CHAPTER VI

GANDHIJI AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIA
6.1 Introduction

In January 1915, Gandhiji returned to India from South Africa after he had successfully led the Indians there. He was given a warm welcome like a victorious hero in Bombay and wherever he went, he received similar type of warm reception. After his return the hero of the South African struggle, had been looking for a field of action where he could use the methods developed by him in South Africa. The South African struggle was to Gandhiji only a prelude to bigger works in India. The veteran moderate nationalist leader, G.K. Gokhala was having very high estimation and admiration for Gandhiji’s non-violent methods of agitation which Gandhiji had invented and applied in South Africa. Gandhiji was also highly impressed by Gokhale whom he had accepted as his political Guru. Gandhiji, on his arrival from South Africa, wanted to apply his non-violent methods to solve the Indian problems including the nationalist issue of the attainment of self-government or freedom from the British regime. But his political Guru, Gokhale advised Gandhiji neither to take active participation in Indian politics nor to give his views to any Indian problem for at least one year. Because in the opinion of Gokhale Gandhiji had lost real touch with the Indian people and their multi-
dimensional problems owing to his being away from India for almost twenty
years. Therefore, Gokhale advised Gandhi first to travel extensively
throughout India to be acquainted with the social, political and economic
realities from the grassroots levels. Like an obedient disciple, Gandhi
followed his Guru’s advice and started to travel the remotest parts of the
Indian territories taking the first hand information of the ground realities
about the problems of the Indian people.1

The adopted method of Gandhi, before his entering into the Indian
politics is quite relevant in today’s political field. If a person would like to
enter into the field of active politics he must have an acquaintance with the
various problems of the society which he would like to work in. After the
extensive travel throughout India and acquainted with the needs and rights
of the people Gandhi plunged into the society. The major public activities
he led during his lifetime for the protection and promotion of human rights
are Champaran Satyagraha, Kheda Satyagraha, Ahmedabad labour-strike,
Khilafat and the Non-co-operation movement, Constructive programme and
the Indian freedom struggle.
6.2 Champaran Satyagraha

In Champaran, a district northwest of Bihar, peasants were constantly subjected to various types of economic exploitation by the British planters since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The main source of exploitation was the compulsory growing of indigo by the peasants under an exploitative system known as the Tinkathia System. Under this system ryots were bound to grow indigo for their European landlord on the three-twentieths of their holdings. This exploitative system had caused a great deal of economic hardships to the peasants of Champaran. Hence the peasants of Champaran opposed the Tinkathia system. According to Bipan Chandra: “The story of Champaran begins in the early nineteenth century when European planters had involved the cultivators in agreements that forced them to cultivate indigo on 3/20\textsuperscript{th} of their holdings (known as the Tinkathia system). Towards the end of the Nineteenth century, German synthetic dyes forced indigo out of the market and the European planters of Champaran, keen to release the cultivator from the obligation of cultivating indigo tried to turn their necessity to their advantages by securing enhancements in rent and other illegal dues as a price for the release. Resistance had surfaced in 1908 as well, but the exactions
of the planters continued till Rajkumar Shukla, a local man decided to follow Gandhiji all over the country to persuade him to come to Champaran to investigate the problem. Rajkumar Shukla’s decision to get Gandhiji to Champaran is indicative of the image he had acquired as one who fought for the rights of the exploited and the poor.2

Gandhiji arrived in Champaran avowedly in a spirit of enquiry to ascertain the truth in the allegation of the ryots against the planters. Therefore he decided to study all the viewpoints of the peasants, planters and the Government. And he found the truth on the side of the peasants and therefore resolved to fight for the abolition of the Tinkathia system and also he revealed to the peasants that we should stop going to law courts. Taking such cases to the courts does little good. Where the ryots are so crushed and fear stricken, law courts are useless. The real relief for them is to be free from fear. Thus Gandhiji encouraged the peasant community for rooting out the exploitative Tinkathia system from the district of Champaran. Under the Tinkathia system the tenant was asked to give the best land for the landlord’s crops; “He has been obliged to give his best time and energy also to it, so that little time has been left to him for growing his own crops – his means of livelihood against their will.”3
The landlords took Gandhiji for a trouble-maker and they refused to talk to him. His arrival in Champaran was unpalatable both to the planters and to the government officials. Hence Gandhiji wrote a letter to the officials saying that he was there to find the truth and he had come there at the request of the peasants there. His intention was to promote peace between planters and the raiyats (tenants) so as to secure to the raiyats “the freedom and dignity that should belong to all mankind”. In the first place, Gandhiji’s object was to inquire into the condition of Champaran agriculturists and understand their grievances against the indigo planters. For this purpose he had met thousands of the ryots. The government of India felt confused at Gandhiji’s presence in Champaran. With the help of his assistants, Gandhiji succeeded in collecting testimony from some eight thousand farmers. And he found that the peasants’ grievances were admitted as real. At the instance of the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford, an Agrarian Enquiry Committee was set up by the Governor of Bihar, Sir Edward Gait in order to investigate the local tenancy system and Gandhiji was given a seat on it. As the committee unanimously recommended, the landlords refunded 25 percent of the cash they had extorted from the farmers. Thus the oppressive ‘Tinkathia system’
and the illegal exactions were abolished. This campaign strengthened the self-respect of the poor peasants and made them feel that they could stand up boldly for their rights.

