability which he unfalteringly opposed and the eradication of which he ardently pleaded. Nevertheless, these issues still continue to throw as many challenges that test the cultural diversity and multiculturalism in the post-independent India.

10.3 GANDHI ON RELIGION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Gandhi considered religion as an integral part of the cultural structures of society. Religious diversity, therefore, is not incompatible with cultural diversity in other domains of society. Gandhi often used religious idioms for conveying his social and political messages as these made sense to most Indians to whom a language of modernity remained as foreign as the English tongue. Gandhi's ideas showed the way in which deep genuine religious beliefs could be combined with genuine belief in cultural diversity and multicultural democracy (Bagchi, 1999 in Bhargava, p.226).

Gandhi firmly believed that every religion has its full and equal place. This could be said of culture also. His view of the composite religion and culture accorded a full and equal place for each and respect for the other. This in his view characterised the compositeness of religion or culture. "We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth" (quoted in Parel, 1997).

Gandhi believed that pluralism and cultural diversity based on such equality of space for each culture leads to composite oneness which is the test of composite culture. But such composite oneness is symbiotic rather than relativist. It does not mean the inclusion or acknowledgement of cultures in a hierarchical order. Such a hierarchical accommodation of other cultures would only result in benign insularity based on respect for cultural distance, or an empirical togetherness that would not stand the test of tenacity under pressure (Madan).

Gandhi understood the logic of religious pluralism better than anyone. He stated in Hind Swaraj that India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. Himself a staunch Hindu, he believed that different faiths represented different paths towards Truth. He believed that religions are different roads converging on the same point. He however described Hinduism as the 'most tolerant of all religions' because it enables one 'to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths.' Who is to judge such 'goodness'? Gandhi rejected the authority of tradition even when it is regarded as revealed as might be claimed by different religious groups. Ultimately, the only guide is moral reason or the inner voice, or to be true to one's 'eternal self'. Gandhi maintained that the religion that he considered the source of value was not Hinduism or any other known religion, but one that transcended them all, that of Truth, Reason and Morality. He did not name it, but one could describe it as universal, spiritual and humanistic.

As a sincere believer in the worth of all religions, Gandhi acknowledged the enormous influence of the moral content of Christianity as depicted in the Sermon on the Mount on his own thinking in which, he declared, 'Jesus has given a definition of perfect dharma.' Similarly, he considered Islam as having been supremely influential in the making of 'India's national culture' through its emphasis upon the 'oneness of God' and 'the brotherhood of man'. His moral sensibilities were deeply influenced by the tenets of Jainism which is well documented in the biographies and other studies. Thus the key idea in Gandhi's religious thought is '*participatory pluralism*', and it overcomes the limitations of the hierarchical model. (Madan). This idea found vivid

expression when he stated in Noakhali in 1946 when he told one of the small gatherings: 'I am a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh... and so are you all'. He tirelessly called for a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Christian unity based on a pluralistic theism that was tied to the concept of Truth as ultimate and one. Rationality of thought was paramount for Gandhi. He envisioned a non-violent society in which all decisions 'were based on consensus, arrived at by rational discussion in which each strove to look at the subject in question from the standpoint of others.'

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movement. The events of independence and partition brought a near-complete marginalization of Gandhi and Gandhism (Omvedt, 1994, p.226).

10.6 UNITY IN DIVERSITY: INDIA'S APPROACH

India's experiment with creating political unity out of unequal and diverse social order has not been without problems. The establishment of a democratic political order in India after independence was indeed a major achievement and it was premised on inclusion of all and exclusion of none. But it was accommodative rather than homogenising and assimilative seeking to reconcile the identity of the new nation state with the culturally diverse groups constituting an overarching national identity. Moreover the perceived gap between formal democracy and substantial democracy due to the glaring inequalities in society has increasingly led to unrest and tension in society in general. The spread and deepening of democracy is not considered as uniform for all the groups and communities with the resulting erosion of faith in institutions of the state (Kumar Suresh, 2005, p.33).

In the post-independence period the identities of language, religion, caste and tribe have been used and appealed to increasingly for the mobilization of political support so much so that these diversities have acquired a sharp political presence and have become instruments of adversarial politics (Beteille, 2000, pp.161-165). In order to make a political claim, cultural identities have often been created or revived while drawing on cultural traits of an earlier historical phase but assuming specific forms. The changing contours of cultural assertion articulated in the political arena have often led to what could be characterised as the 'politics of cultural diversity' (Mahajan, 1995, p.361).

Historically the community identities are prior to our identity as political citizens of India. It is pointed out that Indians see themselves first and foremost as members of a caste, tribe, village, and religion. These community identities constitute people's self-understanding and shape their social and political choices. Even after so many years of independence, social and political conflicts around the issues of religion, caste and tribe based community identities have not diminished. On the other hand, social conflicts have increased and so have incidents of communal violence. Ethnic, regional and linguistic identities have asserted themselves pro-actively and caste continues to be the most important variable covertly and overtly. There is a demand for caste census and caste-based Khap Panchayats are active in some states. All these pose tremendous challenges to our polity and society.

10.7 SUMMARY

It is to be noted that the above-mentioned developments, however, do not in any way diminish the legacy, relevance and influence of Gandhi. Gandhi's thought and actions are significant, relevant and urgently needed for addressing problems of the twenty first century (Allen, 2008, p.viii). Gandhian philosophical orientation relates to major twenty-first century concerns, of the need to empathise with and understand the religious, philosophical, ethical, cultural, economic and political views of others including those considered as irrational, immoral, enemies, threats, terrorists or evil elements. Gandhi's philosophical approach such as pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance, empathy, compassion, non-violence, and respect for the diverse approaches

and views of other philosophical, religious, political and cultural orientations are seen as remarkable, relevant and urgently needed characteristics for possible solutions in the conflict ridden present day world. The contemporary world is besieged by dominant, religious, political, economic and cultural divisions defined by their absolute anti-pluralist, exclusivist, intolerance of others' views, lack of empathy and compassion, justification of endless violence and ethnocentric lack of respect or contempt for the diverse approaches of others. Gandhi, and Gandhian ideas and political practice show the way but call for a resolute commitment to the cause of truth and the readiness to face the challenges therein.

10.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of cultural diversity? Has India been able to tread on this path successfully?
2. Elaborate your views on Gandhi's thoughts on religion and cultural diversity.
3. How important are inter-faith dialogues to maintain the cultural diversity of a nation?

