CHAPTER – VII

The Relevance of Gandhi’s Concept of Inter-Caste Marriage in the Modern India

In India there are around 8 lakhs families whose annual income exceeds Rs. 12 lakhs. Persons who are in their 30s earn more and they do have tremendous confidence about their future. These young consumers lead a life that is a combination of traditional India and international lifestyle. Their overall marriage expenditure amounts to over than Rs. 50,000.- crore per year.

In India, even though marriages do take place only during certain months, their marriage industry and its business worth Rs. 1,25,000 crore per year. This marriage industry that undergoes changes in it during every marriage season, has been estimated to grow at the rate of 25% a year\(^1\).

All Gandhian philosophies were not mere superficial one. There were not prevarication in every Gandhi’s utterances. Gandhi’s thoughts, principles and every utterances were based on firm conviction. He practiced what he spoke. Gandhi was a ‘practical idealist’ so, having his goal clear and vision unblurred, Gandhi advocated inter-caste marriage to eradicate the evil of untouchability.

Gandhi made serious efforts to wipe-out untouchability through his Harijan Sevak Sangh, that compulsorily admitted only non-Harijans as its members. Gandhi satirically called this Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS) as “sinners association”. When he said this, he had an idea that those who committed the sin of untouchability should remain in the forefront to eradicate it. Thus his strategy to accomplish the task in hand was unique.
Gandhi’s these efforts were chiefly instrumental in the enactment of the “Removal of untouchability Act – 1950”. Consequently it has also resulted in a lot of socio-economic and educational development – Thanks to Reservation Policy.

Gandhi is a ‘go-getter’ the practiced all those things that he preached. The laboratories for all his experiments were his family and his ashram. He had conducted a reasonable number of inter-caste marriages, that included the marriages of his family and ashram members. These reforms that were initiated domestically (in his home and HSS) by Gandhi, after 1946, came out with an ‘open declaration’ that insisted everyone in all the spheres of life to follow Gandhi’s ideals on inter-caste marriages.

Gandhi’s earlier political life, that is prior to 1930, was filled with ‘pro-Varnashrama’ ideas and views, that had opposition to inter-caste marriages. But the internal transformation that Gandhi underwent after 1932, made him to advocate only for inter-caste marriage. He himself has facilitated a few such marriages in his Ashram. But, after his demise, it seems no such marriages have taken place in the Ashram. Even no other Gandhian movements had not taken this as an activity in their programmes.

**Research Studies on Inter-caste Marriages:**

The Mahabharata describes a number of inter-caste marriages. Santanu, the progenitor of the Kuru-Pandavas first married Ganga and later Satyavati, a fisher-woman, both outside his caste. Manu has classified and named the offspring of **anuloma** (higher varna man marrying a lower varna woman) and **pratiloma** (lower varna man marrying a higher varna woman) marriages and all possible combinations of the
marriages, indicating that during his time inter-varna marriages were prevalent. He was one of the social thinkers who forbade such marriages.

In this book titled “Social Change in India”, 1993. by B. Kuppusamy, he has furnished two different research studies on inter-caste marriages that was done prior to 1970. The first of this was a research conducted by Mr. Kannan, who has given some interesting details. A few excerpts:

“During the first thirty years of the 20th century, inter-caste marriages were very rare because in an agricultural society following caste system and arranged marriages, it is very difficult for a man or a woman to marry outside the caste”, Says Mr. Kannan. “However, since the thirties, probably with the increase of women’s education, there have been many inter-caste marriages. Kannan made a study of 200 inter-caste and 50 inter-community marriages in Maharashtra. Of the 200 inter-caste marriages, 74 couples were both Maharashtrian, 75 couples with one Maharashtrian and one non-Maharashtrian and the remaining 51 couples were non-Maharashtrian Hindus. Of these 200 marriages, 11 were arranged either by parents or by friends, 11 by social organizations like Jati Nirmulan Samstha and the remaining 178 marriages were love marriages of which 64 took place because the couples came together in educational institutions, 39 because they were working together, 41 because they were living in the same neighbourhood and 34 by coming together in picnics, social gatherings, cultural programmes, etc. A large majority said that they were not bothered about the caste of the person, when they discovered that they belonged to a different caste. Higher education and high age at marriage were the two conspicuous features. Of the 200 marriages, 79 were pratiloma, 76 anuloma, and the remaining were either between sub-castes or between
same castes from different linguistic areas. In 129 cases the parents were favourable, in 34 they were against. In the remaining the parents were not alive. Of the 400 persons, 162 were Brahmins (72 men and 90 women), 39 were Prabhus, 34 Marathas, 34 Nairs, and 20 Tiyas. Of the 162 Brahmins, 76 married within the caste (sub-castes) and 86 outside the caste. Half the parents of the men and more than two-third of the parents of the brides participated in the marriage function. One-fifth of the parents of the bridegrooms and one-quarter of the parents of the brides were against the marriage. The two important reasons for opposition were traditional outlook and the fear of the opinion of the relatives and caste people. It was also found that class factor operated to break down the resistance. When the spouse or the parents of the spouse were wealthy and persons of prestige, there was parental cooperation”.

Mr. Kannan reports that there were not significant differences either between the three linguistic groups (both Maharashtrians, one Maharashtrian, and both non-Maharashtrians) or between the three kinds of caste groups-different sub-castes, anuloma marriages and pratiloma marriages. One-half of the marriages were in traditional Hindu style and the other half were registered marriages; but there was no difference even here regarding the three caste-groups. It was also found that when there was opposition, it was the mother who reconciled herself more easily to the match than the father. About 75% of the parents of one-tenth of the men and among 22% of the parents of the women.

“One of the interesting features of the study is that it was found that nearly 20% of the couples stayed with the parental family of the man after inter-caste marriage. Three couples were with the parents of the women. In four cases the parents came to live with the couple after some time.
Thus inter-caste marriage did not mean a break with the joint family as a consequence. Deviation and tradition coexisted in 25% of the cases. Even those who had set up independent households received cooperation from the parents of both the sides except in 34 cases where the parents were against it.

The second important study was made by Mr. Deshpande, who submitted a study of inter-caste marriage, again in Maharastra in 1969. He used a control group, matched in caste, education, age, etc. It was found that 23% of the girls of the control group had married before the age of 15 years as against 5% of the experimental group. Nearly 50% of the control group and 63% of the inter-caste group had married between 21 and 30 years and 3% of the control group and 13% of the other had married above 30 years. Of the 78 men who had married outside the caste, 24 were Brahmins and of 78 women, 20 women were Brahmins. Thirteen men and seventeen women were Harijans. There was parental opposition in 70% of the cases of inter-caste marriage; only 10% gave their approval. The main basis for opposition was caste. While two-thirds of the group married after informing parents, relatives and friends, one-third eloped and married. While 60% married according to Vedic rites, 40% married by registration. Both the inter-caste group and the control group were well adjusted in their married life. One significant finding of this study is that when one marries a Harijan there is a rejection by the families on both sides. It was reported that even the society, in general, did not accept them; maid servants did not accept any food from those households.

A study was also made to find the attitude of students towards inter-caste marriage. It was found that two-thirds of the group were against inter-caste marriage-60% among the boys and 67% among the girls-
because of the general “caste-mindedness” of the society, that the parents would feel miserable, that there would be differences in culture, customs, food, habits, etc., and that there would be difficulties with respect to the marriage of the children later on.

In conclusion, one can see above that in many parts of the country the lower castes became aware of their position and resented oppression and discrimination by higher castes. This change in the outlook of the lower castes led to inter-caste tensions. Broadly, one can distinguish between two categories of these tensions (a) that between Brahmins and the non-Brahmins, and (b) that between so-called caste Hindus and the Harijans².

Though both these two studies were based on Maharashtra, the findings more or less reflect the all-India mood and attitudes towards such inter-caste marriages. Of the most important findings, the prominently inferred opinion was that, there was opposition from the families as well as from the society, in general, when a man or woman married a Harijan. Other findings reveal that if the person outside the caste was wealthy and had social prestige there was general approval. Persons with higher education and who are older marry outside the caste. In the two studies it was found that a considerable number of those who marry outside the caste are Brahmins. Finally it was found that the mothers reconcile themselves to the deviation more easily than the fathers.