6.3 Kheda Satyagraha

In the Kheda district, there was widespread failure of crops owing to a famine-like condition and therefore the peasants were demanding the suspension of revenue assessment for the year. It was the custom of revenue assessment that when a crop did not come up to one fourth of the full harvest, the rent payable to the government was suspended for that year. Local officials of Kheda were disputing the extent of the damage and insisting that the assessment should be paid. Inquiries conducted by N.J. Patel and Gandhiji established that the damage in many places was more than three fourths of the yield of the normal year. As the government did not accept this assessment, Gandhiji spoke on behalf of the peasants: “We do not demand that the government should accept what we say and yield. We ask that, if our case is proved, justice be done to us. We asked for the appointment of arbitrators, but the government turned down even that request.” Gandhiji with the help of the Servants of India Society, the Gujarat Sabha, of which
Gandhiji was the President and Vallabhai Patel made a thorough enquiry and confirmed the validity of the peasants' case. In the name of Gujarat Sabha, Gandhiji sent appeals, petitions and telegrams to the government, asking for the redress of the peasants' grievances. But when the Government turned them down, Gandhiji said to the government authorities: “This is not a struggle merely to escape payment of the revenue this year”; it is our duty to know and to safeguard our rights. This is a struggle to compel the government to respect popular feeling and acknowledge their rights.”

Gandhiji took a pledge from the peasants not to pay to the government the full or the remaining revenues for the year even if the government would unleash severest types of repression. They should be ready to suffer gladly the consequences of non-payment and whatever legal action the government might take. Gandhiji described the struggle as “peoples fight” and called upon India’s womanhood to join the struggle. The peasants showed great courage and decision; as they stood by the instructions of Gandhiji and Vallabhai Patel. A systematic education of the peasantry began thus to be effective and real. And moreover “the Kheda Satyagraha marks the beginning of an awakening among the peasants of Gujarat; the beginning of their true
political education"\textsuperscript{10}. The campaign in Kheda moved the educated public workers to establish contact with the real life of the peasants. Through this campaign the people were awakened and began to understand their rights. The Kheda struggle received a great deal of publicity and the Gujarat merchants from Bombay and elsewhere sent contributions for the success of the struggle. As in Champaran, so in Kheda, Gandhiji laid stress on simplicity for the Satyagrahi volunteers. For that purpose he issued fifteen instructions to the volunteers on April 17, 1918\textsuperscript{11}. These instructions are revealing as these throw light on the methods of non-violent struggle. Gandhiji claims: These instructions are fundamental for the success of any Satyagraha movement. These non-violent instructions are as follows:

- The volunteers must remember that as this is a Satyagraha campaign, they must abide by truth under all circumstances.

- In Satyagraha there can be no room for rancour, which means that a Satyagrahi should utter no harsh words about any one.

- Rudeness has no place in Satyagraha. Perfect courtesy must be shown even to those who may look upon us as their enemies.
The volunteers must remember that this is a holy war, so all the rules which are essential for living a religious life must be observed here too.

We are opposing the intoxication of power, that is the blind application of law, and not authority as such.

We are to apply here the same principle that we follow in a domestic quarrel. We should think of the government and the people as constituting a large family and act accordingly.

We are not to boycott or treat with scorn those who held different views from ours. It must be our resolve to win them over by courteous behaviour.

We must not try to be clever. We must always be frank and straightforward.

When they stay in villages, the volunteers should demand the fewest services from the village folk. When it is possible to reach a place on foot, they should avoid using a vehicle. We must insist on being served the simplest food.
In their spare time they should try to make good the deficiencies in education etc. of the villagers.

They should create opportunities to teach the village children.

They should inculcate the rules of good health in the villagers.

They should put a stop to quarrelling among villagers.

They should read out to the people, when the latter are free, books which promote Satyagraha.

At no time and under no circumstances is the use of arms permitted in Satyagraha. It should never be forgotten that in this struggle the highest type of non-violence is to be maintained. Satyagraha means fighting oppression through voluntary suffering. There can be no question here of making any one else suffer.

Through these moral instructions Gandhi wanted to arouse and strengthen the spirit of love, truth, Non-violence, self sacrifice and self suffering among the followers of the Satyagraha in order to win over and change the hard attitude of the government, because Gandhi strongly
believed that the rigid fiber must melt in the fire of love. Gandhiji laid special emphasis on fearlessness among the people. He had promoted the self-confidence of the people by fearlessness. Gandhiji and his volunteers moved from village to village asking people to “realize that officials were not their masters but servants of the people”.13. Gandhiji wanted to inculcate and develop the soul force, and the truth force or the moral force within the Satyagrahis in order to check the evil influence of brute force brought into play by the adversaries or the enemies or the opponents. These instructions were also bound to arouse and enhance the spirit of self-respect among the followers of the Satyagraha who had been told by Gandhiji to die but never to submit to the unjust laws or the injustice and oppression. The effect of all the above instructions cast a good effect on the Satyagraha volunteers during the Kheda Satyagraha as no violence was reported from any corner. Moreover, the poor peasants of Kheda district became fearless of the government’s oppression by defying and disobeying the unjust laws of the government. After the struggle, the government declared that, “if the well-to-do patidars paid up, the poorer ones would be granted suspension”14. This proved to be a signal for compromise, an essential weapon in the armoury of non-violence.
Although the termination of the struggle was celebrated “as a triumph of Satyagraha” Gandhiji was far from happy for it lacked the essentials of a complete Satyagraha. But however, the Kheda Satyagraha established a close communion of the educated public workers with the actual life of the peasants. And moreover, they learnt to identify themselves with the latter. The peasantry of Gujarat woke up to a new consciousness of its strength. But most important of all, the struggle imparted a sense of fearlessness among the people. In reply to an address presented to Gandhiji on the successful outcome of the Satyagraha campaign, he observed:

“It is a mere trifle that we have won on the issue of land revenue but ... .... The more important gains are fearlessness and the feeling that we are the equals of even the highest officers and in no way inferior to them. I hope this struggle will have made you permanently conscious of your strength to employ Satyagraha at any time. Once the flame is kindled, it cannot be extinguished but burns ever more brightly”.