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Structure**11.1 Introduction****Aims and Objectives****11.2 The Contemporary Policy of Social Inclusion****11.3 Social Inclusion as a Historical Process****11.4 Exclusion and Kinds of Exclusion****11.5 Forms and Experience of Inclusion****11.6 Gandhian Ways of Social Inclusion****11.7 Impediments to Inclusion****11.8 Summary****11.9 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Development and democracy are the two key concepts that have captured the human imagination during the last two centuries. While developmental processes have tried and brought prosperity and economic well being to people, democracy has been instrumental in assuring that the result of development is widely distributed among diverse groups. In recent years, large number of people, communities and families across societies has been facing the threat of dislocation from their habitat, economy and even families due to the skewed manner in which either development is taking place or its results are being distributed. Anger against such exclusion and dislocation have found articulation in wide spread protests against economic policies and political oppression which backed such policies from across the world in recent years. One of the ways in which the effects of this large-scale economic dislocation is sought to be mitigated is through what is termed as policy of Social Inclusion.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The meaning of social inclusion and its different kinds
- Social inclusion in historical and contemporary context
- Gandhi's efforts towards evolving social inclusion.

11.2 THE CONTEMPORARY POLICY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

Increasing reach of larger economic interest to even smaller economies have led to breaking down of local economies, patterns of consumption, societal mores and values and large-scale use of natural resources. Consequently, there has been increasing homogenisation of the economies and societies at the cost of the richness of life in the hitherto non-integrated societies. There is an obvious sense of loss of diversity and autonomy. In the current phase of development there has been the loss of social place or habitat by large multitude, through large-scale extraction and use of natural resources. The dams, the mines, plantations or cash crops cultivation have also been the economic activities which also led to quite skewed social and cultural impact leading to the marginalisation and exclusion of hundreds of communities whether they are the forest dwelling tribes in Amazon or Congo, or the tribal population in Orissa or Southern Africa, or the plantation economies in western Africa or in northern and southern India. Precisely, it has led to a kind of homogenous development at the cost of human and biological diversities. There have been political and social movements protesting against marginalisation and exclusion, demanding a more inclusive society. Multilateral institutions like World Bank, and a large number of non-Governmental organisations have come up with packages of projects collectively referred as Social Inclusion policy. The rationale for advocating such is to thwart the criticism of the developmental paradigm within capitalism that apparently pushed a large number of people and groups to the margins of economy and society.

11.3 SOCIAL INCLUSION AS A HISTORICAL PROCESS

Socially a more inclusive society cannot be created merely through policy packages. In fact in human history, social inclusion as a policy instrument comes up only in recent times with the advancement of democracy and new phase of capitalism. It has otherwise been rare that the political ruling groups would adopt a policy of social inclusion. It would sound strange as most political system were based on social division and the ruling groups thrived on divided social fabric. On the other hand, however, there have been attempts from within the societies to usher new ways and principles of accommodating individuals, communities and groups. This accommodation proceeded both horizontally as well as vertically. New groups, or foreign elements either migrating from other locale required horizontal inclusion into societies. Indian society has been a very good example where principles and processes to assimilate, or include and accommodate groups or people have been in operation for centuries. Many tribal groups, for example, Sakas and Hunas, from central and west Asia and beyond came and settled in different parts of India. Society, over the time, absorbed them through different mechanisms. There were new terms coined to regulate the social interaction with these new groups. Mlecchas was not only the term for the foreign elements but also signified the code of relationship that was designed between the native and the foreign elements. In the course of time, the foreign elements lose their traces and become part of the local community. The medieval history too witnessed such incorporations by different groups.

In the nineteenth century the British writers and administrators thought that the Indian society was immobile and non-change was its defining characteristic. The 'unchanging village community' with its 'self-sufficient economy' was thought to be the example par excellent of this. Theories about caste, religion, etc., by many foreign scholars were based on these assumptions. In reality, however, there were very dynamic interactions between institutions and human groups and this relationship transcended villages, regions and quite often had continental dimensions. Pilgrimage sites were of such interesting networks. Many groups and ideas and values had their entry into the societies in this horizontal interaction.

What, however, is more intricate is the basis and processes of inclusion vertically. Historians, for example, pointed out that in modern times colonialism produced the most intense unequal relationship between societies, between the one which was colonial and exploited the resources of the colonised societies through various instruments. The colonial system, in its turn, legitimised this unequal relationship on the basis of race, technology or civilising mission. Delving deeper into the working of both the colonial and colonised societies, one soon discovers that the unequal relationship was based on the unequal ownership of the factors of production which historian Bipan Chandra had first pointed out as 'colonial mode of production'. It was further argued that this inequality characterised even the pre-colonial social order in the colonised societies. Historian Irfan Habib, for example, showed how the Mughal Empire and economy was an exploitative economy so far as the poor were concerned. Later day historians showed how the contemporary society remained anchored on unequal relationship and perpetuated this unequal economic order, locally, regionally, nationally and globally. It is generally argued that it was very significant that bases of this unequal order be understood properly so that appropriate response can be created.

11.4 EXCLUSION AND KINDS OF EXCLUSION

Economic and political exclusions are very significant as they not only are the grounds on which social and cultural exclusion are legitimised but they also prevent efforts to create inclusive society. For example, mining and other industries located in the province of Jharkhand and Orissa in India is monopolised by big business groups from outside the province. People whose habitat is used for mining neither have economic nor political clout to impose better economic terms for the land that have been taken away from them quite often with the connivance with the officials siding with the rich and powerful. One can see globally how the multinational companies and the countries backing them, fight to retain their hold over the mining areas in Africa, South America and Asia, and have inflicted some of the worst violence in the region. The decade long agitation to save Narmada River in India has shown how the economic planning quite often ignores the lives and arguments of the economically and politically marginal people and destroys their lives, economies and culture. Thus, location in the economic hierarchy leads to marginalisation. It is this trend which one sees is getting exacerbated in the recent times.

Bases of Exclusion

We saw that economic inequality quite often creates the basis of unequal society. But the basis on which exclusion from economy and polity is legitimised historically and in contemporary times have been ideas like that of colour, gender, language, religion and ethnicity and caste.

(A) *Race*: Race or in some sense colour, has been a significant marker of difference and has been the basis for excluding people from economic, political and cultural power. One of the most intense examples in the modern times has been the way the black population in many parts of North and Southern America has been denied some of the basic civic rights. Not long ago the anti-Semitic feelings were mobilised in a systematic way by the Nationalist socialist party in Germany and excluded the Jews from all affairs. It finally led to the six million Jews being killed. Roma (Gypsies) people in the central and Eastern Europe live an abysmal life of exclusion, political, social, cultural and economic, and discriminated precisely on the basis of race. There is an unsaid division in the world between the white races and the non-white so far as the control of resources is concerned. Thus, rich versus poor division also quite often reflects racial division. There are insidious ways that it works. Within the nations which has multicoloured population the racial division and discrimination is widespread. Quite often the racial division reflecting as it does, the economic division, requires an attack on the economic basis of the exclusion. In Latin America, for example, the whole of mining and plantation economy has been the monopoly of the erstwhile white colonialist and their creole descendants while millions of indigenous as well as the black population and the erstwhile indentured labourers from India, China and other places lived a life of subsistence. The global financial/ governance institutions too are controlled by more or less by developed countries and an element of racial division is quite often obvious.

