



## MAHATMA GANDHI: A MAN OF SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT

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Mahatma Gandhi is such a huge and influential personality that no sphere of human existence in our world may remain out of his reach. There is hardly any society and religion reflecting true spirit of life and humanity that has never kept pace with Gandhian thoughts, principles and ideals. Gandhi was that rare and precious jewel of our human history that remains glitering and brightening the true path of humanity. In Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna says to Arjuna:

Manushyanam sahasreshu Kashchidyatati Siddhaye|

Yatatamapi siddhanam Kashchidmam Vetti tatvataha<sup>1</sup>

(Out of thousands among men only one can attain perfection; and out of those attaining perfection, rarely is there one who knows me in truth.) The same is true in case of this great man as far the real spirit of humanity and truth are concerned. Infact, Gandhi devoted his whole life for human welfare and remained true exponent of truth and non-violence till the end of his life. He never looked back in true and divine search of human life. The entire world witnessed his constant endeavour for the true service of humanity and one can rarely find anybody who has made such ceaseless and whole-hearted efforts for the service of society and practice of true, eternal religion. Infact, there is a striking interrelatedness between his social reformation and his spirituality.

It was his spirituality that rendered him to be a distinguished political leader and perhaps it was his political leadership which was responsible for making him a distinguished spiritual personality, keeping him apart from other great saints. At times, he appeared to be an orthodox Hindu but there was some benevolence under it some dignified objective for the cause of human upliftment. When he was asked by a sage at 'Kumbh Mela', after his return from South Africa, to have 'Janeu' and 'Choti', he accepted for the 'Choti' and said, "I am to make big reforms in Hindu society, and to fight for them as a faithful Hindu, and at times, if needed I have to go against the society and fast. And so I am to be in harmony with the

society so that it may seem that I belong to them. Of what avail is it to get apart from the society by making reforms in such a little thing as 'Choti'."²

He did not accept 'Janeu' as he was a true exponent of equality in society. He wanted to remove every evil that was the barrier for equality of Race, Class, Gender, Caste, etc. He said, "Hindu society is getting weakened because of a lot of useless groupis. Where some people have the right of Janeu and others don't. In that case, we are to be with the people without the right." This way, he always took the side of weak, down-trodden and oppressed, to bring equality in the society. Kaka Kalelkar rightly says, "There was a big reformer in Gandhi. But he was a Baniya. Because of this nature he got himself included in 'Sanatanees'. And he preferred the programme of reformers".³. The value of the reforms and values exercised by Gandhi is, that they uprightly show the way of truth, love and welfare in the midst of adverse forces.

The significant thing for the influence and exercise of Gandhian values and principles is his whole-heartedness and commitment. The whole life and personality of Mahatma Gandhi was utterly meant for society in particular and humanity in general. And it was due to his inner harmony, an undivided spirituality which was perhaps the fundamental and dominating element, not only for his contribution to reforms but for everything Mahatma said and did, as we know he always said what he believed and did what he said. And that is why Balwant Parekh includes the following statement in his book, "The magic of Mahatma Gandhi was he always said what he believed and did it. And so only one sentence by him transformed the whole life of many people. Because of this strength he could transform a little backward village "Shegaun" into "Sevagram"⁴. Gandhi was purely a man of social concern. He performed mammoth tasks such as for the cause of untouchables, Dalits, Poor, downtrodden and communalism. His anxieties and actions on social issues like marriage, status and well being of women and children are really praiseworthy, as they lead towards moral, social, religious and political upliftment.

Gandhi honoured the women who grew up by learning English, he also got their assistance. But he did not expect much from these women. He said, "I am to exercise a big action. For this we are to awaken illiterate and middle class women who do not know English."⁵. That is why he spare his special time for the women in ashram and it inspired them strikingly. Kaka kalelkar, suggesting to read *Bapuna Patro: Ashram-ni Baheno-ne* to know how he awakened the women, said "Gandhiji knew their strength and weakness. And

such a task of removing their weakness and increasing their strength has never been done by any divine man, except Lord Krishna”<sup>6</sup>.

