CHAPTER - IV: Equality

4.1 Introduction:

(i). General concept and meaning of equality:

The concept of equality occupies a central and controversial place in the contemporary political philosophy. While most political philosophers agree upon the importance of this idea, there is a large amount of disagreement about what a substantive theory of equality requires. That people should be treated equally is a widely held view, but asking how one treats people equally elicits a wide range of conflicting responses. Thus it has become very difficult for the political thinkers to offer a precise definition of the term ‘equality’. According to Laski, no idea is more difficult to be defined in the whole realm of political science than the concept of equality.¹ He defines ‘equality’ thus: “It implies fundamentally a leveling process. It means that no man shall be so placed in society that he can over-reach his neighbor to the extent which constitutes a denial of the latter’s citizenship.”² According to R.H. Tawney, equality has become like a multi-dimensional concept. It possesses more than one meaning. The

² Ibid., p. 153
controversies surrounding it arise partly because the same term is employed with different connotations. It may either purport to state a fact, or convey the expression of an ethical judgment. It may affirm that men are, on the whole, very similar in their natural endowments of character and intelligence. It may assert that while they differ profoundly as individuals in capacity and character, they are equally entitled to consideration and respect as human beings and that the well-being of society is likely to be increased if it so plans its organization that, whether the powers are great or small, all its members may be equally enabled to make the best of such powers as they possess.\textsuperscript{3} \textit{The Oxford English Dictionary} defines ‘Equality’ thus: (1) the condition of having equal dignity, rank or privileges with others, (2) the condition of being equal in power, ability, achievement, or excellence, and (3) fairness, impartiality, due proportion, proportionateness.\textsuperscript{4}

Equality also means the equal enjoyment of rights by all citizens and absence of any discrimination based on status, race or sex.\textsuperscript{5} In very simple terms, the idea of equality refers to equality of rights and opportunities so

that each member of the civilized community may have the best possible scope for the development of his personality. It obtains in so far as, and only in so far as, each member of a community whatever his birth or occupation, social position, possesses in fact and not merely in form equal chances of using to the full his natural endowments of physique, of character, and of intelligence.\textsuperscript{6}

In other words, equality refers to a state of life in which the strong and the weak share same privileges for the development of their personality, irrespective of any artificial distinction like that of wealth, religion, color of the skin, domicile, language, descent, sex and the like.\textsuperscript{7} Equality can be broadly divided into four kinds. (1) Natural Equality : It implies all men are born equal, hence no discrimination on any artificial ground as religion, race, creed, caste, sex, wealth, place of birth, domicile, language, color of skin, etc. (2) Social Equality : It implies equality of rights and opportunities subject to genuine grounds of discrimination. (3) Political Equality: It implies equality of participation for all in the management of public affairs.

\textsuperscript{6} R.H. Tawney, op.cit., pp. 103-104

(4) Economic Equality: It implies non-concentration of national wealth in few hands.\footnote{Ibid., p. 210}

(ii). Gandhi's concept and meaning of equality:

Gandhi was a great champion of equality in its comprehensive sense. In his view, equality is essential to human society. The necessities of life are to be enjoyed by all; the princes, the moneyed men and the poor. But equality, according to him, does not mean that all must be provided with palaces, for, these are not essential for happiness. Equality signifies equal freedom of all in spite of different caste, color and creed. It means equalization of status. To him, there is no difference between the son of a weaver, an agriculturist or a school master.\footnote{Harijan, 15.1.1938, Vol. V, p. 416} Gandhi stood for social, political, economic and racial equality of all human beings. He also advocated for the equality of all religions. However, equality does not mean dead uniformity. Equality implies equal opportunity for everyone for the full flowering of his individuality.\footnote{V.D. Mahajan, Modern Indian Political Thought, (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Pvt. Ltd., 1987), p. 361}
Gandhi believes in equality between man and man. He said that his concept of equality of man was derived from the concept of the universal soul. To quote him: “I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All whether in India or in England or in America or in any circumstances whatever have the same soul as any other . . . I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow being . . . He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man.”¹¹ In short, Gandhi viewed that none is high or low and all are born equal.

4.2 Social equality:

Gandhi believed in equality between man and man. He asserted that no man can claim superiority just by his birth. It is the equality of the human rights derived from one common father whom we have in God that postulates a social equality among men. When Gandhi talked about the equality, it was not so much in terms of physical attributes of man but in

terms of the spirit or soul. For instance, he says: "We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence it is a mental state."  

Gandhi explained the positive meaning of his concept of social equality thus: "I believed in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches us that the members of all the four castes should be treated on equal basis. It does not prescribe the same dharma for the Brahmin as for the bhangi. But it consists that the latter should be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning."  

Gandhi believed that all human beings are essentially equal and of the same stamp. He said that he does not regard a bhangi's duties as in any sense of a lower order than any. Indeed the scavenger's occupation is as honorable as that of lawyers or government servants. So coming to the very essence of the thing we can say that Gandhi held that man's essential dignity, which he has in common with all men, derives neither from his birth

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12 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, (New Delhi: Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India), Vol. 52, p. 256 (To be referred hereinafter as CWMG)

13 CWMG, Vol. 30, p. 15


15 Ibid.
nor occupation but from his very human nature, which thus entitles him to basic human rights and to undiscriminating justice.\textsuperscript{16} Thus the fight of Gandhi for the cause of the untouchables was a great fight for bringing social justice. Coming to that of the social system of his time, Gandhi observed that there were numerous inequalities within it. It was evident in connection with Harijans and women (like dowry system, purdah system, education, widow-remarriage, property inheritance etc.).