(B) *Gender*: Gender, the division of the people and social exclusion on the basis of sex has been there for centuries and it is the most obvious discrimination principle which creates an ideology of patriarchy to legitimise and support it. It is one of the oppressive ideologies and needs careful and intense critique. The Feminists movement that emerged in the west attacked this exclusionary principle by arguing for equality of men and women. Later in the 1970s and 1980s, one also found that the stronger opposition to the gender discrimination began adopting a position that men and women are biologically different and the fight for equality should not undermine this difference. Simultaneously, the protest movements across the world reflected the adverse impact of the developmental processes on women. Scholars like Arturo Escobar emphasised argued that an inclusive development should be a gender sensitive development.

(C) *Class*: A careful perusal of human history also indicates that societies have been divided in relation to the ownership of factors of production. The surplus that one section extracts on the strength of its location in the production process determines its location in the society. Therefore classes which are extracting surplus also determine the way the society organises its value, ideological and political organisation. The capitalist society today has, for example, the capitalist class which also is the ruling class. Arguably, any inclusive society means that there should be change in the way productive relation and productive system is organised and

surplus is extracted. This is a tall order and thinkers have called for revolution to bring such a change.

(D) *Aboriginals* in many societies, particularly in the settler societies, are excluded from political, economic and social order. For example, the way the aboriginals from the Northern America and South America survived the onslaught and still live an excluded life demonstrates this. In other older societies too aboriginals are pushed out of the mainstream of existing social-political-economic order. The Veddas in Sri Lanka, Ainus in Japan are some examples. In India too, a large number of tribal population has been living the existence of seclusion and their seclusion often makes them an excluded part of population.

(E) *Religion* has also been quite a powerful tool of exclusion in the human societies. Even today in most part of nationally organised communities, it is religious demarcation that defines the principle of exclusion. Religious minorities are excluded in many societies from many areas of public life. The Hindus, the Ahmadiyas and the Christians for example do not have the same access to public space in Pakistan, a predominantly Islamic state. Similarly in many countries non-majoritarian public space is also small. In Sri Lanka for example the Tamils were excluded from many public offices precisely because the language and region began to be the sole criterion for accessing public offices and spaces.

(F) *Caste*: In India caste has, for long, defined the hierarchical and exclusionary social order. Discrimination has been practiced at many levels on the basis of caste. The worst sufferers of the caste-based exclusion had been the untouchables in most parts of the country where they were excluded from even the normal village existence and they could come to the village for food and other things only by announcing their arrival so that the other caste could save themselves from getting polluted by going away from the public spaces. Public spaces were denied to them which included the village well, or village temple or pond. Centuries of exclusion had created manifold disadvantages.

The contemporary global capitalist formation is also bringing new phenomenon like human trafficking, environmental refugees, forced displaced people, and many groups which are victims of exclusion in the society they take shelter.

11.5 FORMS AND EXPERIENCE OF INCLUSION

As we know the process and the basis of exclusion, we understand the way inclusion principle works. Interestingly, there has always been very powerful movement to protest the state of exclusion, thereby making the society more inclusive of the diverse communities, and groups. However, in a society defined and divided by caste, it was always very difficult to include people without defining their exact location. In 1941, N.K.Bose talked about the Hindu ways of absorption and how different tribes have been absorbed within Hindu society by accommodating them as a group practising the particular specialised crafts. This was a significant mode of inclusion that was historically obtained. Historians have pointed out that the most significant process of inclusion, both vertically and horizontally, for centuries, had been through assumption of particular *jati* name and become part of the large pantheon of Indian society. Many have suggested that with Conversion to another religion one has

introduced a new element and organisation principle but a careful observation would suggest that even after conversion many groups have retained their previous *jati* identity to preserve its domain and space in the larger social frame.

With the widening of the Indian national and social horizon, new elements like, for example, Naga, Mizos, or other tribes from extreme East came under the national rubric who were socially not part of the erstwhile socio-cultural setting based either on *jati* or *dharma*. The ethnic variety from north-eastern part brought a fresh new component and was to be accommodated in the social horizon. It remains an extremely significant issue as to what facilitates inclusion of the new groups into a new national space coming to life during the last 100 years or so. The idea of a nation in India, with its distinctive inclusive appeal, has helped to bring many groups and people to a common world of economy, polity and in many cases a cultural dialogue. The democratic template provides this new nation with its distinct inclusiveness. The modern base of the nation in the Indian setting in fact allows one to avoid two particular extremes, i.e, identity-based exclusive nation and second, the exacerbation of the primordial identity to the exclusion of all others.

Historically, religious movements like Bhakti movement in the 8th to 12th and later during 15-17th centuries provided strong critique of the principle of exclusive and orthodox social order. The Veersaiva movement in the South and Nanak, Kabir, Ravi Das, provided strong indictment of the existing social order and brought a new social philosophy of openness. Coming of Islam, with its strong emphasis on a new social order based on equality, too brought openness which was further advanced by the Sufi orders which went far and beyond to bring many groups into close proximity a prerequisite for a sense of togetherness. Social reforms were integrally connected with religious reforms. That is why when in the nineteenth century social reform movement phase came, the reformers clearly attacked the religious core of the legitimising principles inherent in social inequalities. It is significant here that the attack on the Hindu social order and its practice of exclusion of lower castes by the Christian missionaries since the nineteenth century, an attack which is continued even today by the evangelists, provided one of the major thrust for the religious and social reformers to work for removing inequalities from the Hindu social order. It is no wonder that from 1820s onwards, many intellectuals and social leaders like Raja Rammohun Roy, Jyotiba Phule, Sri Narayan Guru, Ayothiadas, Dayananad Saraswati, Dadabhai Naoroji and others saw the urgency of changing the existing social order. In this they all attacked caste system and practices like untouchability prevalent in India. Raja Rammohun Roy, for example, attacked the prevailing social division based on caste as antagonistic to any new vision of a new world. It was later when the Indian Social Conference was set up with the efforts of the great reformer of India, M.G.Ranade, N.G. Chandravarkar, etc., that a dedicated modern movement to change such practices came into mainstream. In the meantime, however, individual efforts to empower groups and communities were carried on by individuals and groups with tremendous zeal and sacrifice. Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra, for example, opened school for women and through his writings, carried on campaign to attack the basis of inequality. When the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, it took up a social change agenda but soon it realised that it can take up social issues only at the peril of its

political plank of bringing people together and became cautious. However the social conference had very close cooperation with the Congress and it held its annual session along with the Congress session when the new and aggressive section led by Tilak led to the ouster of the Social Conference from the Congress session. It also signifies a complete divorce between the political movement for freedom and social movement for changes in society. It was only with the arrival of Gandhi that the agenda of social reform got entwined with the political vision.