**Conference on Eradication of Castes**

Salem Velu Gandhi (82), who has been fighting for the eradication of castes since 1972, has put forwarded an idea of ‘Gandhi Caste’ for those persons who want to remain ‘casteless’. To get his concept a legal validity,
he even approached the Supreme Court and argued in person for this cause. This news has been widely published almost in all leading dailies including ‘DINAMANI’ dated 11th December 2007.

This research scholar, had the opportunity to Meet Mr. Salem Velu Gandhi in 1997, at Madurai. This, reformist ‘Velu’ Gandhi, then, was in a “Bullock – Cart Yatra” through out Tamil Nadu, to propagate, Gandhi’s ideas on forming ‘casteless Society’. This ‘Yatra’ was in the wake communal clashes that happened then in South Tamilnadu. This occasion created an opportunity, for this scholar, to meet Velu Gandhi at Madurai, that culminated in organizing a Grand Conference on “Eradication of Castes – with reference to Gandhi, (29-3-1998) at Gandhi Museum, Madurai.

This conference released a ‘Souvenir’ titled ‘Gandhi Caste’ (In Tamil). The contents of the souvenir were, The selected essays from schools and college students, essays from Gandhian resource persons and selected caste-related quotations of Gandhi. And this Conference resulted in sharing of all the Gandhian views on ‘caste-abolition’ between this scholar & Mr. Velu Gandhi. This paved way for Mr. Velu Gandhi, to file a suit in this regard with a lot of substantiating ideas of Gandhi to argue for his cause and case of abolition of castes and formation of one ‘Gandhi caste’.

**Governments Financial Assistance to Inter-Caste Couples :**

Gandhi’s strong advocacy for inter-caste marriage, in which, he insisted the either of the married party, to be a Harijan, didn’t get a wholehearted reception even in his Harijan Sevak Sangh. An objective and unprejudiced assessment tell us that there were not many takers for this
concept even in his own party. But the initiatives from Tamilnadu, opened the gates of the reformative legislations that provided cash rewards for such marriage that took place on the lines of Gandhian concept, where, either of the married party is a Harijan. Tamilnadu and its reformist and rationalist leaders, through their ‘Self respect movement’ pioneered the cause of ‘inter-caste’ marriages. Thanks to the untiring efforts of great leaders like Periyar and C.N. Annadurai etc. This was followed by other states as well, for which the details are furnished below:

**Tamilnadu** : The ongoing schemes include marriage assistance schemes, service homes, guidance bureau for women, setting up of family counseling centres etc. Under marriage assistance schemes, financial assistance is given to daughters of poor widows, orphan girls, widows remarriage and inter-caste marriage. The age limit for all the marriage schemes has been fixed as 20 to 30 years. The quantum of assistance of all marriage schemes except inter-caste marriage is fixed as Rs. 10,000/- per beneficiary. For inter-caste marriage, the quantum of assistance is fixed as Rs. 20,000/- for SC/ST with FC/BC/MBC and Rs. 10,000/- for BC/MBC with FC. Totally an outlay of Rs. 397.00 lakhs was proposed for 2004-05 to benefit 2600 women.

**Andhra Pradesh** : Marriage grant of Rs. 1,500/- to daughters of widow of ex-servicemen upto two daughters. Financial grant for Inter-caste marriage Rs. 3,000/- and widows re-marriage Rs. 5,000/- is also given.

**Maharashtra** : As incentive for Inter-caste marriage financial assistance of Rs. 15,000 is given to a newly married couple. 50 percent of the assistance is in the form of National Saving Certificates. The outlay for Tenth Five Year Plan is Rs. 562.34 lakhs, out of which Rs. 102.20 lakhs is for Annual Plan 2002-2003.
Chandigarh: “The UT pays Rs. 5,000 to couples, one whom belongs to Scheduled Caste. The 2001 – 2002 Budget provides Rs. 1.00 lakh for these schemes. Since the inception, Rs. 1.05 lakh has been dispersed and 21 couples have benefited.