Throughout his life he worked hard to bring about social equality in India. Gandhi viewed that there should be perfect social equality among the people in the society. No superiority should be entertained by any individual or by a section of the society on the ground of birth or knowledge or religion or any other consideration. That is why Gandhi fought against the evil practice of untouchability in India. He regarded untouchability as the “greatest blot on Hinduism”\textsuperscript{17} and a “hideous doctrine”, and called it “a curse that is eating into the vitals of Hinduism.”\textsuperscript{18} So it is a sin “to be removed by every effort.”\textsuperscript{19} To Gandhi, no one is born untouchable and

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\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17}M.K. Gandhi, Address to the Suppressed Classes Conference, Ahmedabad 13 and 14 April, 1921
\textsuperscript{18}M.K. Gandhi, \textit{The Bleeding Wound}, Compiled and Edited by Ramanath Suman, (Banaras City: Shyam Lal, 1932), p. 46
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
\end{flushright}
unequal. The practice of untouchability is a sin against God. Removal of untouchability means service and love to the whole humanity and God.

Gandhi’s crusade against social inequality is best exemplified by his effort to remove untouchability as he claimed that he did not even hesitate to stake his life for it. He called the untouchables by a new name ‘Harijan’ which means the people or children of God. He bade the Harijans to come and live in his Ashram as members of one family among people drawn from all castes. He adopted a Harijan girl. He also encouraged other caste members to marry Harijans. He said: “I therefore tell all the boys and girls who wanted to marry that they cannot be married at Sarvodaya Ashram unless one of the parties is a Harijan.”

Gandhi began public work for the removal of untouchables since 1915. In 1932, he went for fast unto death against the infamous Communal Award which was calculated to severe the body of Hindu community by providing separate electorate to the so-called untouchables. By the Poona Pact, joint electorates were provided although there were reservations of seats for the Harijans. In 1933, Gandhi fasted for 21 days to make penances of the sins of the caste Hindus against the Harijans. Thus Gandhi worked as

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20 The Hindustan Standard, 5.1.1946
a revolutionary leader, preaching social equality to the conservative tradition-gripped Hindu India, and due to his efforts many conservative groups had to open temples to Harijans.²¹

For the uplift of Harijans, Gandhi wanted a non-political association to be called Harijan Sevak Sangh. It was to be a national organization with its branches in state capitals, district headquarters and taluk places. All these national, provincial, district and taluk boards of the Harijan Sevak Sangh were expected to be self-supporting and self-reliant and should actively seek the support of the savarnas and change their heart.²² He also said at the same time that while the savarna Hindus shall engage themselves in the socio-economic and political upliftment of the Harijans, the Harijans shall also make attempts at self-improvement. Gandhi laid down the certain rules and programmes for self-improvement of the Harijans: (1) They should cultivate cleanliness, both of mind and body. (2) They should give up carrion-eating. (3) They must give up drinking habits. (4) Whenever they have to visit

temples, they should observe the rules applicable to all temple gears. (5) They should not entertain the feeling of high or low among themselves. 23

Gandhi held that untouchability was a hindrance not only to the march of Hindus towards their own good, but also to the general good of all. He rejected that untouchability had a religious, spiritual sanction, and even if it had, he would refuse to honour and live by that sanction. Hence he said: “You must have the right of worship in any temple in which members of other classes are admitted. You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office in the land not excluding even that of the Viceroy’s. This is my definition of the removal of untouchability.” 24

Gandhi believed that the Varnashrama was necessary to bring about social balance as ‘Varna’ institution removes unnecessary and embittering competition from society and puts a check on the increasing love for materialism. And although he justified Varnashrama dharma he saw no reason for any one to claim superiority. He said: “The four divisions are not a vertical section but a horizontal plane on which all stood on a footing of equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. In the book of

23 CWMG, Vol. 56, p. 195
24 CWMG, Vol. 30, p. 18
God, the same number of marks are assigned to the Brahmana that has done his task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise." 25 But he admitted that "Today varna means gradations of high and low. It is hideous travesty of the original." 26 Gandhi had seen that violation of the original scheme of varnas had given rise to the caste system with all its horrors as practiced in India. Therefore, in order to bring about social justice or equality in the society, Gandhi advocated the abolition of caste system for he believed it to be the very antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better. 27

Another significant area of Gandhi’s work where one can see his fight to end social inequality is in his efforts to bring about women’s uplift. He worked for the restoration of the status of the Indian woman which had deteriorated appallingly in a degenerating society. He pointed out that gross violations of the dignity of a woman were being perpetuated in the name of customs and traditions. He asserted repeatedly for women’s equal rights with men. Gandhi said: “Wife is not the slave of the husband but his comrade,