It is this integration of social and political with a modern vision that defined the social vision of Indian nationalism. The formation of a large space in India with nation as an abstract but assemblage of values has helped evolve a very powerful inclusion principle. The national space evolving in opposition to colonialism was in fact imbued with a strong notion of justice and equality. The idea emerged when the middle class intelligentsia in Bengal, Maharashtra and other provinces began to give shape to the territorial idea of a nation. This was the time most of the North east and many other parts were not part of India as such. Assam, for example, became part of the British India only after 1826. The level of ignorance about many parts of India was widespread. Notwithstanding this ignorance about territory, large numbers of people have been coming under the fold of the Indian nation to realise their democratic ideals.

The creation of this space began during the national movement for freedom. The Indian national movement was the largest mass movement and this led to its acquiring its democratic, open and inclusive character. In a mass movement people join the movement breaking all boundaries of class, caste, region etc. As Visalakshi Menon opines, during the non-cooperation movement and civil disobedience movement a large number of women had come out in public breaking the gender prejudice and went to jail. Similarly, different shades of the communist and socialists who tried to mobilise the peasants, the working class during the national movement helped in bringing large sections of the marginalised people into the democratic mainstream of the nation.

11.6 GANDHIAN WAYS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

Gandhi's intervention has been truly phenomenon in the realm of social inclusion. His success in bringing people of all hues to the national movement and thereby enlarging the space of further extending the frontiers of freedom was enormous. By bringing up the social issues to the centre of his movement, he provided that space with a social conscience. This defined the democratic order later. He brought issues of untouchability and Hindu-Muslim divide at the highest priority level and did not prioritise freedom from colonial rule at the cost of these issues. He argued that freedom from foreign rule is meaningless unless accompanied by freedom from our own ills.

The **Anti-caste movement** led by Gandhi can be said to be unique in the history of movement for a human society based on the principle of non-hierarchical arrangement. Gandhi personally led the movement to mobilise public opinion for such a society and

particularly against the prevailing practice of untouchability. In 1924-25 and again in 1934-35 he toured the whole country to mobilise opinion against untouchability- a practice which saw a major chunk of humanity being treated as beyond sub-human level.

The thrust of Gandhi was that the savarnas or the upper caste who perpetrated the treatment should own up the responsibility for their acts of omission and commission and take initiative to end the practice in such a way that the fundamental principle behind the exclusion is wiped out. He argued that it was the idea of hierarchy that underlies the practice of untouchability. Once this principle is wiped out of existence, the caste system can be said to have purged of this principle. He therefore considered other practices as a symbol or symptom of the disease while the disease was the idea of hierarchy. One of the areas that symbolically attacked was the temple entry movement in Guruvayur and Vaikom. Gandhi wanted the upper caste who practised discrimination to change and invite those who were denied admission. Thus he wanted the social inclusion to take place not on the basis of the right but of acceptance because he felt that right-based approach does not endure but the change of heart and mind would.

There were famous temple entry movements in Kerala, one in Guruvayur and the other in Vaikom. The congress and many other Satyagrahis marched to open the doors of the temple so that the deprived sections too could gain entry. The movement aroused the whole of the country and had Gandhi's blessing. Though there were moves by the Maharajas' government to resist it, the movement remained non-violent and aroused the conscience of the society against the practice of untouchability and exclusion.

Gandhi made the **Hindu Muslim divide** a major political plank and advocated that the divide needs to be broken and both begin to respect each other's religion and live like brothers. In Noakhali, which was affected by riots, he asked the Hindu women to make the Muslim women literate as this not only brings education but also brings down the walls of separation. He negotiated with Jinnah and resigned to the fact of partition, which he felt, was not to be based on the Two-Nations theory as that would have been exclusionary.

On the issue of the dalits being converted to Christianity, he attacked the idea of conversion as he thought that was a wrong way to address the issue. He argued that it shows disrespect to other religion as it privileges one religion over the other. It does not address the question of correcting the aberration if any that has crept in any religious practice. In practice too, one found that conversion- instead of creating a more inclusive principle- brings a new exclusionary base to come into operation. This also meant that the process of inclusion should be without violence. However, what is unique in the Gandhian approach was the attack of the very foundation of the principle of exclusion. Mandela adopted this approach during the anti-apartheid struggle. Martin Luther King had approached the issue of blacks in the US similarly.

Democratic inclusion: Gandhi's idea of inclusion through non-violent means also foresees a democratic system to operationalise it. He was in favour of broad-based democratic order reaching up to the villages. Non-violent inclusion was in some way coterminous with the democratic ways of inclusion. This interestingly was also the basis on which most of the Indian leaders fought for inclusion, including Nehru who wanted a socialistic order, Ambedkar who wanted the current caste-based exclusion to be eliminated, and many others. Democracy and development seemed to all of them to be the guaranteed way to bring inclusion without violence and in the most effective way. The idea of justice and equity was to be prioritised over anything else. Interestingly the critique of internal social order was not delinked from the critique of external social order as it was realised by the leadership in India that the exclusionary principles in the world are all related and legitimise each other. For example, the racial understanding of society at the global level gives credence to racial theories at home and similarly class-based discrimination abroad also legitimises class-based exclusion at home. Therefore, from the beginning, at the international level, it argued for non-racial organisation of the world institutions and polity. India was the first country to raise the voice of anti-racial and anti-colonial world.

A very critical component was the tradition and traditional institutions like community, caste etc. were found to be legitimising the social order based on discrimination. It is here the role of the education and educational institution was most critical. The public institution has done the most effective inclusion throughout the world and the independent India tried to imbibe socially inclusive educational policy. There are heavy roadblocks as nearly 40% of Indian school going children do not go to school. Experiments involving millions of children by groups like MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh have found that it is not poverty but wrong policy that prevents children from going to school. Thus education remains the most significant inclusive agenda as it not only brings different social groups onto a single platform but it also fosters modern ideas of democracy, gender equality, justice which would sustain the inclusive ideas for the generation. Ambedkar for example argued that Hindu religion legitimised castes and untouchability; the communists argued that communities based on religion hide the fact of internal exploitation based on gender or class. The template of modernisation was adopted along with development so that the idea of citizenship is developed and idea of justice and democracy takes deep root.

11.7 IMPEDIMENTS TO INCLUSION

Some movements for inclusion adopted the right-based approach and argued that as individual and community and nation, it is the inalienable right to be treated humanely and with dignity. Ambedkar for example insisted that the depressed classes have to be given their right not by changing the heart of the upper castes but with attacking the basis of the exclusion, i.e., that legitimised the caste discrimination. Ambedkar's theory is the most modern right-based approach and in fact he was also one of the key figures who helped Nehru to use legal angle to change the laws detrimental to women. Interestingly it is the legal and right-based approach that the women's groups have demanded as a means to create space in public. In fact modern Indian state has tried to employ fundamental rights as guarantee for

socio-cultural diverse groups and communities to come into the national fold without losing their particular tradition and religio-cultural traits.

