CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Any one observing the contemporary scene in India, would hardly believe that the man called Mahatma Gandhi, for over three decades, strode its enormous territory like a colossus, was controlling its political convulsions and was trying to change its age-old social disparities, reviving its ancient spirit. There is hardly any trace of Gandhi’s impact on political and social life of to-day’s India could be found. Nevertheless, on 2\textsuperscript{nd} October and 30\textsuperscript{th} of January, we never forget to revive his memory through government sponsored programmes, because Gandhi’s name is still a vote catcher in India.

Gandhiji has been understandably the most outstanding personality among the social reformers of modern times. He accepted the values like truth, non-violence and the like, pronounced in our ancient texts, for social purification.

The mute question is, what is the ultimate goal of social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi? The problems of social change in India are vast, complex and difficult. The simultaneous existence of many centripetal and centrifugal forces, along with
the age-old customs and religious misconceptions, make the problem more difficult. The main aim of social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi was to awaken social consciousness about the necessary changes in the society.

The fundamental Gandhian means, to bring about a social change in India, rest on the reformation of man himself. If all Indians are morally reformed then the Gandhian goal of social reforms will be achieved.

Other areas, with which Gandhiji was intimately connected, were the caste system untouchability, alcoholism and status of women. In fact these topics form the core of the social philosophy of Gandhiji.

He fought for the rights of Indians in South Africa. Thus, out of Mohandas Gandhi Mahatma Gandhi was born. Mohandas Gandhi was a biological phenomenon in human form, but the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, who was the very embodiment of Truth, Non-violence and other noble qualities, who swayed the Indian heart and mind for decades, reminds us the promise given by Lord Krishna, in Bhagavadgita, “I shall take birth aeon after aeon”. [Sambhavami yuge, yuge].
Such mythical personalities have power and energy of their own. They move and speak, they perceive and have purpose they fascinate us and also drive to some actions, which are, sometimes, against our will. We simply cannot say ‘No’ to their commands. Thus, the mythical Gandhi is more powerful than the historical or biological Gandhi. All the great persons like Christ and the Buddha have duel personalities. The historical or biological Christ was just one Jewish priest but the mythical Christ grows to a gigantic form and reaches to heaven. Similarly, historical Gandhi was a London trained Indian barrister, who led the freedom struggle of his country. On the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi, with his unique weapons like Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Truth, Love and so on, transformed himself into a ‘Saviour of Mankind’. This mythical Gandhi was born in South Africa.

From South Africa Gandhiji came to India and found his country cold, powerless and sans national consciousness. The rise of national consciousness was the first duty Gandhiji did after coming to India from South Africa. Along with national consciousness, social awareness was also an important agenda of Gandhiji. In order to liberate the Indian society from several disabilities, Gandhiji laid more stress on the eradication of
alcoholism, caste system and also to improve the status of Indian woman.

India has a long history of the use of intoxicating liquor, right from the ancient times. But the Hindu scriptures have condemned the habit of liquor. Poor people become easy victims of this habit. There is a wrong notion among these addicts that liquor takes away their tiredness and gives pleasure. Gandhiji had the first hand knowledge of how poor families were destroyed due to the drinking habit. A study of social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, hence, should include his views regarding the problem of alcoholism.

The forces of modernisation not only bring the modern amenities but also the curses like tension, insecurity and other associated problems. Not finding ways out of such dilemmas, weak-willed people resort to drinking. It destroys first the health of the concerned person, then ruins the family. That is the reason why Gandhiji totally opposed alcoholism. He did not contribute to the theory that taken in little measures wine or beer could be as safe as any other drink.

The British government was earning excise duty from the liquor, so it did not heed Gandhiji's advice to close down the
liquor shops. Gandhiji established Temperance Boards to prohibit the drinkers. Sometimes he resorted to the measures like picketing. Women and children along, with some social workers, used to gather outside the liquor shops and would request the visitors not to go in.

Independent India tried, in the beginning, to introduce prohibition through state governments. In some states, there was total prohibition, in some others, there was regulated and controlled prohibition. The directive principles of state policy, advocate the introduction of prohibition for the welfare of the masses. This noble cause gradually disappeared. The state governments could not afford to lose the revenue. That is why, one after another, the state governments started lifting the prohibition.

Besides the financial losses the state government faced the administrative, legal and social problems also in effectively implementing prohibition.

(i) The administrative difficulty arose from lack of enforcement staff. There was revenue loss on the one hand and on the other, the huge expenditure in effectively implementing the prohibition.
This double loss made the state governments to reconsider their prohibition policies.

(ii) There were some legal problems in introducing prohibition. The first difficulty was there was no grave punishment for violating prohibition. The drunkards were produced before the Court and with a nominal fine he was acquitted. Sometimes mere warning was given. This did not deter the habitual.

(iii) There was social difficulty also. Some people in the society did not actively support the enforcement of prohibition. Unemployment generated among the toddy tappers, due to prohibition, also caused financial losses to some families.