Thus the people have been awakened and began to understand their rights. And moreover, they gained “a full understanding of their rights and
what is meant by Swaraj. That is the issue of democracy". Gandhiji considered the toiler to be the real owner of what he produced. If the toilers intelligently combine, they will become an irresistible power. Thus the toilers and the workers have the right to unite in free associations for the purpose of promoting and protecting their legitimate interests and rights. Thus Gandhiji gave strong confidence and determination to the peasants to identify their rights and make themselves as strong.

6.4 Ahmedabad Labour Strike

Gandhiji received a call for help in Ahmedabad. He gave it to the mill-hands of Ahmedabad, in a form even more constructive and enduring than his work for the peasants. The problem is that the mill hands of Ahmedabad were underpaid and over worked. They wanted more wages and better conditions. And after the visitation of a virulent plague during the latter half of 1917 in Ahmedabad, the mill owners had been giving handsome bonus to the labourers over and above their daily wages by way of inducement to hold them in their mills. But the workers argued that the cost of living had more than doubled because of the war. The mill owners simply stopped the bonuses, but were offering a twenty percent increase of the wages. But the
labourers were demanding more. Gandhiji studied the problem and urged the mill owners to refer the dispute to arbitration. But as a devotee of non-violence, took the first step of requests, entreaties and supplication. Gandhiji had close and cordial relations with many of the mill owners. Ambalal Sarabhai, the leader of the mill owners, was in fact Gandhiji’s friend and benefactor of his ashram. Gandhiji had long discussions with the representatives of the mill owners and mill hands. He understood the demands of the workers that they were on the whole asking for a just increase. Both parties were inclined to agree to an arbitration. Gandhiji pleaded with the mill owners to solve the issue through arbitration. But the workers would not show readiness for the intervention of a third party and disclosed the intention of a lock out. According to Gandhiji’s advice, a regular strike of ten thousand workers began. Gandhiji who took up the workers cause wanted that this large-scale strike be a real experiment in Satyagraha. He instructed the workers on the necessary requirements for a successful strike; never to resort to violence or damage the property of the mill owners; never to molest black legs and to remain firm till victory. The strikers should entertain no bitterness towards the employers, but try to earn their bread by some kind of
labour, thus making use of their enforced idleness. As the strike progressed, Gandhiji watched it with some anxiety. The workers began to weaken; it was difficult for them to live without wages. Hunger adversely affected their morale. At that state Gandhiji announced that he was undertaking a fast. The purpose of the fast was to rally the workers and to make them hold on to their pledge to remain firm till victory. It is intolerable that ten thousand men should give up their oath. This model of initiative for the public sake is essential in today’s world to protect their rights of the people. Gandhiji took an initiative of the strike which the workers would not continue because of their hunger. He understood the real state of the workers’ morale and he himself declared a fast for the workers’ well being. It is an example of real leadership. A leader must always stand for the sake of his society which he represents. As a leader Gandhiji had done the best for the public. Hence the fast in fact exercised a sort of indirect pressure on the mill owners too because most of them loved Gandhiji and were really concerned about his well being. Gandhiji had never before undertaken a fast for a public cause. He used the fast as a remedy for saving the labourers from a fall. But he was also aware that it had an element of moral coercion in it. After three days, the mill
owners agreed again to arbitration. And everything was settled and the workers received the thirty five percent increase. Thus, the Ahmedabad strike was the first of such organized efforts of workers in India. The after effects of the strike lasted for two years. Later, Gandhiji inaugurated the Ahmedabad Textile Labourer Association which marked the beginning of the trade union movement in India. This association secured good wages and other conditions of employment to the workers. Thus the working atmosphere of the workers has been improved.