Certain Modern Political Processes and phenomenon have become impediments to an inclusive society. In the international context racial ideas are still the biggest impediment against the vision of inclusive society. Till recently it was very difficult for the Jews to get socially acceptable paces due the entrenched anti-Semitism in many places in world including in America. In the Indian context, the phenomena of communalism and caste are major impediments. Both refer to a process that began in the late nineteenth and first half of twentieth century whereby the people of one particular caste or religious community is invoked in achieving certain political goals and the group is defined in terms exclusively of its primordial identity and its secular interests are seen completely in variance as well as antagonistic to the caste and religious community. Now the communal political mobilisation in the 1940s led to communal violence of large scale and finally led to the division of the nation. Though it was based on the issue of religion, it could not bind the country and the issue of language led to the division of the state into two, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Inside India, the communitarian mobilisation around the idea of Language led to the demand of linguistic states. It led to lot of passion and consequently agitation and violence. From 1952 to 1956 – state reorganisation commission which toured the country, and recommend the division of many areas, have helped the passion to subside only to come up again in the forefront in the 1980s when regions like Vidarbha, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Darjeeling etc. began to demand separation from the states. This was in addition to the demand of separation of various groups in North-eastern part of the country. In 1972 with the creation of Meghalaya and other states in North-east, the Indian government had tried to scotch any further inter-ethnic antagonism. Currently the demand for the greater Nagaland has been a major problem for an inclusive society as it has created very strong feelings between Nagas and Manipur and the later felt they are forced to accept something against their collective wishes. The affairs in the North-east bring together the issue of tribal and non-tribal inclusion, inter-tribal issue, and intrusion of foreign agent into the country. On the other hand, economic inclusion has taken place with the Indian market becoming larger and bigger. This has led to the Marxist formulation that the capitalism stream rolls all diversities and creates a homogenous society. The Indian democracy too has worked to bring substantial classes into the Indian political, economic and educational system. However loss of diversities might create the demand for cultural tightening. It creates cultural systems like, for example, the new inheritance law for the Khasi women in Meghalaya where women who married outside their community are deprived right over property.

11.8 SUMMARY

There have been contradictory processes taking place in the world today. While there has been serious efforts to create one large society called European Union by including many nations of Europe, many nations are in the meantime breaking up releasing ancient hatred and prejudices that has led to brutal ethnic cleansing and wanton massacre in many such parts, i.e., Yugoslavia, between Serbian, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, between the

erstwhile communist and the non-communist, the developed west and the east Europe. Similarly while there has been need for immigrant labour, the same immigrant labour lives an excluded and marginal life in all such societies. Similarly, at the intellectual level, while the new globalisation is invoking the inclusion of all the societies into one world order, the practice of the neo-colonial economy is excluding many communities from the political and economic order. One the most prominent trends within the new liberal order is invoking fragmenting rather than connecting, exclusion rather than inclusion in its correct sense. The core of the neo-liberal intellectual exercise has been that there are fragments and that there must not be inclusion into any whole and rather fragments should hang around. Nevertheless, empowering individual and communities has become the core principle for the new ideas of inclusion. The origin or the source of empowerment however has not been very apparent. Quite often it is from a source outside the individual or community, i.e, outside, from World Bank, or from international agencies. It is again here that a critique of “state” emerges as an agency. Thus all arguments which bring state into picture are discarded as non-empowering principle. However, a close appraisal would show that the state and nation are some of the key agencies that still play a very crucial role in bringing communities, individuals and groups together by removing many of the exclusionary ingredients in the society.

11.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by social inclusion? Trace the historical background for the emergence of this concept.
2. Discuss at length the bases of exclusion.
3. Analyse the Gandhian methods of social inclusion.
4. What, in your opinion, are the impediments to the process of inclusion?

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Structure**12.1 Introduction****Aims and Objectives****12.2 Gandhi's Idea of Woman as Mother****12.3 Influence of Women Public Figures on Gandhi****12.4 Gandhi against Gender-based Discrimination****12.5 Gandhi and Empowerment of Women****12.6 Gandhi on Women's Contribution****12.7 Relevance of Gandhian Legacy for the Contemporary Women's Movement****12.8 Summary****12.9 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

12.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Woman is more fitted than man to make exploration and take bolder action in nonviolence’.

‘There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men’.

‘Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity’.

‘If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior’.

‘If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women’.

‘Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realize what tremendous advantage she has over man’.

These are some of the most famous quotes from Gandhi's writings and speeches. Gandhi believed that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women. Any tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Great Soul, would be an empty one, if we were to take no cue for our own guidance from his words and from his life; for him ideas and ideals had no value if they were not translated into action. He saw men and women as equals, complementing each other. If then, men and women work together selflessly and sincerely as equals with a faith like Gandhi's, they may indeed realize *Ram Rajya*, the perfect state. Traditionally, woman has been called *abala* (without strength). In Sanskrit and many other Indian languages *bala* means strength. *Abala* means one without strength. If by strength we do not mean brutish strength, but strength of character, steadfastness, and endurance, she should be called *sabala*, strong. His message almost six decades ago at the All India Women's Conference on

December 23, 1936 was: “When woman, whom we call *abala* becomes *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful.”

Aims and Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand

- Gandhi’s contribution towards Empowerment of women
- Gandhi’s Efforts at Enhancing women’s Dignity within private and public realms
- Gandhi’s role in political participation of women in the Freedom Movement
- Gandhi’s views on man-woman relationship
- Relevance of Gandhian Legacy for the Contemporary Women’s Movement

12.2 GANDHI’S IDEA OF WOMAN AS MOTHER AND “MOTHER INDIA”

In the formative years, Gandhi was influenced by his mother Putlibai, who imparted in him strong sense of personal ethics and compassion. Gandhi said: "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without daily prayer. She would take the hardest of vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them." He got his mother's permission to go to England for studies by taking an oath: "I vowed not to touch wine, women and meat." These three vows shielded him throughout his stay in England.

Gandhi married at the age of thirteen to Kasturba and lost no time in assuming the authority of husband to **lord over** her life (emphasis added). At the time of conjugal conflict, Kasturba used the weapon of passive resistance of “fasting”; from this, Gandhi got inspiration to start Satyagraha in the freedom movement to resist the British Regime. Kasturba became his active partner and supporter in all his activities. She was a devoted wife, who was content to live in the shadow of her illustrious husband, and was fiercely independent.

Gandhi’s devotion to women began with his devotion to his mother and Kasturba, most particularly to women as mother. Motherhood became increasingly his model for liberation of India and his own life for he envisaged that unless we have a selfless devotion for our motherland many countries will be lying in wait to crush us down. He saw no hope for India's emancipation while her womanhood remained un-emancipated. In the course of his social reform work, the realisation came to him that if he wanted to reform and purify society of the various evils that had crept into it, he had to cultivate a mother's heart.