26 Quoted by Krishna Gupta, "Mahatma Gandhi: The Great Crusader Against Social Inequalities" in Ramjee Singh (ed.), op. cit., p. 28
27 Harijan, 16.11.1935, p. 316
otherwise known as his better half, his colleague and friend. She is a co-sharer with him of equal rights and of equal status. Their obligations towards each other and towards the world must, therefore, be the same and reciprocal." 28 He further said: "My own opinion is that just as fundamentally men and women are one, their problems must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one cannot live without the other's active help." 29 He laid emphasis on education as an essential means to enable women to assert their rights and to achieve emancipation from male domination. For a human being without education is not much different from an animal. As such, education is necessary for women as it is for men. And marvelously he succeeded in lifting to some extent the degrading burden placed unjustly on the Indian women. 30

According to him, if a woman wants to be an equal partner with man, she should stop to adorn herself with cosmetics and jewellery and must prevent herself from wasting her time to please even her husband by

29 M.K. Gandhi, Young India, 24 Feb. 1940, op. cit., P. 26
30 V. Tellis-Nayak, op.cit., p. 158
physical charms. If she cultivates good character, she can attract the whole mankind. Otherwise, the various desires and cravings for beautification lead women to slavery.

Gandhi’s opposition to the various social evils like child marriage, dowry, purdah, etc. was also related with his efforts to uplift women of his times. He was opposed to child marriage and pleaded that the public opinions should be built up against the evil practices of child marriage. According to him the age of marriage for girls should not be less than eighteen years. The boys and the girls who are to marry should be physically grown up, must have a say in the selection of life partner and should know the consequences of married life.31 He said: “The custom of child marriage is a moral as well as physical evil. For it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs we recede from God as well as swaraj.”32

Gandhi was deadly against with the evil practice of dowry and called upon the youths of the country to totally eradicate this social evil practice. He said: “There are many youth movements in the country. I wish that these

32 CWMG, Vol. 36, p. 230
movements would deal with questions of this character.” Gandhi declared: “If I had a girl under my charge, I would rather keep her a maiden all her life than give away to one who expected a single pie for taking her for his wife.” Gandhi even advocated ‘excommunication’ of those young men who accepted dowry, and wanted the parents to offer their daughters in marriage to such young men of the other castes who are opposed to dowry.

Gandhi felt that the custom of purdah was humiliating and painful. He asked: “Why do our women not enjoy the same freedom that men do? Why should they not be able to work out and have fresh air.” He did not accept purdah as an Indian tradition. He pointed out that women in ancient India used to participate in public discourses. And this was not done from behind the purdah. Therefore, Gandhi considered it as a travesty of Indian history that purdah was described to be an ancient custom of our people. He pleaded: “We must test on the anvil of reason everything that is capable of being tested by it and reject that which does not satisfy it even though it may appear in an ancient garb.”

34 Cited in Anima Bose, op. cit., p. 66
35 Cited in Anima Bose, op. cit., p. 65
36 Ibid.
On the question of 'widow-remarriage' Gandhi maintained that the rules of remarriage should be equally applicable to both widow and widower and there should be no discrimination against either of them. He said: "Widows should have the same freedom that widowers have."37 Gandhi believed that both men and women are equal in status but was not identical. Both had separate spheres in society and specific roles and are essentially complimentary to each other. Gandhi made no distinction between man and woman in so far as their educational rights were concerned. He was uncompromising in upholding the equality of the sexes and was eager to restore to women their traditional and natural right to rule the home.38 However, different functions call for different educational methods. As man has to carry on the outward activities of the married life, the educational systems for man should emphasize the knowledge relating to outward activities. And as home life is the sphere of the women, the educational system for women should emphasize home management like upbringing and education of children, and other related matters. To be a good mother, a woman has to be given a special education. He also appreciated a mother's qualities of self-reliance, courage, patience, purity and a capacity to undergo

37 Cited in Anima Bose, op. cit., p. 67
suffering. He felt that the inequalities of women can be removed through appropriate legislation and he encouraged the formation of women's organizations to fight against all sorts of social evils.

On the question of inheritance of property, Gandhi did not give much importance to the right of inheritance to the women. He was of the opinion that if the women did not get a share in the father's property, she got her share in the property of her husband. In fact, he did not attach much importance to the right of inheritance to the man or to the women for he considered the property as the source of desire for status, reputation and enjoyment. Instead of emphasizing legal right of inheritance of property, he emphasized the real property to be handed over to the next generation. The real property that can be equally handed over to the sons and daughters is character, education, self-reliance and dignity of labour.\(^{39}\)

4.3 Political equality:

Generally speaking political equality means that all the citizens should have political right and privileges. It is guaranteed through universal adult franchise, the right to vote and the right to be elected to all representative

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\(^{39}\) See S.H. Patil, op. cit., p. 53
offices, the right to express opinion, freedom of press, the right to form associations so on and so forth. Gandhi viewed the term 'equality' as a very important characteristic of democracy. He says that in democracy, the necessities of life are to be enjoyed by all, the princes, the moneyed men and poor. Complete self-government (Poorna Swaraj), according to him, is impossibility unless all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoy, are made available to the poor also. Equality signifies equal freedom for all in spite of differences in terms of considerations like that of caste, color, creed, etc. Equality means equalization of status. There should not be any difference between the son of a weaver, an agriculturist or of a school master.  

He further said: “I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in peace and harmony... There shall be no room in such an India for untouchability, for the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs... Women ... will enjoy the same rights as men... This is the India of my dreams.”