Gandhiji emphasized the necessity of trade union for the well being of workers or to secure the rights of the workers unitedly. Unity is strength; hence Gandhiji found that it is necessary that the workers have a union to represent them for safeguarding their rights. Gandhiji opines that: “If these unions function well, acting with unity of purpose and speaking with one voice, their strength will increase very much indeed and, at the same time, the members will learn to be bound by their decisions whether these are to their liking or not”\(^20\). The unity of purpose in trade unions are quite relevant in today’s world. The conflicts and clashes of trade unions is the absence of unity of purpose and speaking with one voice of all the members of the
union. According to Gandhiji “strikes are an inherent right of the working men for the purpose of securing justice, but they must be considered a crime if the capitalists accept the principle of arbitration”\textsuperscript{21}. “If an arbitration is suggested through men in whom you can place perfect reliance, I would advise you to agree to the arbitration”\textsuperscript{22}. Strikes are used to be clean weapons whenever a body of workmen brings their legitimate grievances before their employers and the employers do not listen to them. To go in for strikes without a good cause, its effort is basically wrong. “So, for a good and successful strike, the first thing essential is that the cause should be good and just. The second is that the strikes should never resort to violence. That is to say, you may not hurt those who did not join you in the strike”\textsuperscript{23}. For the successful end of a strike must have a good and just cause. It is the strong part of the strike which help the participants to be strong, confident all the time. Gandhiji instructed “A strike or any other kind of Satyagraha can be undertaken only when all normal avenues for securing justice are closed and autocratic ways have taken the place of justice”\textsuperscript{24}. Hence Satyagraha or strike is the last resort for securing justice. The workers have the right to demand good wages as will enable them to sustain life, educate their children and
live as decent human beings. And moreover, the labourers should have good conditions of work and life. Gandhiji had said to the workers: “you are entitled to the same fresh water and fresh air as your employers. You are entitled to insist upon leisure and recreation from day to day”\textsuperscript{25}. Gandhiji had not only stood for the rights of the workers, but he strongly and clearly revealed the duties of the workers too. The workers have the duty to render diligent and faithful service to their employers. And moreover, they should look after the property of the employers as if it were their own. This attitude of work is essential to secure the faith of the employers and to enhance the wages of the work and its facilities. There is no right without duty. Before demanding their rights the workers must do their duty first. Duty is the base of right. Without it the rights have no relevance or existence in any field. If a person does his duty properly, he must have the base of his right which he deserves. A faithful worker is always eligible for his work rights. The worker must prove his eligibility through his dedication to the work. Gandhiji always emphasized the need to think of one’s duties first and foremost and leave the rights to take care of themselves for he believed that rights followed upon the proper fulfillment of one’s duties and not vice versa\textsuperscript{26}. Gandhiji’s opinion
was that the true source of right is the performance of duty. “If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they will escape us like a will-o-the wisp. The more we pursue them the further will they fly”27. Commonly people are simply insisting on rights and not duties. Gandhiji found that there would be utter confusion and chaos. On the contrary, “If instead of insisting on rights everyone does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among mankind”28.

The correlation between rights and duties, Gandhiji again says:

“I venture to suggest that rights that do not flow directly from duty well performed are not worth having. They will be usurpations sooner discarded the better. If you apply this simple and universal rule to employers and labourers, landlords and tenants, the princes and their subjects, or the Hindus and the Muslims, you will find that the happiest relations can be established in all walks of life without creating disturbance in and dislocation of life and business which you see in India and in other parts of the world”29.
Gandhiji was against child labour too. He believed that forcing children to work is inhuman. According to him, "It is a sign of national degradation when little children are removed from schools and are employed in earning wages. No nation worthy of the name can possibly afford to misuse her children". It is quite relevant in today's world too. The drain of children from schools for work and earning wages caused the national degradation of child literacy. Thus it also adversely affects the literacy of national population. Hence the government must take the initiative to protect the rights of the children, 'the right to education'. In Gandhiji's opinion, as labour becomes well organized the labour leaders would not conduct labour strikes for political purposes. But the labourers have to understand the political conditions of the country and work for the common goal. "The greatest political contribution, therefore, that labourers can make is to improve their own condition, to become better informed, to insist on their rights, and even to demand proper use by their employers of the manufactures in which they have had such an important hand". Gandhiji wanted the strikes to be of non-violent character and to be as few as possible because they mean material loss to the whole society and to the strikers themselves. "In a well ordered
democratic society there is no room, no occasion for lawlessness or strikes. In such a society there are ample lawful means for vindicating justice". 

6.5 Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movement

In the early years of the twentieth century, there were two trends among the Muslims; one among them was for nationalism and the other expressed greater interest in Islamic countries especially Turkey. When Italy attacked Turkey in the Tripoli war and subsequently during the Balkan wars (1912 – 13), the Indian Muslims showed great sympathy for Turkey. But World War I was a trial for the Muslims in India because Turkey was fighting on the other side. And moreover, the Indian Muslims were concerned over the future of Caliphate in Turkey, the centre of Muslim institutions. Thus the Caliphate came to be known in India as Khilafat. The Khilafat movement was initially started by the Muslims of India against the British designs aimed at the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire and dismantlement of the Khilafat system through which the Sultan or emperor of Turkey was enjoying both the temporal as well as the religious powers over the Muslim countries since 16th century. The Indian Muslims were anxious to safeguard the Khilafat. During the World War I, the Indian Muslims had helped the British
government. According to Prof. Vishnoo Bhagwan “To allay the Muslim fears the Britishers had pledged during Great War that Turkey would not be deprived of its rich lands of Asia Minor and Thrace. Thus the Indian Muslims extended wholehearted co-operation to the Britishers during the War. The end of the war and the subsequent formulation of ‘Sevres Treaty’ revealed that the Britishers were not going to stand by their promise. It shocked the Indian Muslims. Thus a powerful Khilafat agitation was launched”\textsuperscript{34}. All the Indian Muslims were combined against the British, because of their violation of the promise towards them. The situation for Gandhiji was an opportunity to bring Muslims and Hindus closer. For Gandhiji Hindu-Muslim unity was necessary for the freedom struggle. According to him: “Any third power may easily enslave India so long as we Hindus and Mussalmans are ready to cut each others’ throats. Hindu-Muslim unity means not unity only between Hindus and Mussalmans but between all those who believe India to be their home, no matter to what faith they belong”\textsuperscript{35}. Gandhiji had implied Hindu Muslim unity as a vast perspective. He aimed national unity among various faiths. Unity in diversity was his ultimate aim regarding the religious society in India. While Gandhiji was engaged in his work in Punjab, he
received a letter of invitation from the Khilafat leaders to come to Delhi to take participation in the Khilafat conference in November 1919, to discuss the Khilafat question and adopt effective measures for the achievement of the Khilafat demands. Gandhi not only accepted the invitation of the Khilafat leaders but also he became ready to provide wholehearted unconditional support to the Khilafat agitation. Accordingly, he attended the Delhi Khilafat conference and proposed a programme of Non-co operation with the British government, which was accepted and later approved in the Khilafat committee meeting. According to Gandhi, non-cooperation: “It is an unalienable right of the people thus to withhold co-operation. We are not bound to retain government titles and honours, or to continue in government service. If government should betray us in a great cause like the Khilafat, we could not do otherwise than non-cooperate. We are therefore entitled to non-cooperate with government in case of betrayal.” The British government betrayed and the Khilafat committee at Allahabad in June 1920 accepted the method of non-violent non-cooperation and asked Gandhi to lead the Khilafat movement. Gandhi informed the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford that if the peace terms offered to Turkey were not revised according to the British pledge to
the Muslims, he would call upon Muslims to non-cooperate with the
government and invite the Hindus to join the movement. Non-Cooperation
was 'the nation's determination to improve' so long as the doctrine of non-
cooperation remained non-violent, there was nothing 'unconstitutional' in
the doctrine37. And moreover, there was a certain constructive side in the
movement of non-cooperation. Spinning on Charkas (spinning wheel) was
to begin; arbitration courts and Panchayats (village committees) were to be
established. Swadeshi or the use of homemade goods was one of the positive
features of the non-cooperation movement. Shops for the sale of hand woven
clothes (Khaddar) were opened. The making of Khaddar clothes was a feasible
undertaking because it did not require any capital or costly implements to
put it in operation. Hence spinning and weaving became a source of income
to the poor masses. Non-cooperation was not employed against the rulers,
but against the policy they followed; against the system they administered.
The attack is not against individuals. It is directed against the system, or the
government. Gandhiji had visited the country with Muhammad Ali brothers.
On the way he had met both Hindus and Muslims and he told them that: The
fact is we have never before endeavoured to come together to adjust our
differences and live as friends bound to one another as children of the same sacred soil. We both have now an opportunity. Gandhiji spread the seed of unity into the minds of the people and exhorted them to live as one mind.

