CHAPTER 2

GANDHI: RELIGION AND SOCIETY
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GANDHI’S VIEWS ON RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Gandhi gives the term religion a very wide and comprehensive meaning which in so many ways is different and unique. While introducing religion into politics, Gandhi thought that religion subserves politics and that politics berefit of religion is a death trap which kills the soul. Behind every word he uttered and every act he did, there was a religious consciousness and a downright religious motive.

He was of the view that most of the religious men he met were politicians in disguise and the ones who the whore guise of politicians were at heart religious men. Two questions arise out of this position. First: In what sense does politics encircle life like the coil of the snake? How was it that in his attempt to lead a truly religious and spiritual life he came up against political evils? What exactly did he mean by religion when he said that he was trying to introduce religion into politics. The answer to these questions would takes us into Gandhi’s concept of religion.

Gandhi did not become a Mahatama, simply on account of his religious views. There was another side to his activities the impact of which upon the lives of his countrymen was no less
tremendous. Though not a recognised religious leader or a great social reformer, his contribution to society towards of social reform and religious reconstruction was phenomenal.

To Gandhi, politics bereft of religion is a death trap because it kills the soul. Politics too, like other human activities, must be governed either by religion or irreligion. Without the moral basis provided by religion, life would be a mere maze of sound and fury signifying nothing. By religion, however, he means, not a particular creed, but that which underlies and harmonizes all religions.

To him, religion means "belief in the ordered moral Government of the universe." It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.¹

It is essentially practical and is, in no way, world denying. To Gandhi, there was no such thing as the other world. There was no here and no 'there'. He believed that:

The spiritual and religious laws do not but express themselves only through the ordinary activities of life. Thus, religion provides a moral basis to all activities, Gandhi did not know any religion apart from human activity. It provided a moral basis to all other activities which would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing.²
Gandhi was in politics, only because:

Politics today encircles us like the coils of a snake from which one can not get out no matter however one tries. I wish to wrestle with the snake..... I am trying to introduce religion into politics.3

The goal of life is self-realization which, Gandhi believes, cannot be achieved unless one identifies oneself with the whole of purely religious work which can not be divided into watertight compartments.

Gandhi was of the view that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means. A living unshakeable faith in God, an insistence on the primacy of spirit is the core of his philosophy. So immovable is his faith that he feels he may live without air and water but not without God. He say the fullest life is impossible without such faith and unless one has a living faith in God.

To Gandhi "truth is God. Thus God is a living force. The spiritual force of God resides in, but is not the body. He who denies the existence of that great force, denies to himself the use of that inexhaustible power and thus remains impotent. Strength comes from God."4

To Gandhi, "the first and the last shield of the non-violent person will be his unwavering faith in God."5
The only weapon of the Satyagrahi is God, by whatsoever name one knows Him. Without Him, the satyagrahi is devoid of strength before an opponent armed with monstrous weapons. But, he who accepts God as his only protector will remain unbent before the mightiest earthly power.  

Dismissal or negation of God from common affairs gives rise to the feeling of helplessness and induces people to put their faith in violence. In 1921 Gandhi observed that,

"We have become atheists for all practical purposes. And, therefore, we believe that in the long run we must rely upon physical force for our protection."

Gandhi does not mind absence of a universally acceptable definition of God. He is conscious of the fact that there are innumerable definitions of God because His manifestations are innumerable.

God is indescribable and impenetrable, because he is in every body and in everything. No description of him God adequate. As for himself, Gandhi describes God as pure, undefiled consciousness, as undefinable mysterious power that pervades everything, as purest essence, etc. He specially identifies him with the dumb poor millions, with love and above all with truth. To him, the word satya (truth) is derived from sat which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality
except truth. That is why satya or truth is the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that truth is God than to say that God is truth.

Gandhi is conscious that God is, strictly speaking, not a person, but truth in law. Yet, he believes that God is the personal God to those who need him.

God is the Creator, the Ruler and the Lord. God pervades every thing that is to be found in this universe down to the atom. The mantra describes the seer to whom this mantra or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found every where. "Since God provades every thing, nothing belong to you, not even your own body." Even natural calamities, he believes are no mere divine caprice but come to mankind as just retribution for their sins.