40 Harijan, 15.1.1938, Vol. V, p. 476

Gandhi's concept of democracy had nothing to do with numbers or majority or representative rule in the ordinary sense. He emphasized service and sacrifice as the motivating forces. He said: "The rule of majority does not mean that it should suppress the opinion of even an individual, if it is sound. An individual opinion should have greater weight than the opinion of many, if that opinion is sound on merit. That is my view of real democracy. Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep."

His idea of a democracy is one with complete identification with the poorest of the poor, renouncing his own comforts for leveling himself down, and making a deliberate effort to do so. Gandhi advocated non-violence to be cardinal principal of democracy. A non-violent democratic society alone can provide adequate protection to the weak and downtrodden. His concept of democracy is that every individual will be free to devote himself to social service according to his peculiar motive. Everybody would be his own master and nobody a hired laborer of another. A non-violent civilization cannot flourish on centralized production which involves concentration of economic power and the likelihood of misuse of such power.\footnote{Young India, 2.3.1922, p. 129} \footnote{Verinder Grover (ed.), \textit{M.K. Gandhi}, (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1996), p. 56}
opposition of the state is due to the compulsive and exploitative nature of state authority which is never friendly with the poor and is destructive of individuality. The stateless democracy as advocated by Gandhi was the state of enlightened democracy where social life becomes so perfect as to be self-regulated. This democracy will comprise almost self-sufficient Satyagrahi village communities organized on a voluntary basis. Gandhi is against centralization of power because it implies concentration of authority with the probability of its abuse, because it increases complexity of life which is a distraction in all creative moral endeavour, and finally because it diminishes the scope of self-government and of resisting injustice. \(^{44}\) Gandhi had often used the word 'Ramraj' for indicating his concept of an ideal democratic society. He describes Ramraj as "The establishment of the Kingdom of righteousness on earth."\(^ {45}\) He further explained: "By 'Ramraj' I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by 'Ramraj' the Divine Raj, the kingdom of God... The ancient ideal of Ramraj is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the


\(^{45}\) *Young India*, 4.5.1921, p. 143
meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure."\textsuperscript{46}

Gandhi upheld that everyman should have equal right to the necessities of life. As every right carries with it a corresponding duty, it is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the elementary fundamental equality. So for him, one can not think of a right without first performing a duty. And the true source of right is duty discharged willingly, voluntarily and in advance. H.G. Wells drew up a charter of Human Rights and asked Gandhi for his subscription to it. Gandhi wrote back: "Begin with a charter of Duties of man, and I promise the rights will follow as spring follows winter."\textsuperscript{47} Hence, duties and rights are interconnected or rather inter-dependent for Gandhi.

Gandhi has subscribed two different theories of rights, namely, the rights which the people earn by first performing the corresponding duties, and the natural rights which they deserve by virtue of their cultural heritage of rationality. These two put together, they constitute Gandhi's charter of

\textsuperscript{46} I bid.

\textsuperscript{47} CWMG, Vol. 7, p. 416
earned rights. He believes that man is not born with any rights. He has to earn every right which he wants, by first performing his obligation.  

Gandhi’s charter of earned rights which give political equality to all the citizens are discussed one by one here under:

The foremost among the earned rights, is ‘the universal adult franchise’. He upheld the right of every citizen to vote and to get elected to any political office on attaining the age of 18 years and hold to the political office until he attains the age of 50 years. The prescription of the maximum age-limit on debarring people above 50 years of age from voting or get elected was the outcome of his belief in the Varnashrama of Vedas.

Gandhi also emphasized the necessity of literacy test for every voter before he actually comes to exercise his voting right. He said: “I have come round to the view that a literacy test is necessary for two reasons. The vote should be regarded, as a privilege and should therefore carry some qualifications. The simplest qualification is a literacy test. And if the ministry appointed under the literacy franchise is sincere and solicitous

48 Ram Rattan & Ruchi Tyagi, Indian Political Thought, (Delhi: Mayoor Paperbacks, 1999), p. 258
49 Harijan, 13.10.1940, p. 319
about the disqualified illiterates, the much desired literacy would come in no
time.”^50

The second earned right of a person is the right to criticize, challenge and even change the government through constitutional methods, supplemented by the extra constitutional satyagrahic methods. Gandhi advocated the citizen’s right to participate in the conduct of government through their bona fide representatives. He believed that the Indians also have an innate “capacity to regulate national life through national representatives.”^51 He thought that since people send their representatives to the assemblies, “loyally to carry out” their wishes, they have the right to the government of their choice.^52 They have the right to exercise their birth right to criticise or resist a bad government by “undergoing hardships and self-sacrifice” and by attaining a high degree of political awareness.^53 Gandhi also prescribed a right of the people to ‘protest and go on agitation’ against the government, if it perpetuated its wrongs.^54 He also prescribed an extreme

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^50 Harijan, 14.1.1939, p. 421
^51 Young India, 2.7.1931, p. 162
^52 Harijan, 28.4.1946, p. 112
^53 CWMG, Vol. 25, p. 559
^54 Harijan, 28.9.1947, p. 349
step of the people's "to remove the Government if they wished to" in case the people found it to be a bad government.