He learnt the fundamental aspects of his soul politics from his mother and his wife but women's influence on him was not limited to his family. The *bhadra mahila* (respectable or new women), created in nineteenth century by Indian social reformers, became the model for Indian women on the nationalist era. Women in late 19th and early 20th century created organisations such as All India Women's Council and Bhagini Samaj, founded predominantly among the upper-middle class in urban centres. Although many associate the ideals and organisations of the "new woman" with Gandhi, as Elise Boulding indicates "well before Gandhi was calling women to practice Satyagraha, the grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters of the educated classes in India were forming organizations providing educations and action-training for other women, in order to re-build an Indian society freed from colonial structures."

12.3 INFLUENCE OF WOMEN PUBLIC FIGURES ON GANDHI

Gandhi was profoundly influenced by Annie Besant, a British militant feminist, Theosophist, Sarojini Naidu a trusted Gandhi's co-worker; Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, a fiery Satyagrahi; RajKumari Amrit Kaur and Pushpaben Mehta. Geraldine Forbes examines the model that Sarojini Naidu developed in her speech as President of the Indian National Congress, "a model with India as the "house", the Indian people as "members of the joint family and the Indian woman as the "Mother". Naidu, Gandhi, and many other advocates of women's and national liberation agreed wholeheartedly that women and India would advance together to the extent this new familial model for India was adopted by the women and men of India.

Gandhi believed that women could do much to transform India on all levels. He believed that equal rights for women and men were necessary but not sufficient to create a more just social order. Also having equal rights is no good if we are divided within ourselves and unable to attend true unity with others.

In a letter written to RajKumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 20-10-1936, Gandhi opined that, "If you women only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full sense of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slave and holders have become one in the crime on degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity. I was once slave holder myself but Ba proved an unwilling slave and thus "opened my eyes to my mission."

Gandhi further said: "I began work among women when I was not even thirty years old. There is not a woman in South Africa who does not know me. But my work was among the poorest. The intellectuals I could not draw ... you cannot blame me for not having organized the intellectuals among the women.

I have not the gift... but just as I never fear coldness on the part of the poor when I approach them, I never fear it when I approach poor women. There is invisible bond between them and me."

The mass of poor women were those whose dignified *upliftment* he craved. Poor women understood what he was saying because he spoke in the religious pantheon and referred to the facts of caste and gender. Some times highly progressive, other times conservative, he created an empathy with his audience through this cultural fine tuning. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, echoing this aspect of Gandhi's personality, stated that "We found him not a "Bapu" - wise father, but what is more precious, a mother, on whose all embracing and understanding love all fear and restraint vanish."

12.4 GANDHI AGAINST GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Gandhi was totally opposed to gender discrimination. He disliked the Indian society's preference for a boy and a general neglect of a girl child. In fact, in most cases she is not allowed to be born or her survival is not ensured. She is subjected to neglect, does not get respect and the status she deserves equal to that of a boy. Gandhi described discrimination against women as an anachronism: "I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going."

Gandhi called women as the noble sex, weak in striking, but strong in suffering. Gandhi described; "Woman as the embodiment of sacrifice and ahimsa." He further states: "A daughter's share must be equal to that of a son. The husband's earnings are a joint property of husband and wife as he makes money by her assistance."

Gandhi firmly believed that if a husband is unjust to his wife, she has the right to live separately. He averred, "Both have equal rights over children. Each would forfeit these rights after they have grown up, and even before that if he or she is unfit for them. In short, I admit no distinction between men and women except such as has been made by nature and can be seen with human eyes."

Gandhi preached and practised sharing of housework by both men and women of the family. He encouraged women to do intellectual work and men to help in cooking, cleaning and caring, conventionally 'women's chores'. Gandhi expounds further, 'more often than not a woman's time is taken up not by the performance of essential domestic duties, but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master for her own vanities. To me this domestic slavery of woman is the symbol of our barbarism mainly. It is high time that out womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of women's time'. His policy of empowerment was that man must participate in the housework and reduce the drudgery of women's home work.

12.5 GANDHI AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Gandhi was not only a great political leader but also a passionate enthusiast of humanity and an implacable enemy of all injustice and inequality; he was a friend of the lowly and the downtrodden. Women, the poor and the deprived sections commanded his most tender attention. He had almost an instinctive understanding of women and their problems and had a deep abiding sympathy for them.

The oppressive custom of dowry too came under fire from Gandhi. He preferred girls to remain unmarried all their lives than to be humiliated and dishonored by marrying men who demanded dowry. To him, dowry marriages are "heartless". Gandhi wished for mutual consent, mutual love, and mutual respect between husband and wife. He decried that marriage must cease to be a matter of arrangement made by parents for money. The system is intimately connected with caste; he opined that the girls or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if the evil is to be eradicated.

For the fight against foreign domination, women by the thousands rallied to Gandhi's call for civil disobedience. Women set aside their traditional roles, came out of seclusion, cast off their purdah, entered the public domain along with men, offered Satyagraha, remained undaunted by police beatings and extreme hardships in prison. Even illiterate tribal women from the forests joined the freedom movement. Though pre-occupied with heavy responsibilities his views in this regard were clear and he tried to educate the public to accept women as equal partners. He further asserted: "I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on an equal footing of perfect equality." Also he said that "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is a man's injustice to woman. If by strength it is meant moral power then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not more self-sacrificing, has she not great powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women."

Women could play a significant part in the freedom fight under his inspiring leadership, his fostering care and loving guidance. According to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India none has been so potent as the field of nonviolence which Gandhi offered to women in his "war" against British domination of India. It brought them out in their hundreds from sheltered homes, to stand the furnace of a fiery trial without flinching. It proved to the hilt that woman was as much able as man to resist evil or aggression.

Gandhi was deeply pained at the impact of poverty on women that deprived them of even basic necessity like clothing. He took to spinning so that every poor woman could be clothed and he promoted production of khadi as an economic activity.

12.6 GANDHI ON WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

Gandhi had profoundly said that the 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 his capacity in the largest measure? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of a man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

Citing an example of the bravery, which a woman showed, during child birth by not taking chloroform, which would have risked the child's life and undergoing a very painful operation, he further says: "Let not women, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise their sex or deplore that they were not born men."

Feminist researchers differ widely in the assessment of Mahatma Gandhi's theory and practice of women's emancipation during the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Madhu Kishwar asserts that "Gandhi saw women not as objects of reforms ... but as self-conscious subjects who could, if they choose, become arbiters of their own destiny. In this way Gandhi represents a crucial break from the attitude of many of the leaders of the reform movements of the late nineteenth century... The main contributions of the Gandhi to the cause of women lay in his absolute and unequivocal insistence on their personal dignity and autonomy in the family and society."