Himachala Pradesh: “Under this programme, the important schemes being implemented during 2001-2002 are Award for Inter-caste marriage – Under this scheme, an amount of Rs. 25,000/- per couple is given as incentive money. For inter-caste marriage during 2001-2002, a budget provision of Rs. 18.50 lakhs has been kept and about 69 couples were benefited with an amount of Rs. 17.25 lakhs upto December 2001.

Madhya Pradesh: “As per the 1991 Census the total population of Scheduled Castes in M.P. is 74.78 lakhs which constitutes 15.40% of the total population 485.66 of the re-organized state. Out of 45 districts of the state, there are 29 districts dominated by Scheduled Castes population. The problem faced by the Scheduled Castes are manifold and complicated nature. Other activities of the department include training and rehabilitation of the persons engaged in unclean occupations, apart from mass-marriages and inter-caste marriages. On the economic front assistance is provided to MP Anusuchit Jati Vitta Avam Vikas Nigam for promoting self employment among SC population. During the 9th plan period the department has provided assistance to 252 couples in Mass Marriage Scheme and 511 couples in scheme to promote inter-caste marriage.
Kerala: Financial assistance is given up to a limit of Rs. 2,000 to those who are suffering from hardship precipitated by mixed marriage. For this one of the partners should belong to scheduled Tribe. The annual income of the family should not exceed Rs. 8,000. Application can be submitted after one year from the date of marriage.

Orissa: The Board decided to increase the financial incentive for inter-caste marriages from Rs. 3000 to Rs. 10,000. If a boy from a higher caste marries a girl belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Schedule Tribes, the couple will get a reward of Rs. 10,000. The same would also hold good in case of a higher caste girl marrying a boy from a lower caste. The reward amount of Rs. 3,000/- had remained constant since 1981.

The Ministry of Welfare during the tenure of Shri. Sitaram Kesri as welfare minister had introduced, a list of the schemes / projects & programmes. Many such projects were taken up by various states / UT Government and Union Ministries. Under the B.R. Ambedkar centenary programmes implemented during 1990-1991 as per the Item No. 14, 100 inter caste marriages were organized under one roof at Hyderabad marking the centenary celebrations of Dr. Ambedkar.

Government Advertisement on Inter-caste Marriages:

A newspaper advertisement from the “Ministry of Social Justic & Emancipation” reveals all the good intention and the measures taken by the central government to follow the ideals of Gandhi. The said advertisement beans with a heading that “Marriages are ascertained at Heaven. But caste obstacles do originate from our minds. So don’t be caste-based” This is followed by the Ministries objectives as stated below:
a) As inter-caste marriages are considered to be an effective means to improve ‘social harmony’, the ‘ministry of social justice and emancipation’ encourages it.

b) In order to know the details of this ministry’s role in encouraging inter-caste marriages, do contact the respective State Government / Union Territory Official.

Recent Trends in Inter-caste Marriages:

Over 1 crore couples get married in India each year. Among these marriages, inter-caste marriages are no longer unusual. Yet, before the superficial calm there is an under current of uneasiness. There is a slowly changing social scenario. After the passing of the Special Marriages Act in Tamilnadu, there were no inquisitive queries and tensions when the mention was made of one marrying outside the narrow confines of one caste and community. But now, about 4 marriages are registered everyday in Chennai under the special marriages Act and about 100 get recorded under the Hindu Marriages Act that involve couples of different communities. Close to 90% of the latter are between members of particular 2 castes. One noticeable change now is that persons coming to get married do not mention their castes.

The present change in the outlook of this kind of marriage is refreshing. Before the amendments to the Acts governing the Hindu marriages in the early ‘70’s, it was difficult for those from different castes to be married respectably. They may get married and remain happy but society always looked down on them – mostly as “runaways” but it is not so now. The various social and political developments in Tamil Nadu, such as the emergence of rationalist forums and economic incentives to start avenues of self-employment, largely contributed to removing of any stigma
closely associated with inter-caste marriages. The Special Marriages Act contributed positively to the integration of upper middle-income groups and a small segment of high-class society⁴.