And the third earned right of a citizen is the right to express opinion, freedom of press and right to form association. As a true democrat, he upheld the principle of freedom of opinion. He said: "Every one should have perfect liberty to preach by pen and tongue." He further said: "Public opinion alone can keep a society pure and healthy. There can be no public opinion without free press, free platform, association, etc." He elaborated his point of view thus: "Liberty of speech means that it is unassailed, even when the speech hurts; liberty of the Press can be said to be truly respected only when the Press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters, protection against misrepresentation or violence being secured not by an administrative gagging order, not by closing down the Press but by punishing the real offender, leaving the Press itself unrestricted. Freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects, the State relying upon the forces of public opinion and the civil police, not the savage military at its disposal to

55 Ibid., 26.10.1947, p. 382
56 Harijan, 29.9.1940, p. 305
57 Cited in V. D. Mahajan, op. cit., p. 359
crush any actual outbreak of revolution that is designed to confound public and the State representing it."\textsuperscript{58} Thus Gandhi vehemently voiced for the freedom of speech, freedom of press and the right to form association so as to bring political equality to all the citizens in a democratic state.

4.4 Economic equality:

Gandhi believed that social and political equality would not last long unless there was also co-existent economic equality. He said: "Everyone must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for education of one's children and adequate medical relief. That constitutes my picture of economic equality."\textsuperscript{59}

Economic equality is a natural consequence of the equality of rights that man enjoys in a society. Gandhi was of the opinion that economic equality means that everybody should have enough of facilities to provide for his needs as a human being. No one can deny a man that right and every man has an equal right to the necessities of life. In this Gandhi also instinctively included each man's right to opportunities for the full flowering

\textsuperscript{58} Cited in Ram Ratan, \textit{Gandhi's Thought & Action}, op.cit., pp. 97-98

of his personality.\textsuperscript{60} "Economic equality of his conception did not mean that everyone would literally have the same amount. It simply meant that everybody should have enough for his or her needs. For instance... the elephant needs a thousand times more food than the ant, but that is not an indication of inequality. So the real meaning of economic equality was: 'to each according to his need'. That was the definition of Marx. If a single man demanded as much as a man with wife and four children that would be a violation of economic equality.'\textsuperscript{61}

Thus the Gandhian concept of economic equality did not imply a narrow or absolute equality of property, opportunities, etc. Gandhi stressed the need for equal opportunity for economic equality. All must have equal opportunity. Given the opportunity every human being has the same opportunity for spiritual growth. But it does not mean that perfect equality can be attained. Therefore, Gandhi made it clear that even in the most perfect world we shall fail to avoid inequalities, but we can and must avoid strife and bitterness. "Even in the most perfect world we shall fail to avoid

\textsuperscript{60} S.H. Patil, \textit{Gandhi & Swaraj}, op.cit., p. 105
inequalities." For him, "inequalities in intelligence and even opportunities will last till the end of time. A man living on the bank of a river has any day more opportunities of growing crops than one living in an arid desert." So too may needs vary from person to person as those of the elephant and the ant. One may need two shawls in winter whereas another does not require any warm clothing whatsoever. So the real meaning of economic equality was to each according to his need.

In spite of this Gandhi was careful to insist on the fundamental and essential equality of all and said it is not to be missed since every one is equal as far as every one has a right to have enough for his or her needs. And justice demands that every one recognize this right of others. Gandhi said: "My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see it is not to be realized. I work therefore for equitable distribution." Indeed he was ready to call himself and others thieves if they possessed things not of immediate

62 Harijan, 2.1.1937
63 Young India, 26.3.1931
65 Harijan, 31.3.1946, p. 63
66 Ibid.
67 Young India, 17.3.1927, p. 86
use when so many of their countrymen lacked the necessities of life.\(^{68}\) It was again his simple logic of justice that concluded that in such circumstances even "to partake of sweetmeats and other delicacies... is equivalent to robbery."\(^ {69}\) For we have no right to the superfluities of life as long as a single person does not have enough for his or her needs.\(^ {70}\)

Economic equality suggests equal distribution and this in turn points to the doctrine of trusteeship. "Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbors,"\(^ {71}\) He said that though he may come by wealth either through legacy or trade or industry, he has a right to an honorable livelihood no better than that enjoyed by millions of others, and that the rest of his wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.\(^ {72}\)

This implies man's equality of rights to the goods of this earth. And the only way of maintaining this equality of rights in practice is to ordain our

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69 Cited by V. Tellis-Nayak, "Gandhi on the Dignity of the Human Person", op.cit, p. 154
70 Ibid.
72 *Harijan*, 3.6. 1939, p. 145
property to the common good of people as a whole through the principle of trusteeship.\textsuperscript{73} Gandhi said: "Moneyed men may earn their crores (honestly only, of course) but so as to dedicate them to the service of all. . ."\textsuperscript{74} It is trusteeship therefore which will help in realizing a state of equality on earth.\textsuperscript{75}

Gandhi steadfastly upheld the doctrine of trusteeship so as to bring about economic equality between the few rich and hungry millions. He said: "Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and a leveling up of the semi-starved, naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists . . . A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day, unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for the

\textsuperscript{73} V. Tellis-Nayak, "Gandhi on the Dignity of the Human Person," op. cit., p. 154
\textsuperscript{74} M.K. Gandhi, \textit{India of My Dreams}, op. cit., p. 69
common good. I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it." 76

According to Gandhi, the problem of inequality would not remain there if everyone laboured for his bread and no more. Therefore, Gandhi introduced the concept of bread labour so that everyone should earn his living by manual labour. If everyone labour physically for his bread it follows that poets, doctors, lawyers and others would consider it their duty to use those talents free of charge for the service of humanity. Gandhi believed that God created man to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. He said: "May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's' perhaps applies here well. Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Men's triumph

76 M.K. Gandhi, *Trusteeship*, op. cit., p. 15
will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service.”

4.5 Equality of religion:

Gandhi once said: “By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker.” He further continued: “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 even purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.”