It took several years for Gandhi to overcome the forms of sexism, classicism, and racism that he internalised as a young man. But from the perspective of social feminism, he made enormous progress. The new women (women engaged in feminist movement) respected Gandhi because he spoke their language, he did what they wanted men to do, and encouraged other men to follow suit. Given the stark contrast in Indian society between men and women's cultures, broadly speaking, where man is more bellicose, rigid, controlling culture while woman is more relational, egalitarian, fluid, open, peace-loving culture, it is not surprising Gandhi chose the latter. The extended family, even with its patriarchal modes of dominance, gave many women a wide scope of expression than either the British or the Indian public spheres. Gandhi's effort to model Indian public life on the joint family brought thousands of women into social and political institutions of the nation.

Gandhi had advocated three distinct levels of women's participation in the national movement.

First, women who had familial responsibilities such as care of children and the aged, were to fulfill only their primary duties which were not to be given up for the sake of the national movement.

Second, a group included women from whom he expected a sacrifice of the pleasure of house-keeping and child-caring. If already married these women were expected to remain celibate for the sake of the nation.

Third, full time workers were expected to stay single and dedicate themselves entirely to the struggle for independence.

12.7 RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN LEGACY ON THE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Contemporary feminists' analysis on empowerment of women includes not only of sexism but also of racism, classism and imperialism as determining factors in shaping women's status in the private and public realm. This development seems consonant with Satyagraha which for Gandhi was an inclusive quest to find creative solutions for all forms of oppression. In India and elsewhere, there are healthy movements of Gandhi's followers, and there are more moribund Gandhians who speak in Gandhi's name but also subvert the power of his theory and practice by failing to be open to new movements. Feminists and other women are engaged in many forms of action that Gandhi may not have anticipated. We have much to learn from Gandhi's theory and practice, but not to the exclusion of modern ideas and movements.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Swaraj, in all its facets and perspectives, has permeated the discourse on India's contemporary history. As the most towering figure in India's freedom struggle, Gandhi's role remains unchallenged and the imprint of his moral philosophy as a workable political ideology has been particularly indelible. Gandhi's views on social, political and economic matters are transparently evolutionary, a continuing examination of reality, the human condition and truth. Gandhi's attitudes towards women were as much shaped by his innate sense of comparison and justice as they were by the patriarchal albeit benevolent conservatism that was the sheet anchor of his cultural and social discourse. The contradiction between his liberal feminist pronouncements, his egalitarian, loving and respectful concern for women, his belief in their role in politics and in society are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Yet Gandhi, more than anyone else, struggled with these paradoxes in the existing social milieu. Comparing his vision of women with the current status of women and the ongoing struggle for women's empowerment will provide a measure of what has been achieved.

Gandhi was able to devote himself to such a mission and formulated views on all aspects of a woman's life, political, social, domestic and even the very personal or intimate. He was able to do this by liberating himself from the sexual desires that identify the difference between man and woman and thereby positioned himself well above the feminist, becoming instead a reformer of humanity. While this gave him the right to demand far-reaching changes in the attitudes of society towards women and the attitudes of women about themselves, he rooted his views on distinctly Indian soil. It was also for the "non" Intellectual among Indian women. Poor women understood what he was saying because he spoke in the idiom of Hindu religion and culture, religious pantheon and caste and gender.

This is particularly clear in his response to a question asked of him as to "What would determine a woman's varna? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her Varna from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life ...?" In his reply Gandhi analysed the prevailing social situation and went on to state an ideal objective and finally reiterated the reality embedded within the question. He says: ".....owing to the confusion of varnas today, the varna principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four varnas exist today in name only. If we must talk in terms of varna there is only one varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all shudras. In the resuscitated varna Dharma, as I conceive it, a girl after her marriage, would naturally adopt her husband's varna and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need . . . any such change... imply a slur since...the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all four varnas" (Harijan, October, 1934). Not only does Gandhi automatically accept the secondary status of the woman vis-a-vis the social identity of her husband or father but he goes on to say, "I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband."

It is indeed interesting to note that, in a letter to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in answer to a question about the religion of children in mixed marriages, Gandhi reveals his patriarchal bias: "I am quite of opinion the children of mixed marriages should be taught in the male parent's religion. This seems to me to be self obvious for common happiness and interest. That the instruction should be liberal goes without saying. I am considering merely the question of choice of religion. The children cannot profess two religions. They must respect the female parent's religion. If the female parent has not that much discretion and regard for her husband's religion, the marriage becomes superficial." One sees Gandhi grappling with what is just and moral at one end with the necessity to assert the paternity rights of the father at the other. In reality, even if there was no respect, and the marriage was not a true meeting of minds, the father's religion still prevails, seems to be the unsaid part of the answer.

While adopting a high moral and often conservative position, he could- the next moment- seemingly abandon it for a more fruitful and dynamic postulation that brings him to the forefront of extreme liberalism. Typically, Gandhi was able to step out of his traditional attitudes through the medium of education. When asked to write a primer for school children by Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Gandhi did it in the form of a mother teaching her child in which she explains to her son that housework was good for both mind and body and helped in character-building. This was part of his efforts to build a wholly new society, without which he believed it was not possible to make an appreciable difference to improve the lot of mankind with the cultural discourse of society as it was, and he never shied from providing direct and practical methodologies to achieve his goals. From feminist ideas in a text book to spinning the charkha for swaraj, he always came up with a constructive proposal to bring women out of their traditional mental fetters and into a more dignified life.

In describing the woman's role as householder and housekeeper, he goes even further in stressing the need for man and woman to "do the duty for which nature has destined us"; by finding it "degrading, both for man and woman, (if) the woman should be prevailed 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 defending it against attack from without." The contemporary argument for wages to be calculated for women's work at home and the need for economic independence for them to be truly able to act in their own interest overtakes by far Gandhi's traditional perceptions. Today's liberated woman would find his position almost totally unacceptable. They would argue that while women's special calling may be child nurturing, peace-loving and preservationist, they are capable of performing all tasks hitherto left to men.

But Gandhi revealed a deep understanding of the pulse of society, and reflected its rhythm. He offered spinning and the salt agitation as nonviolent ways for women to join the political movement for swaraj. By 1940, he had provided modifications to his earlier more generalised approach to women's contribution to public life. Despite a change in attitude he seems to have the middle class woman rather than the poor one in mind, and adheres to the position that a woman should be able to order her household duties in such a manner as to complete them and yet have enough time for public work were she to abjure vanities. The onus is still on the woman. However Gandhi was always willing to modify his own stated positions. He simply resolved his contradictions by responding instinctively and practically to a situation as he saw it.