This discussion regarding the good and bad effects of drinking and the role of Gandhiji in introducing prohibition could be lengthy, because many Enquiry Commissions have provided enough material for that topic. However, one thing that is missing very badly in the preparation of prohibition by the state governments is that, instead of suddenly clamping prohibition, the state governments first find out the resources to compensate the probable losses. After this, a strong political will is necessary to undertake such welfare activities, overriding popular
opposition. Neither the Gandhian means were tried nor were the Gandhian ends achieved.

Caste System

Every organised society becomes stratified. Most societies of the world have had the last in their societies. The Romans had Plebeins, the Spartans, helots, the British, Villains, Germans, Jews and the Hindus, untouchables. Certain classes of people are branded as the lowliest among the Hindu social hierarchy. Other people refuse to touch them or have but limited contacts with them to the extent of taking their services, without touching them.

Gandhism and 'Touch-me-not-ism'

Gandhi's crusade against untouchability had double purpose; political as well as humanitarian. He wanted all the Indians to be united for the freedom fight. The second purpose was Gandhi felt that the age-old untouchability was a curse to Hindu society. He wrote in Harijan,

"The untouchability that disfigures the present day Hinduism is a morbid growth. It only betrays the woodenness of a mind, a blind conceit. It is abhorrent alike to the spirit of religion and morality."
According to Gandhiji untouchability is the worst kind of social disease. It has received religious sanction in India and reduced millions of people to a state, bordering on slavery. If the Indians were divided on the basis of caste and colour, every group would be playing into the hands of the British rulers. That is the reason why Gandhiji opposed separate electorate for the Harijans. This name was given by Gandhiji himself, which means sons of God. He did not want the scheduled caste people to be segregated from the main stream of Hindu society.

Gandhiji opposed untouchability on the social ground also. The caste Hindus was avoiding the touch of Sudras as sin. Even their shadows were not allowed to contaminate the shadows of the caste, Hindus. In no other religion of the world, its followers are so divided on the basis of caste. The Mahatma felt that for a healthy society the epidemic of untouchability must vanish. A.R. Desai writes, "Historically untouchability was the social fruit of the Aryan conquest of India. In the process of interaction, a portion of the indigenously conquered population was incorporated into the Aryan fold. The most backward and despised section of this incorporated population constituted the hereditary caste of untouchables. It is older than the Vedas".2
Untouchables were socially debarred from pursuing any profession except scavenging and removing the dead animals. The upper caste Hindu society, enacted draconian laws to punish them, if they transgress the limits put by them. Under no institution was man so deeply humiliated, as he was, under untouchability. Gandhiji came to their rescue.

Logically speaking there is no rationale behind untouchability. Ambedkar and Gandhiji did their best to condemn the practice. The Constitution negates it and its practice is punishable by law.

The untouchable castes suffered for centuries from a number of disabilities, which made their lives worse than beasts. The civic disability kept them away from wells, ponds, temples, hospitals, choultries and so on. They were forced to live on the outskirts of the village. Educational disability denies them education of any kind. In religious disability, they were not allowed to enter temples. Even after the successful campaign of Ambedkar demanding the untouchables' right to enter the Kalaram temple at Nasik in 1930, things did not change much. There are other disabilities like the economic disability that bars them seeking any permanent or fulltime job any where or the
disability to own property of any kind, virtually rendered them beggars for centuries.

In order to emancipate this suffering humanity, the two persons, whose names are uppermost in the minds of the people of this part of India, are Basaveshwara and Ambedkar.

Basaveshwara was born in the latter half of the 12th Century in Ingaleshwar of Bijapur district. The place of his birth is also called Basavana Bagewadi. His parents were Madaras and Madalambike. The dualities or contradictions in the traditional Hindu religion made him stop his study of Vedas and Puranas. When he received the holy thread [Janiwar] at the initiation ceremony, he felt that it was a symbol of discrimination between people. Since then, he thought of avoiding disparity. He tried to root out the caste system by allowing ‘Lingadeeksha’ [bearing Lingam on body] to the low-caste people.

Another prominent leader of the depressed class of people Bhim Rao Ambedkar [1891-1956] was born in an untouchable community of Mahars in Maharashtra. He got his education, facing lot of humiliation. Being highly educated untouchable, Ambedkar became the undisputed spokesman of the community. He was the first to make the scientific study of the untouchables.
Ambedkar proposed five cardinal principles Pancha-Sutra, for emancipation of untouchables. 'Self-help', one should help oneself, then God will help one. Second principle is of 'Self-progress'. 'One should uplift oneself' is one of the teachings of Bhagavadgita. Then comes 'Self-dependence'. Ambedkar aimed at maximum physical labour for the progress of oneself. Untouchables cannot be the social parasites. 'Self-reliance' is depending on oneself regarding the other activities than the physical. Lastly, 'Self-confidence', which is of great importance to these downtrodden people. Their energies were crushed for centuries that are why they were not confident that they could do something or achieve something in their lives. Ambedkar was not the crutches of the untouchables but he removed crutches from under their arms.

In order to realise the five cardinal principles in life, Ambedkar recommended a three pronged strategy of Education, Organisation and Agitation. Education is the corner stone for the welfare of human beings. Education is light, it is delight, it is strength and what not. Untouchables will be their path in the light of education.