The same spirit of Gandhi is seen in his concern for the life and learning of children. He regarded the opening of Gujarat Vidyapith, the greatest ever task in his life. We can see the glimpse of Gandhi’s attitude for society and humanity in his remarks: “O God; Render this institute into one wherein we get the individuality for which we strive day and night. And by this individuality not only Hindustan, but the whole world where Hindustan is a small dot, be happy.”<sup>7</sup>

Gandhi’s great spirit of social reform is seen in his constant efforts for the cause of Dalits. A versatile poetic genius ‘Padmashree’ Dula Kag has written beautiful padas and bhajans (hymns, verses) about the plight of Dalits and Gandhi’s concern for it. The Bhajan ‘Bhayankar Vrat Bhangavo’ about the fasts of Gandhi for protecting Dalits, ‘Mano Svabhav’ dealing with the scolding to people against Gandhi’s service to Dalits are noteworthy. The poems ‘Mohan-ne Trajave’ and ‘Mohan Doobalo kem’ show tremendous spirit and the reason of Gandhi’s suffering. In the first three padas of ‘Mohan Doobalo Kem’ the poet expresses the feeling that Gandhi’s weakness and pain are due to the sufferings of Dalits: “Lagi ene Harijan bandhudanee laya”<sup>8</sup>. The same excellent example of Gandhi’s spirit is there in the prolific genius, Javerchand Meghani’s poem ‘Chhellee Salam’. Here, it is significant in the sense that the poem was composed on the incident of Gandhiji’s fasts against the decision of British Government to make separate voter groups for untouchables (the same dirty politics as that of old times). The purpose of Gandhi’s fasts was to awaken the conscience of upper class Hindus. The poet also depicts the tyrannies exercised on untouchables by upper class and Gandhiji’s immense suffering thereon. Though the poem is historic, there is no reference of its historicity, nor of Gandhi, his fasts and their reasons. The poem begins with the depiction of Gandhi’s dying moments because of the fasts for Dalits. The way Gandhi bids farewell is really heart-touching. His first salutation is definitely to those for whom he staked his life—the Dalits:

So so re salamun maran bhandudane ke’jo re  
Jhajhera juhar jagane deho... .. ji! <sup>9</sup>.

[Convey hundreds of salutations to my brothers and a lot of juhar to the world... ..]

What more would you expect for the cause of Dalit and down-trodden from a man who says: “I do not ask for rebirth. But if I get born in the next life, I would be born as ‘Antyaj’

and experience the distress and misery suffered by them.”<sup>10</sup>. And yet Gandhi never believed himself to be a perfect man, a Mahatma and a true social reformer. In Bihar Gandhi once went to a mother who had lost her son in the fight and said with folded hands, “Mother this is your son standing before you, put your hand on his head and bless him that he may sacrifice his life for the cause of nation.” As if a call of prayer awoke from within the heart of the mother, “My son, long live. This prayer of heart was fulfilled. He got sacrificed in human welfare Yagna”, <sup>11</sup> writes Umashankar Joshi.

Having finished the first summit about Vardha Education scheme, while sitting at the house of Jammalal Bajaj at Vardha, Gandhiji sighed: Why has god given me this idea of education so late? Soon, improving upon it, the devotee in him uttered the second sentence, Who are we to blame God? He knows when and what of everything and inspires me at proper time, I should feel the gratefulness”.<sup>12</sup>. Perhaps it was this instinctive spirituality which was one of the most responsible factors for turning Mohandas of Karamchand into Mahatma Gandhi. Perfect faith was the striking thing of Gandhi’s religion. He strictly obeyed the rules of prayer. In spite of being an orthodox Hindu, a vaishnav, he was utterly generous towards other religions. He believed in the positive and ideal things of all religions. And that might be the reason for the extent of Gandhi’s success in communal harmony.

On one hand he was ready and eager to accept every good thing from any religion, he never hesitated to give up the bad one from his own religion on the other hand. Because of this generous nature of Gandhiji, even strictly religious men of other religion accomplished then in prayers in the Ashram. As Gandhi wrote “I read their book with honour and I found the original moral principle the same in all of them”. Joseph Raypen knew music well, he sang ‘Christian jan to tene kahiye’ and all followed him.”<sup>13</sup>. Thus Gandhi was not a Christian, nor a Sikh or Muslim or Hindu, he was all in one and yet he was a pure devotee who considered human religion above all. Luis Fisher rightly remarked: “Had Gandhi been born thousands of years ago, he would have been worshipped in the form of idol in temples like Ram and Krishna.”<sup>14</sup>. Not only Fisher, our great Folklorist Padmashree Dula Kag has sung ---

*Sat ahinsa-ne bhava bharela, eva shlok sangharashe(2);*

*Dev dubaliya-ni (Gandhi) najaru padatan (2), Khota khakh thai jashe*

*Bavaliyana navan puran lakhashe.....<sup>15</sup>*

[The verses full of the feeling of truth and non-violence would be collected; the weak but God-like Gandhi's sight would demolish wrong ones. And the new Purans of this great sage would be written.]

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