Liberation of woman, as Gandhi saw it, was linked to a deep-seated malaise. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy wrote a long letter to Mahatma Gandhi as far back as 1929, in which she raised some fundamental issues concerning social reform. She also questioned him as to why the Congress, which was fighting for the freedom of every nation and the individual, should not first liberate their women from the evil customs and conventions that restricted their healthy all-round growth. Indian women, with a few exceptions, have lost the spirit of strength and courage, the power of independent thinking and initiative which actuated the women of ancient India, such as Maitreyi, Gargi, Savitri and even today activate a large number of our own women belonging to the liberal creeds like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy, which is only Hinduism freed of all its meaningless customs, rites and rituals? Although Gandhi agreed with her in a rather perfunctory way, he was not prepared to tackle the issues of social and religious customs so directly at that point of time and centred his response thus, "Men are undoubtedly to blame for their neglect, nay their ill use of women, and they have to do adequate penance, but those women who have shed superstition and have become conscious of the wrong have to do the constructive work of reform. The question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of untouchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like, resolve themselves by penetration into the villages, reconstruction or rather reformation of the village life."

Mahatma Gandhi believed that *Satyagraha* was the most powerful weapon in a nonviolent struggle, which involves defiance, the willful, peaceful, and breaking of unjust laws. Since women were the most nonviolent and ardent lovers of peace, it could be sharpened and extended as a weapon in women's struggles for justice and equality. To him the ultimate ahimsa and Satyagraha was when women, in vast numbers, rose up to put an end to the destructive aspects of male dominance in society. Had the momentum of freedom struggle not been slowed down, such mobilisation could have attracted many more women into public life. Political activity geared towards the transformation of society into the holistic, integrated entity as Gandhi had visualised has not yet crystallised. Satyagraha is now just a word, a mere symbol, that serves no purpose for the academic or the elite, or even the middle class feminist whose dialectic emerges from a theoretical background far removed from Gandhi's poor women who act because they have no use for words to explain themselves.

The anti-liquor movement of Andhra Pradesh built up gradually in the minds of poor and illiterate women who, for long years, suffered the ill-effects of alcohol consumption by their men folk. For families steeped in poverty, for women who were subject to domestic violence related to alcohol, for wives who had nothing material to lose by rebelling because they had nothing to lose, they fulfilled Gandhi's wish of deciding no longer to be slaves of the situation. "No one can be exploited without his or her willing participation" said Gandhi. Gandhi said that women "strengthen my belief in swadeshi and satyagraha....if I could inspire in men devotion as pure as I find in the women, within a year, India

would be raised to a height impossible to imagine. As for swaraj it was the easiest thing in the world." The superior qualities of women and the intrinsic difference between man and woman was something Gandhi kept highlighting. He believed that women could bring about swaraj better as they were the very embodiment of nonviolence, greater soldiers and beneficiaries of his swaraj campaigns. The three famed spearheads of these campaigns were the manufacture of salt, boycott of foreign cloth and shunning of liquor which he said "were specially meant for the villages and the women would benefit especially."

Somewhere along the way, however, the issues close to Gandhi's heart have been largely left by the wayside by women who became part of the power structure as well as by the emancipated women's groups. Organisations involved in trade union work, social reform and development issues have in part or in whole addressed the issue of prohibition; but women, as a group in parliament or through institutional structures, have not raised this demand loudly and effectively. Prohibition is not accepted when it is presented as a moral issue alone and therefore the argument has to include developmental priorities, revenue collection, and budgetary allocations to social welfare, health and other sectors which rural women are unable to do.

The salt satyagraha and boycott of foreign cloth emphasises the indigenous, but the feminist movement has not associated itself with the swadeshi movement except for the Gandhian elements within the various groupings. The wearing of khadi and handloom among the younger activists is more as the badge of a progressive liberal rather than as a commitment to the foods of indigenous manufacture. These are no longer taken up as issues of struggle although many women are part of the wider movement against the neo-colonial pressures of the new world trade regime which destroy both sovereignty and national resources.

Many institutions and organisations representing women's rights have a high visibility in the cosmopolitan arena and have effectively expressed their concerns. Further, their members have decisively moved far ahead of Gandhi's vision of fearless women. Alert, active and bold, they engage in constant discussion and introspection for genuine equality.

While middle class women were visibly active side by side with Mahatma Gandhi, wearing khadi, going to jail, organising resistance on the British in some creative and selfless way, the socially conscious middle class woman of today has largely shunned direct political activity, preferring to seek more secure ground in funded social work through voluntary organisations. A growing number of emancipated, educated, young women are being diverted by market-oriented consumerism in the name of modernity and liberation. They become packaged products for the marriage, beauty or fashion markets, a professionalised catering to "the vanities" that Gandhi spoke of. This depoliticises them to

such an extent that the cream of young women students are unavailable to articulate the needs of their underprivileged sisters. This results in a wider cultural and social divide emerging between the rural and urban woman. It also demonstrates that emancipation does not mean empowerment in the Gandhian sense if women move away from involvement with the more deep-seated problems facing India.

Compared to the momentous work of stalwarts like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Dr Muthulakshi Reddy, Lakshmi N. Menon and Annie Besant and organisations like the All India Women's Conference, the Arya Samaj and many others during Mahatma Gandhi's time, the collective or individual work of women in the political arena in the post-independence era has been unremarkable. Some of the organisations are fine examples of Gandhi's ideas put into practice but lack political power to influence change in the society around it. The appalling number of women at the helm in the decision-making levels of the administration shows that there is a long way to go before gender parity is achieved.

While in some spheres women have accepted Gandhi's words about shedding their role as slaves and facing patriarchal challenges, women have largely slipped away from the paths of political action that Gandhi had opened out for them during the freedom movement. For instance, women from the middle classes have achieved remarkable prominence in fields such as aviation, science and space technology, administration, education, literature and the arts. Unfortunately, the women of the rural classes are subjected to the same oppression as before, not only by the men within their caste but also by other communities. In spite of the policies and legislations favouring women, and adoption of universal franchise before many other nations, India remains far behind in achieving social and gender justice. With the increasing criminalisation of politics and the use of vast sums of unaccounted money and ugly muscle power by different groups and with both caste and gender groups perpetuating traditional and modern divisions, the mission of Gandhi and the dreams of women are yet to be fulfilled.

12.8 SUMMARY

Gandhi taught us that empowerment of women without sharing our material, financial, intellectual resources with the poor women is not possible. No other leader has done as much as Gandhi to bring out masses of illiterate women from the four walls of their houses. A few talented women were spotted by him who worked shoulder to shoulder with him, like Midas touch, anybody whom he inspired became vibrant and active soldier of movement and not a lifeless idol of gold. No one can double the efforts made by Gandhi to empower women. He had attracted many millions of literate and illiterate women without the power of state, without the modern information technology and offering in return only sweat, toil, and pain, which is an exceptional feat! His insistence on Women's education is the

first step in right direction. We still have miles to go to achieve our cherished goal to empower women.

12.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe Gandhi's contribution towards empowerment of women.
2. Critically analyse Gandhi's views on man-woman relations.
3. How did Gandhi make thousands of Indian women to join India's freedom movement?
4. What is relevance of Gandhian legacy for contemporary women's movement?
5. Write short notes on:
 - a. Gandhi as mentor of women freedom fighters
 - b. Women's Awakening in Gandhi's era.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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