About Gandhi’s understanding of religion, Prof. Bipan Chandra observed: “He often used the word religion in two different senses: one in its denominational or sectarian sense, that is, in terms of Hinduism, Islam,

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77 M.K. Gandhi, India of My Dreams, op. cit., p. 59
79 CWMG, Vol. 55, p. 61
Christianity, etc., and the other in the traditional Indian sense of dharma, that is, the moral code which guides a person's life and the social order.”

Gandhi’s concept of religion is unritual, undogmatic, tolerant, ethical and comprehensive. His religious concept lays stress on ethics and morality. For him religion is not merely uttering the name of God. Rather, his concept of religion is dynamic with its essence to be found in truth and non-violence. He believed in the fundamental virtue of all religions which emphasize the absolute and universal value of truth, morality and justice. For him religion and morality are two faces of the same coin from which neither of them can be separated. In his opinion religion is to morality what water is to seed that is sown in the soil. He made it clear that religion in its real sense is the basis of friendship among all mankind.

Gandhi further said: “Morals, ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand, and religion divorced from morality is like ‘sounding brass’ good only


82 Ibid.
for making a noise and breaking heads." He further said: "... as soon as we lose moral basis we cease to be religious." He again said that there is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. In this way Gandhi equated morality with Truth, which is for him God. He recognized morality and ethics as the foundation of all religions and equated them with Truth and God.

Gandhi did not make any distinction between various religions of the world and considered them as one religion based on the same principles of Truth and Non-violence. In other words, he believed in the equality of the principal religions of the world. He preferred to call it as equality of all religions to tolerance of all religions. To him, the different religions were beautiful flowers from the same garden or branches of the same majestic tree. All religions were at the bottom one and were all helpful to one another. He held that all religions were equally true. Each one of the religions embodies a common motivating force - the desire to uplift man's

83 Cited by Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 91
life and give it a purpose.\textsuperscript{87} He tried to explain that differences in religions were only in their methods of approach to God.

Ramjee Singh observed: "To Gandhi, though religions are many but religion is one. This means that he was convinced of the essential unity of all religions. His vow of ‘treating all religions as equal’ was neither his political strategy nor a convenient policy but a yearning of soul."\textsuperscript{88} He went much ahead of religions tolerance, because as he said, "Tolerance may imply gratuitous assumption of inferiority of other faiths to one’s own, whereas ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord our own".\textsuperscript{89} Again according to him, "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals".\textsuperscript{90} For him, "If a man reaches the heart of his own religion, he has reached the heart of the others too."\textsuperscript{91} According to him, a true Hindu is a true Muslim or a true Christian. He also said: "My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Cited by Ramjee Singh, op.cit., p. 15
\textsuperscript{90} Cited by K.S. Bharathi, op.cit., p. 86
faith, therefore no thought of conversion is possible."92 One’s aim should be to help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, and Mussalman to become a better Mussalman, and a Christian to become a better Christian.93

Gandhi made it clear that equal regard to different religions does not mean that one should adopt the other’s religion. Rather, it means only understanding the view-point of others while adhering to one’s own viewpoint. In other words, it means emphasizing the points of agreement and not the points of difference.94 According to him the goal of man’s life is to conquer evil in himself and reach the good. Therefore, all religions are different roads to this common goal. Consequently Gandhi emphasized that one must not reject other religions, but anybody belonging to any religion can receive from others what is good in them.95 Therefore, Gandhi tried to unite all religions. He wrote: “Just as a tree has one trunk but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect religion, although it is divided into many as it appears through a human intermediary”.96 Again he wrote:

“My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All

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93 Ranjee Singh, op.cit., p. 12
94 Mazhar Kibriya, op.cit., p. 92
95 Ibid.
proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they have come
down to us through imperfect human instrumentality." 97 Further he said: "In
theory, since there is one God there can be only one religion, but in practice
no two persons I have known have had the same identical conception of
God. Therefore, there will perhaps, always be different religions answering
to different temperaments and climatic conditions." 98 Hence, Gandhi pointed
out, "I don't share the belief that there can be or will be on earth one
religion. I am striving, therefore, to find a common factor and to induce
mutual tolerance." 99 In this way Gandhi tried seriously to moralize all
religions and thereby to avoid hatred, fanaticism, and orthodoxy.