Secondly, organisation is the very essential quality for any one to succeed in life. That is why it is said, 'United we stand
and divided we fall'. Disunity among the untouchables might break their backbone. Unity and systematic organisation is the need of the hour.

Lastly comes agitation. Unless one agitates against injustice, one is not likely to get anything from the society. It is more true of the untouchables. Thus Lord Basaveshwara and Ambedkar did a lot of good to improve the conditions of the untouchables.

What did the Mahatma to improve the status of woman in the society is one more important question to ask. Gandhiji strove to enhance the position of woman in all walks of life. He went to the extent of saying that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women. Gandhiji said that wife is not the husband's slave but companion, helpmate and equal partner. He deplored male chauvinism and said that woman should be as free to choose her course of life as man is. As Gandhiji tried to emancipate the position of the untouchables in Indian society, in the same way he tried to improve the status of woman.

The health of a civilisation depends on how the woman is being treated in that particular civilisation. No society or
community can dream of any progress, keeping half of its population in the dark. Therefore, progress of a community means progress of women in the community.

In the beginning, the woman was treated with equality in Indian society. She was free to get education. As a result, our country has a bright tradition of female scholarship. Any community can be legitimately proud of the fact that its women contributed to the most sacred texts of that community. Saraswati, the wife of Mandanmisra, a Buddhist scholar, was the arbiter, when her husband lacked horns with Shankaracharya, the founder of the Advait School of philosophy, in philosophic discourses. The lady declared her husband having been defeated in argument by his opponent. This bright and beautiful picture of Indian womanhood gradually became dim and dusky, when Manu came on the scene.

During the Buddhist period there was a slight improvement in the status of woman. It is difficult to digest the duality apparent in the behaviour of Lord Buddha that the person, who emancipated a courtesan like Amrapali, also ordered his first disciple Anand, not to see woman in reality, not even her picture. Another declaration that hurts his sympathizers is, "A wife and a
slave cannot own property". One good thing that did happen in Buddhism is that, the female saints enjoyed liberty.

As far as the status of woman is concerned the medieval period was rather disappointing. The Brahmanical grip was further tightened on Indian womanhood. While describing this situation, Paul Thomas writes, "Her freedom was curtailed, knowledge of not only of the scriptures but even of the letters, was denied to her and her status was reduced to that of an appendage on man".3

This situation leads us to another pertinent question, whether the status of woman was improved during the modern period, the period in history, after 1750 A.D., is known as the modern period. As far as India is concerned, this period can be divided as the British India and the Independent India. In British India, the introduction of western education brought awareness among the Indian women. The British government joined hands with the social reformers and introduced several measures and legislation to improve the condition of women. The government brought about changes in the attitudes and values of life of some of the Indians who got western education. As a result, many social organisations came into being. The government also introduced many social legislation like Sati Act (1829), Widow
Remarriage Act (1856), Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) and were passed.

The status of woman radically changed in independent India. Equality of opportunities in education, employment and participation in political activities and so on. Consequent upon such liberal state and Central policies towards women, many eminent women were seen in every field.

As there were advantages for the women in independent India, there were some disadvantages also. Child Marriage, Sati System continued as the legacy of the past. Some new problems also crept in, as a result of female education. The picture of woman as workhorse gradually changed and in its place we find educated, politically conscious and economically independent woman. So, the problem of incompatibility in married life also increased.

Secondly, crime rate against women, especially against working women, is very high these days. Violence, harassment, dowry deaths, wife battering are carried out in broad day-light, though stringent laws are there against such crimes.

Gandhiji is the foremost among the social reformers, who paid much attention to the cause of women. A passionate lover of
humanity, an absolute foe of injustice, in whatever form or sphere, it is small wonder that Gandhiji early espoused the women's cause. Being a merciless critic himself, the moment he realised that he was a slaveholder, his attitude towards his wife changed. Thus women's emancipation was begun by Gandhiji from his house itself. He said, “Man and woman are equal in status. I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man”\(^4\). This is enough proof to show that Gandhiji treated woman on par with man and praised her patience and sacrifice.

Not only Gandhiji's life, but his death also spreads the universal message of Truth, love, equality, compassion and so on. His services rendered towards the emancipation of Indian womanhood are matchless.

What Gandhiji did for Indian women has been beautifully described by Nayanatara Sahgal in her novel. The Gandhian movement of women's emancipation took the Indian woman by guts and steeled every nerve, every fibre of woman. Mira, a character in the novel, says,
“It trimmed and toughened you. And while it had finished with you it said, ‘Now cry if you dare’, And you didn’t. Not because the tears were not there, welling a flood in your breast, but because you are too proud to shed them”5.

This is what Gandhiji did to Indian women. Gandhiji’s social philosophy is nothing but a social charter of compassion, emancipation and social justice. Compassion towards the downtrodden, emancipation of women and social justice done ‘unto the last’ man or woman in the society. In this way, Mahatma Gandhi became the Messiah of women and weaker sections of Indian society.
Reference


5. Sahgal, Nayantara, *This Time of Morning*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1965, p. 82.