**Internet and Inter-caste Marriages**:

Divya Mathur, a Indian student also a research scholar, from Chicago University, has found through her research that Marriages arranged through Matrimonial websites least bothers for caste rigidities. This scholar’s findings were based on her research involving thirty thousand (30,000) marriages. Of this Thirty thousand, three thousand persons had found their partners through web-site based matrimonial. Ninety percent of these marriages have been conducted with the help of friends and relatives the remaining persons who search their life partners through websites, shun the caste, religion, region and language identities. Job, career prospective and salaries are given due weight age over castes and religion etc. Thus, a change that cannot be made effectively through sixty year old Indian Constitution and law, is being appreciably done by this website linked marriages.

**Forum for Inter-caste Marriage Couples**:

Tamilnadu witnessed great reform activities through E.V.R. Periyar’s Self Respect Movement (SRM) and later during the regime of Thiru. C.N. Annadurai. Even since their period, there has been no powerful movement or organization to protect the rights of inter-caste couples, so far. This need has been nullified by the formation and functioning of an organization named “Human Renaissance Forum” (Maanuda Marumazharchi Paasari), that strives to protect the rights of the inter-caste couples and their offsprings. This organization’s conference was conducted at Chennai during Feb-2004. This conference was well attended by more than 1000
persons. This conference stressed the central government to provide reservation for the inter-caste couples and their offsprings.

Further, this researcher has come to know that another such forum do exist and function from Bangalore, Karnataka State.

**Casteless Family in Kerala:**

An interesting, but a progressively realistic incident has been reported in “KUMUDAM” a popular Tamil weekly in its issue dated 5.12.07.

It is all about a ‘caste less’ family. This news item reports about the story of a married couples Mr. Basludin, a Muslim and Mrs. Agnes Basludin, a Christian and their family. Their residence is at Punaloor in Kollam. They, themselves having thrown away all the caste and religious identities, have named their first child as ‘Casteless’, their second child as ‘Junior Casteless’ and for their third daughter as ‘Shine Casteless’. Further they have also gone for marriage alliance with families which do not believe in caste and religion. They are also in search of a groom from such a family for their daughter. Their family living in such a style, have aptly named their home ‘Casteless Bhavan’.

This is not the only isolated case. But all over the country there are many such families whose reformist lives are not this much exposed or publicized. Though these events are restricted only to single or individual families it is said further steps progressively ahead have started taking place in Tamilnadu & Karnataka, where ‘Inter-caste’ forums have been formed by such inter-caste married couples. These ‘Inter-caste’ married couples forum, which became active after the year 2000, have now started demanding reservation also, for them and their off-springs in job
opportunities and educational institution. But, this demand remains unheeded by the respective Government so far.

To Sum Up:

The untiring and ceaseless efforts of Gandhi and his programmes to promote inter-caste marriages, have resulted in many pro-inter-caste marriage related measures taken by central and state Governments. Many state governments have initiated schemes of incentives and privileges for inter-caste couples. Even the Ministry of ‘Social Justice and Empowerment’ openly advertises for the cause of inter-caste marriages thereby leading to caste eradication.

Despite many a persons ‘caste-rigid’ orthodox mind-set, who don’t favour inter-caste marriages a positive changes can also be seen through ‘no-bar’ matrimonial columns and among the highly educated economically well-off individuals who stand for inter-caste marriages. Similar place of inter-caste marriages do take place among the poor and rural people, who don’t get the needed social security from the public, that is relatively enjoyed by the urban rich. What is needed in this hour of lacking of social security for inter-caste couples, is a strong movement like Self Respect Marriage of E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar) to give protection and security for inter-caste marriages.

Further, if the Central and State Governments in addition to its financial aid and incentives to inter-caste couples, extends reservation in job opportunities and in educational institution, this will act as a further impetus to inter-caste marriages.
Among the many organisations that were active during Gandhi’s period, a few have become extinct and other few have re-modeled or reshaped themselves to suit the modern trend. Only a very few Gandhian Organizations do service among which Harijan Sevak Singh is a prominent and active one. It this Harijan Sevak Sangh starts functioning with the true Gandhian spirit in encouraging and protecting inter-caste couples and for their posterity, it will be a welcome move and will contribute stoutly for the progress of such marriages.

Reference:
1. India Today, Tamil, 28.11.07, p.39
3. Dinamani, 15.1.2007
5. Woman’s Era, April, 2003, p.12