“Hindu-Muslim unity, however, does not mean that no Muslim or Hindu will ever make a mistake. If we remain unperturbed even if somebody makes a mistake then only can it be said that unity is a living reality. Thus Hindu-Muslim cordiality and solidarity was growing. Gandhiji became the leader of both the national and the Khilafat struggles. Hindu-Muslim unity, which was dear to Gandhiji as life itself, implied unity among all races of India, unity among all religious communities.

6.6 Constructive Programme

Gandhiji had realized that the road to real freedom of India went through constructive programme. Gandhiji proposed the ‘Constructive Programme’ in order to advance the process of reconstruction of the nation. It was necessary to bring together the different groups and classes of people and promote unity of heart based on mutual interest. Through the constructive programme, Gandhiji endeavoured to regenerate a new type of society which was fearless, self-dependent and humanitarian. He believed that the real and
lasting freedom of India was dependent upon social and economic regeneration. According to him: “The temple of freedom requires the patient, intelligent, and constructive effort of tens of thousands of men and women, young and old.” Through this statement Gandhiji revealed the necessity of participation of all sections of the society in the effort of the attainment of freedom. On the one hand the constructive programme was intended to be instrumental for the eradication of social evils such as alcoholism, untouchability, child marriage, inertia and uncleanliness. And moreover, the constructive programme would prepare India for complete independence.

Gandhiji’s constructive programme consisted of eighteen items — communal unity, removal of untouchability, khadi, prohibition, village industries, village sanitation, basic education, adult education, women, health and hygiene, provincial languages, national language, economic equality, kisans, labour, adivasis, lepers and students. For the study purpose, the first three of the eighteen items have been narrated concisely. It has greatly influenced the course of India’s history.

Before the advent of the British in India there had existed tension between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims. The quarrels of the
two communities adversely affected the freedom of the country. Gandhiji found that communal harmony is essential to attain freedom of India. For this the country must have to develop the faculty for assimilation. Hindus and Muslims have to live together as fellow countrymen and partake each others joys and sorrows. Gandhiji insisted that the assimilation cannot be brought about by violence and force. But the way to it was through mutual tolerance and respect. Regarding this Gandhiji aimed at non-violence which was the most powerful weapon of him to unite the various communities especially the Hindus and Muslims. According to him: "Hindu-Muslim unity means Swaraj. There is no question more important and more pressing than this." Swaraj means self-rule. To attain self-rule, Gandhiji took an initiative to untie the communities through non-violent means. The Hindu-Muslim fraternization in 1919 made the British shudder. In 1924, the fraternization, and with it freedom, was ebbing away. Hence Gandhiji declared the fast. About it he had said: "I am therefore imposing on myself a fast. It is both a penance and a prayer. I respectfully invite the heads of all communities, including Englishmen, to meet and end this quarrel which is a disgrace to religion and to humanity. It seems as if God has been dethroned. Let us
reinstate him in our hearts". On the sixth day of his fast, he wrote an article which ended: "Seek you first Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability and the spinning wheel and khaddar, and everything will be added unto you". Through this Gandhiji emphasized the relevance of Hindu-Muslim unity. Before breaking the fast he beseeched all present to renew the pledge and if necessary, "lay down your life for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity". Gandhiji strengthened the confidence of Hindus and Muslims to think of freedom. He himself took the leadership for the sake of communal unity. The fast stung the conscience of the two communities, and unity conference was convened. Thus the fast poured water on the communal fire for the time being.