In a way Gandhi wanted to establish the kingdom of God on earth by
emphasizing morality, truthfulness, tolerance, humanity and love for all as
the core of all religions. Therefore, he wrote: "As soon as we lose the moral
basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding
morality. Man for instance can't be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and
claim to have God on his side." 100

99 Quoted by Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 92
100 Cited in K.S. Bharathi, op. cit., p. 46
4.6 Racial equality:

Human beings are broadly divided into three races- white, black and brown. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, racialism is the political and social practices based on the differences of the races of people, and on the belief that one's own race is the best. Gandhi was completely against the practice of discrimination and segregation on the ground of race. To him, it is a blot or evil to human kind. In the light of his conception of human nature, all the different races of people are the children of a common creator. In a family the children of the same parents are also different in terms of the colour of their body skin. But the parents treat every one of them with equal love. The parents do not treat them differently on the ground of their skin colour. Similarly, people of different races are like the children of a family of the same parents. It is against the will of God and humanity to believe and treat a particular people as inferior to the other. Racialism and segregation is thus a sin in the eyes of God.

Gandhi, therefore, fought against racialism and segregation practised by the white people against the black and brown people in South Africa with all his might. With sacrificial spirit he worked there to annihilate the prevailing evils of racialism and fought for racial equality. The fight of
Gandhi for racial equality in South Africa is one of his remarkable successes in his life. Though not in person, Gandhi's spirit, thought and method had contributed immensely to the realization equality of races in South Africa and U.S.A and also to the political independence of many black nations namely Ghana, Zambia, Algeria.\textsuperscript{101}

Gandhi condemned racialism unequivocally in the following words: "Racialism is a new caste system which is worse than the ancient but dying institution in India. It shamelessly proclaims that the white civilization requires an erection of legal barriers in order to protect itself from Asiatics and Africans. It is time white men learnt to treat every human being as their equal. White men should not forget that all the greatest teachers of mankind (including Christ) were Asiatics and did not posses a white face and skin, if they were to go to South Africa, they would have to live in the segregated areas, and they would be classed as Asiatics, coolies, and people unfit by law to be equals to the whites. Would there be any other greater blasphemy than this?"\textsuperscript{102}


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
In South Africa, he found that he had no fundamental rights as a man and as an Indian. When Gandhi first landed in Pretoria, Dada Abdulla’s attorney, Mr. A.W. Baker who helped him in solving lodging problems and also apprised him of the practice of colour prejudice in the Transvaal, told Gandhi: “There is a fearful amount of colour prejudice here, and therefore, it is not easy to find lodgings for such as you.”103 And Mr. Jacobus de Wet, the British Agent in Pretoria an Indian sympathiser showed Gandhi some important papers dealing with Indian affairs. Gandhi wrote in his Autobiography thus: “In short, my stay in Pretoria enabled me to make a deep study of the social, economic and political condition of the Indians in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.”104 Gandhi discovered that the Indians in South Africa, though nominally free citizens of the British Empire, were subjected to grave disabilities. Both the Church and the state denied equality of rights to non-European races. Indeed, among then many things that Gandhi learnt in South Africa was that there no equality, either in the Church or in the state, could exist between white and colored people.”105

104 Ibid., p. 118
105 Quoted Mazhar Kibria, op. cit., p.13
Gandhi was on one occasion (the journey from Durban to Pretoria) pushed out of the First Class train compartment for being a coloured person, on another occasion he was called 'a coolie' in the first compartment and yet on another occasion he was kicked in the street by a police patrol without giving a signal of warning for using a foot path which was meant for the white only. The prevailing racial discrimination and coloured prejudices in South Africa and the inhuman experiences which Gandhi had met compelled him to think ceaselessly as to how he could bring about a change of such state of things. He said: "I thus made an intimate study of the hard condition of the Indian settlers, not only by reading and hearing about it, but by personal experience. I saw that South Africa was no country for self-respecting Indians, and my mind became occupied more with the question as to how this state of things might be improved."\textsuperscript{106} Hence he actively defended the claims of equality of the Indian population in South Africa. Gandhi said that in 1899, 1906, 1914 and 1915 he came to the help of the British empire because he felt that due to his voluntary services rendered in times of need, the empire would grant to the Indians 'a status of full equality' in the empire. But he realized that imperialism is a soulless

\textsuperscript{106} M.K. Gandhi, \textit{An Autobiography}, op. cit., p. 109
machine. He wrote in Harijan: "The real 'white man's burden' is not insolently to dominate coloured or Black people under the guise of protection, it is to desist from the hypocrisy which is eating into them. It is time white men learnt to treat every human being as their equal. There is no mystery about whiteness of the skin. It has repeatedly been proved that given equal opportunity a man, be he of any colour or country, is fully equal to any other."\textsuperscript{107} Mazhar Kibriya has observed that the European planters considered the Indian traders and laborers as their competitors in a field (agriculture, trade and commerce) which was their monopoly. Besides the economic factors, the culture, customs, traditions, different religions and the alleged insanitary and unhygienic habits of the Indians also worked as antithetical to the interests of the Europeans. In consequence, the Europeans started an agitation all over South Africa which aimed at harassing the free Indians in number of ways. They wanted to force the Indians, legally, socially, economically and politically, to leave South Africa, and go back to India. The Europeans, on the one hand, badly needed and demanded more and more indentured laborers from India for sustaining their agriculture and mines, thereby making money out of their labour, and, on the other hand,

\textsuperscript{107} Cited by V.P. Varna, \textit{The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya}, op. cit., p. 202
they were not ready to accept these indentured laborers as free working men in South Africa competing with them in trade and commerce after the expiry of the period of their indenture.”