The institution of untouchability had plagued the Indian society from very early times. Mahavira and Buddha had by their practice and precept, raised their powerful voices against this inhuman institution. Gandhiji regarded untouchability as "the greatest blot" on Hinduism. He hated it with his entire soul. Among the activities which he had done regarding the removal of untouchability, the Vykom Satyagraha is a notable public motion. When he took the leadership of the motion, he had declared that,
untouchability is a crime’ and championed the cause of ‘the unapproachable and the untouchables and for the recognition of the most elementary human rights’

Gandhi realized that human rights begin in small places, in the community where one lives in, or in the neighbourhood where one works or in such places, where human beings seek justice and equal dignity without discrimination. In point of fact, it was the Vykom Satyagraha which for the first time revealed the depth of the evil of untouchability in India.

The village Vykom in former Travancore, South India, was the venue of a successful Satyagraha which took place in 1924 and 1925. The aim of the Satyagraha was to obtain permission for untouchables and unapproachable to use certain roadways close to the temple. The prohibition upon the use of these roads passing by the temple caused great inconvenience to the untouchables, as it required them to take a long devious route to reach their dwellings. The long range objective of the campaign, which lasted over sixteen months, was to get rid of the blot of untouchability from Hinduism. From the very beginning of the campaign Gandhi gave guidance and encouragement to the Satyagrahis. Among the initiators of the movement was a Syrian Christian, Mr. George Joseph as well as a number of Hindu
leaders involved and highlighted the reform objective. The caste Hindus had to remove untouchability and thus correct themselves. The negotiations with the state authorities regarding the campaign were made but the untouchables together with caste Hindus used the forbidden road. Then the police built and manned a barricade on the roadway to prevent entry. But Gandhiji visited Travancore in April 1925 and he persuaded the authorities to remove the barricade, with the result that the untouchables could enter the areas and temples formerly closed to them. Thus, the general condition of the untouchables began to improve. It gave great joy and satisfaction to Gandhiji who had anticipated: "The end is to get all such roads throughout Travancore to be opened to the untouchables; and not only that, but we expect that our efforts may result in amelioration of the general condition of the untouchables and unapproachables. That will require tremendous sacrifice." The effect of the movement was that not only public roads were opened to the untouchables, but also all public places at large. Gandhiji declared: "Not till this simple, elementary, primary human right is guaranteed to every single human being on this piece of God’s earth will I consider that the claim in regard to untouchability is vindicated." Gandhiji believed all
human beings are the children of God. Hence all have equal dignity to live in the earth without any discrimination based on caste, colour, creed, tribe, etc. and moreover, he found that the unity among untouchables and unapproachables is a must to fight for the freedom of India.

Gandhiji was as restless as anyone to achieve India's freedom. But for Gandhiji political freedom without economic freedom would be useless. According to him: Swaraj and Swadeshi must go together. Swadeshi meant fiscal autonomy. Without fiscal autonomy, Swaraj has no meaning. For Gandhiji, the adoption of Swadeshi would materially decrease the economic drain and enable the Indian peasantry to supplement their income, and moreover the Swadeshi mentality is a determination to find all the necessities of life in India and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers. Khadi played an important role in this regard. It connoted the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country and the villagers become self-contained and moreover a revolutionary change occurred in the mentality and tastes of many. Regarding the nature of khadi, Gandhiji says, I hit upon khadi as the necessary and the most important corollary of the principle of Swadeshi in its application to society. Khadi and the spinning wheel stand
for a symbol which is widely popular amongst the Indian masses, and promotes national solidarity. According to B. Kumarappa, an eminent Gandhian scholar, observes, “The most outstanding and the most popular of all the symbols associated with Gandhiji is undoubtedly the spinning wheel. And moreover, it provided the dumb millions with a political weapon of defence giving rise to nation wise united action in concrete form. The entire methods of Gandhiji in religious, social and economic life of the people aimed to unify the people to attain the common goal – the freedom of India. For that purpose he put in to practice the constructive programme among the people. Or it is an emotional preparation to make the people mentally fit to suffer the hardships of the freedom movement.

6.7 Gandhiji and India’s Freedom Struggle

Indian freedom struggle can be broadly divided into three periods:

1. The first war of independence of 1857 – 1859 and the events and activities upto 1884 forming the first part.

2. The second part of the history of freedom struggle begins in 1885 when the Indian national congress took over the struggle through a national movement and covers the activities upto 1919;
3. The third and the most important part of the struggle was during 1920 – 1947 which is called the Gandhian era of the Indian freedom movement.

The third and the final stage of freedom struggle is called by the historians as the Gandhian era because this period witnessed heroic non-violent struggle under the dynamic leadership of Gandhiji. The period witnessed distinct activities of Gandhiji as a leader of the Indian National Congress. After the death of Gopalakrishna Gokhale, there were difference of opinion between the liberals and the extremists of the congress relating to freedom struggle. It was at this crucial time that Gandhiji instilled confidence in the congress and made it a powerful organisation to lead the freedom struggle. Here an attempt is made to analyse the role of Gandhiji on India’s struggle for freedom.

After the First World War, the country was faced with utter hopelessness and disappointment because of the indifferent attitude and the anti-people policies of the British towards the people. Regarding the anti-people policies of the British, Gandhiji fought against it through his powerful non-violent weapon of non-cooperation. According to Gandhiji: “Co-
operation is a duty only so long as government protects your honour, and non-cooperation is an equal duty when the government, instead of protecting, robs you of your honour\textsuperscript{55}. For the implementation of the non-violent non-cooperation, the Indian people were asked to:

- Surrender titles, honorary offices and refuse to attend official functions, nominated seats; ceremonies and Durbars;

- Withdraw gradually from government colleges and schools; and to establish national institutions to replace them;

- Boycott British courts and to establish private arbitration courts;

- Refuse to offer as recruits for service in Mesopotamia;

- Withdraw candidates from elections to the reformed councils and abstain from voting; and

- Boycott foreign goods and to adopt Swadeshi\textsuperscript{56}

The non-cooperative movement gave a new spirit and new revival to the freedom struggle and united the Hindus, Muslims and other communities. In December 1929, the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress under
the President ship of Jawaharlal Nehru adopted the famous resolution of Purna Swaraj or complete independence. And moreover, the Lahore congress also adopted the non-violent methods of non-cooperation and civil disobedience for achieving the goal of complete independence under the sole authority, guidance and leadership of Gandhiji. The anti-people policies and the unhelpful attitude of the government compelled Gandhiji to start the civil disobedience movement in 1930-31. But the government started repressive measures. At this stage, Gandhiji moved from mass Satyagraha to individual Satyagraha. The civil disobedience movement, the individual Satyagraha and the freedom movement included the British Parliament to pass government of India Act, 1935, whereby a federal government at the centre and responsible governments at the provinces were set up. And moreover the Government of India Act was a step forward in the direction of India’s autonomy. When the Second World War broke out, the leaders of the Congress expressed the attitude that only a free India could properly take part in such a war. But Gandhiji did not believe in any war although he wrote that if there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity war against Germany to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole
race would be completely justified. When the Viceroy rejected the Congress offer of India’s freedom the political leaders induced Gandhiji to conduct a non-cooperation campaign. Then Gandhiji made a plan for individual civil disobedience to be conducted by chosen persons. This was because he did not want to embarrass the British with a mass movement at the crucial moment of a world war. Gandhiji asserted: “We must claim, even though it be on the gallows, to hold and openly express any opinion we choose, so long as we do not directly or indirectly cause violence.” Freedom of speech is a “natural freedom to which every human being in decent society is entitled.” Civil liberty means the fullest liberty consistent with non-violence to speak and write, even if it means strong criticism of the acts of the state. Civil liberty includes freedom of the press and freedom to read newspapers which do not promote violence. During the entire period of freedom struggle, the British government tried to control and curtail the freedom of speech and of the press. Legislation was made all along for the surveillance and control of communication media. Gandhiji raised his voice against the repressive measures and writing to the Viceroy Lord Reading: “... in no case can it be held to justify the wholesale suppression of ... peaceful meetings ... nor
again can the administrative interference with the liberty of the press under a law that is under promise of repeal be regarded as anything but repression". Gandhiji’s non-violent action was directed towards safeguarding the elementary rights of free speech, free association and free press. The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill was completely against the granting of independence to India. But in March 1942 a commission headed by Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in India with the proposals of the British war cabinet. But Gandhiji found the offer unacceptable because it contained many limitations. Therefore, both the Congress and Gandhiji rejected Cripps Mission’s proposals. Thus, the Cripps Mission proved to be a failure and Sir Stafford Cripps returned empty-handed. After that both the Congress and Gandhiji started to assert the demand for complete independence in a more rigid manner than earlier. And moreover Gandhiji had launched the campaign of ‘Quit India’. Both Gandhiji as well as the Congress were determined to launch a non-violent mass movement against the British government. There was urgency and passion in his speech demanding freedom. “We are fighting by truthful and non-violent means for freedom, the birthright of every nation”63. In an address made to the Congress party delegates on 8 August
1942, Gandhiji exhorted each one to consider himself or herself as a free man or woman and to act as a person no longer under the heel of British imperialism. All should cultivate the spirit of freedom before it came physically. It activates the confidence of the public to participate in the struggle for freedom. And moreover, Gandhiji gave the famous slogan, "do or die" to the public which aroused among the Indian people a fresh wave of patriotic emotions and zeal to make India free from the exploitative clutches of the British imperialism and colonialism. Gandhiji explained to the people the real meaning of 'Do or Die' in these words: "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hears and let every breath of yours find expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true congressman or woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery."64. Gandhiji also declared that he will not be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. But the Viceroy who had the full support of the British Cabinet, started a strong preventive action against the mass civil disobedience movement which might, he feared, paralyse the civil
administration and endanger the war effort. Gandhiji and other congress leaders were arrested. India suffered several months of sporadic violence and revolt, which the government suppressed with all its might. But in May 6, 1944, Gandhiji was released from prison because of ill health. However, after the release Gandhiji fully committed to the goal of complete independence with non-violent methods. Regarding the inhuman measures of the government Gandhiji asserted: "Every state has the right to put down violence by force, but to suppress expression of opinion in order to prevent the spread of disaffection is repression". There should be freedom of opinion and public opinion has to be respected. The indispensable condition for the success of a cause is that "We encourage the greatest freedom of opinion". The test of real freedom consists in letting the people determine their own destiny without any outside influence. Gandhiji restarted a fresh and determined effort to solve the communal differences between the Muslims and Hindus through negotiations with M.A. Jinnah, the leader of Muslims in order to fight unitedly for the independence of India by the joint effort of the Congress and the league. Gandhiji rejected the two nations theory of Jinnah as the basis for the creation of Pakistan. Because in the opinion of Gandhiji,
the Muslims and Hindus were not two nations, rather they were one nation by their common political subjection. There were many Muslims who were against the idea of two state solution. They considered India essentially as one nation with a geographical, historical and cultural unity. The country’s imperative need is mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of different religions. Religious neutrality from the part of the state was a basic provision for a free India of Gandhian prospect. According to Gandhiji: “Swaraj will favour Hinduism no more than Islam nor Islam more than Hinduism”\(^7\). Freedom without equality for all irrespective of race or religion is not worth having. The principles of liberty and equality are the foundation of a democratic state. The minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority. It separates the minority from the majority. Commonly almost every reform has been brought about by the action of minorities in all countries.