A number of personal experiences spurred him all the more to fight racial discrimination. Here one may briefly mention some of the discriminatory policies pursued by the white regime against the Indians in South Africa. The Government of Natal passed an Act (No. 25 of 1894) disfranchising all Asiatics except those whose names were already contained in any voters’ list. In Natal the Indians, as British subjects, used to enjoy full electoral rights before 1894 according to the Royal Charter of 15th July 1850. The Charter declared: “... any adult male, not being native of South Africa, possessing property to the value of £ 50 or who rents any such property of the yearly value of £25, shall be entitled to be placed on the voters’ roll.”

The reason advanced for this class legislation was that the Indians were not accustomed to franchise rights and representative institutions. In the Cape Colony, two discriminatory Acts namely, the Immigration Restriction Act and the Dealer’s Licenses Act on the line of Natal were pursued. Besides,

108 Mazhar Kibriya, op. cit., p. 22
110 CWMG, Vol. 2, pp. 55-56
the Indian children were not allowed to attend public schools and the hotels
did not provide accommodations to the Indian travellers.\textsuperscript{111}

In the Transvaal, under an Amended Law 3 of 1886, the Indian
settlers in the colony for the purpose of carrying on trade required to register
at the cost of £3 failing which severe penalties were to be awarded.\textsuperscript{112} In the
Orange Free State, the second Boer Republic expelled Indian traders from
the State without any compensation by a special law intended “to prevent the
inrush of Asiatic coloured persons.” Besides, this law also prohibited Indians
from trading, farming, residing and holding fixed property in the State. A
fine of £25 or three months imprisonment, with or without hard labour was
fixed for violating this law.\textsuperscript{113} Thus the Indians were subjected to inhuman
and undignified treatment in all the four colonies – the Transvaal, the
Orange Free State, Natal and the Cape Colony of South Africa. Gandhi
started his non-violent resistance movement on a mass scale to protest
against the oppressive restrictions meted on the Indian community in South
Africa. He also revealed to them their real social degradation and inspired
them to fight for their dignity and honor.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp. 46-47
\textsuperscript{113} CWMG, Vol. 2, pp. 31-32
Thus he fought for the abolition of the racial policy of the white regime in South Africa against the Indians and also fought for the establishment of the fundamental principles of human rights – liberty, equality and fraternity universally, irrespective of caste, color and creed. He stood for the essential principles that all men are equal and artificial distinctions based on race and color was both unreasonable and immoral. He said: "Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence, it is a mental state. We need to think of, and to assert, equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man."\(^{114}\) Thus Gandhi's approach to the question of equality of men transcended the artificial distinctions of race and advocated the concept of universal brotherhood as he considered all human beings as belonging to the same human family.

4.7 Equality and human nature:

According to Gandhi equality of man is inherent in human nature. He believed that man is not only a creation of God but also that God dwells

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inside every man in the form of his soul. This makes man not only a spiritual entity but also that all men belong to God and they are all part of God Himself. In other words, there is unity between God and man. This was the basis of equality of man for Gandhi. There is no denying the fact that there is a big difference physically from man to man: some may be strong while some are weak; some may be big while some are small; some may be tall while some are short; some may be cleverer than other and so on. Human souls on the other hand have no difference. The soul of a rich or strong or clever man in Gandhi’s conception of equality is not different from that of the poor or weak or foolish man. Gandhi believes that human nature is in its essence one and that every man has the capacity for the highest possible development. “The soul is one in all. Its possibilities are, therefore, the same for every one.”

Again, Gandhi’s conception of equality also implies that the soul of a man is not different from that of a woman. He said: “The ideals that regulate my life are presented for acceptance by mankind in general. I have arrived at them by gradual evolution … I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort

115 Harijan, 8.5.1940, p. 254
and cultivate the same hope and faith." He further continued: "I claim that what I practise is capable of being practised by all, because I am a very ordinary mortal open to the same temptations and liable to the same weaknesses as the least among us." Thus Gandhi's conception of equality is a mental state.

In the light of Gandhi's understanding of human nature, no one is superior or inferior on the ground of birth. Equality is a doctrine taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches that the members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. Thus Gandhi derived the concept of equality from God, who is the creator of all. He said: "All are one in the eyes of God, and so He, the Father in heaven will deal with us all with even-handed justice." Therefore, "birth or observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority or inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable,

116 Young India, II, p. 204
117 Ibid., III, p. 517
118 Cited by V. Tellis-Nayak, op. cit., p. 157
because of his or her birth, can command our allegiance. It is a denial of God and of Truth which is God.”\textsuperscript{119}

V. Tellis-Nayak has elaborated Gandhi's understanding of human nature in the light of equality thus: "... we see that for Gandhi neither birth nor occupation essentially differentiates one man from another, because it is one and the same nature that is precipitated in by every human being which brings with it human rights and dignity, though it does not necessarily postulate an absolute mathematical social equality. Among other things this Gandhian conviction was seen in his heroic struggle on behalf of India’s women and untouchables whom he declared to be equal to any other human being as far as they are endowed with both human nature and dignity.”\textsuperscript{120}... Indeed, the dignity that Gandhi attached to human nature was really very lofty. For him, neither age-old customs nor religious sanctions can justify any one’s looking down on another human person even in the slightest way. If man is man he has a unique claim for deep respect for the inviolable dignity of his nature.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{120} V. Tellis Nayak, op. cit., p.163

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.