In February 20, 1947 the British Parliament declared the British intention “to withdraw British authority from India by June 1948 and the appointment of Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy in place of field marshal Lord Wavell to carry out the operation”\(^8\). In this way, the Britishers became willing to concede what Gandhiji had demanded – Quit India. After arriving in India
on 22nd March 1947, Lord Mountbatten started to discuss with the Indian political leaders the question of the transfer of power and resolution of the communal differences between the Congress and the Muslim League. After having a series of interviews with the top most leaders, Lord Mountbatten was convinced of the inevitability of the partition of India. And moreover, the Britishers were also in favour of the partition of India because the two dominions – Hindu and Muslim were suited to the strategic and defence interests of Great Britain. On 3rd June 1947, Lord Mountbatten seeking “to effect an early transfer of power on the basis of Dominion status to two successor states, India and Pakistan.” But however, the congress discarded the two nations theory and regretted the partition of India. The all India congress committee meeting at Delhi on 14 and 15 June ratified the proposals embodied in the Mountbatten plan of 3rd June 1947. The Muslim League also accepted the plan on June 9, 1947. After the Congress accepted and ratified the Mountbatten plan envisaging the partition of India, Gandhiji could not oppose it publicly and instead gave his assent, however reluctantly, to the congress’s resolution. Gandhiji refused to rebel against the Congress, which according to him, was doing according to the opinion of the majority
of the people, and, therefore, Gandhi did not wish to impose his personal opinion of the opinion of many. Thus Gandhi accepted the partition of the country based on people’s opinion. On 20th February 1947, the Prime Minister of England, Clement Atlee, announced the decision of the British Parliament to give complete independence to India and deputed Lord Louis Mountbatten to work out details and formalities in consultation with Indian leaders. Ultimately, the Indian Independence Act was passed by the British Parliament which ‘provided for the end of the British rule in India on 15 August 1947, and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan which were allowed to secede from the British Commonwealth’. In this way, the century old British rule came to an end and India achieved her independence.

But the cost of partition was a blow to the dreams of Gandhi of a united India and a permanent Hindu-Muslim unity. He was very anxious about the consistency of the Hindu-Muslim unity. His anxiety would come into effect by barbarous outbreaks of communal riots in Calcutta, Naokhali, Delhi and the Punjab. In Calcutta, Gandhi ceaselessly and fearlessly went on exhorting the Hindus and Muslims alike to observe communal harmony.
and peace at all costs. He did not lose his unflinching faith in his theory of non-violence law of love and innate goodness of human beings. To restore communal peace and harmony, he went on an indefinite fast in Calcutta. M.M.Verma records; “15 August 1947 saw Gandhiji trying to quell riots in Calcutta.....At the end of the month with disturbances continuing furiously, Gandhiji announced his decision to fast until peace returned to Calcutta and sanity returned once again. Next day, 1 September 1947, the fast began. On the fourth day of the fast, people, policemen and leaders of Calcutta pledged to keep peace and Gandhiji took fruit juice from the hands of H.S.Suhrawardy and broke his fast. From then on, peace returned and remained in Calcutta and Bengal both East and West778. Similarly by resorting to an indefinite fast, Gandhiji succeeded in quelling the communal riots and re-establishing communal harmony and peace in Delhi on 18 January 194876. Thus we observe that Gandhiji accomplished a highly commendable task of restoring communal peace and harmony among the Hindus and Muslims. He persuaded the Hindus of India to treat the Muslims as brothers and share their pain. Gandhiji declared that in spite of the partition of India, there should not be partition of hearts and, therefore, India still belonged to the Muslims in the
same way as she belonged to the Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis and other religious communities. These words are quite relevant in the political and religious context of contemporary India.

6.8 Conclusion

The entire public action of Gandhiji in India has been regarded as very distinctive and remarkable in many respects; before his entering into the Indian political life he would like to travel extensively throughout India and understand the social, political, and economic realities from the grass root level. And according to the needs and wants of the people he had intervened with all public affairs. Gandhiji fought against social exploitation through his powerful weapon of non-violence. In Champaran case Gandhiji studied the viewpoints of the peasants well and understood the problem thoroughly and guided the people in a proper way. He always stood for the rights of the people and negotiated with the authorities on behalf of the public, and also created confidence among the people to achieve their goals. He taught the people of the relevance of unity among workers to win their rights. According to Gandhiji ‘without duty there are no rights’. The people must do their duty first, and then only they have the right to right. Gandhiji
insisted that the cause behind a strike must be good and just. And moreover it should never resort to violence. As a real public leader and activist, Gandhiji was a great success. He understood the need of unity among the people to win a public cause. For that purpose he had always chosen the method of action based on truth and non-violence. He had a strong faith in that powerful weapon of soul force all through his public life. His entire public life and action was a great victory of soul force over brute force. The Indian freedom struggle was a great victory of soul force over brute force. The base of soul force was non-violence. Non-violence is the only solution to cure the existing social, economic, political, religious and moral ills and evils of India.
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