As a true Vaishnav Hindu, Gandhi was conscious of God. Every minute of his life, whether asleep or awake, was controlled by God. He felt the sense of entire dependence on Him and humbly sought His guidance. His help never failed Gandhi and this help was to him, "the visible finger of the invisible God." Often in the name of God, in answer to his voice, he undertook fasts. And he had real mystic experiences. Here is one of these in his own words:
"It relates to my 21 day fast for the removal of untouchability, I had gone to sleep...at 12-00 O'clock in the night something woke me up suddenly and some vice whispered, thou must go on a fast. How many days I ask. The voice again said, I twenty one days! When does it begin? It say, I You begin tomorrow!.

On another occasion he described his experience by stating that:

"what he did hear was like a voice from a far and yet quiet near. It was as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me and irresistible. I was not dreaming at the time. I heard the voice. The hearing of voice was preceded by a terrific struggle, within me. Suddenly the vice came upon me. I listened, made certain it was the voice and the struggle ceased. I was calm... The determination was made accordingly, the date and the hour of the fast was fixed.

Though he sometimes uses the language of the theist, Yet in his ideas about God, Gandhi is extremely catholic. He identifies God with truth. He also identifies Him with Love, Ethics, Law and conscience. He once said: "faith in one self multiplied to the 9th degree."

To Gandhi, there is no antithesis between God and man. The spiritual feeling (soul) is the only reality in man as well as in the lower order of creation. It transcends time and space, he believed, in Advaita and believed in essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Gandhi also
subscribed to the belief that human beings are working consciously towards the realization of spiritual identity. The relation between God and the individual soul is that if the individual shatters, the chains of egotism melt into the ocean of humanity and shares its dignity. On the other hand, if he feels that he is something, he sets up a barrier between God and himself to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God.

The soul is the Godhead within man, it is self acting, it persists even after death; its existence does not depend upon the physical body. Hence, whatever happens to one's body must affect the whole of the matter and the whole of the spirit. He identifies soul force with non-violence and points out that imperfect man can not grasp the whole of the Essence.

Gandhi belief in the existence of God and the quest of the soul is vital to his political philosophy. He identifies truth with God, and as a mean to apprehending spiritual reality.

According to many thinkers, reality can be apprehended either by the senses or by reasoning. Since perception can not go beyond the external qualities of objects, many Western philosophers hold that the ultimate nature of the universe can be grasped by senses or through reason. According to them, the real is rational.
Gandhi considers the senses and reasoning as an inadequate media of apprehending the absolute reality. To him, God is indescribable, inconceivable and immeasurable. God transcends the senses and the intellect. The general masses, whose coarse intellect can never penetrate into the unfathomable deep, do not have much to do with such a God if they do not feel His presence in their midst. If He is the creator and father of all, why do we not feel His presence in every beat of our heart? they say.

We must not endeavour to perceive him through the senses because he is beyond them. It is just like trying to import faith in God through the intellect. It cannot be as it is essentially a matter of the heart. Faith can be turned into knowledge by experience and it can come only through the heart and not the intellect. The intellect, if anything, acts as a barrier in matter of faith.¹³

So realization must be outside the senses and the intellect, it must have for its basis a living faith. The source of faith is the heart.

"God can not be realized through intellect. Intellect can only lead to a certain extent and no further. It is a matter of faith and experience derived from that faith...."¹⁴

That which is beyond reason is surely not unreasonable. To ask any body to believe without proof what is capable of proof would be unreasonable. But for an experienced person to ask another to believe without being able to prove that there God is humbly to confess his limitations and to ask another to accept in faith the statement of his experience. Without faith this World would come to naught in a moment.
There are subjects where reason is not enough and we have to accept things on faith. Faith does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are outside the purview of reason. Faith is living wide awake consciousness of God.

For Gandhi, the method of religion is not different from that of science. Scientific truth can be verified only by following the prescription given for comprehending the facts which are taken for granted. Thus, we can not understand electricity except by the galvanometer test. "Precisely in that manner speak the rishis and the prophets. They say anybody following the path they have trodden can realize God. Indeed even the so called realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it can not be sustained that is why Gandhi proclaimed.

I hold that complete realisation is impossible in this embodied life. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human being.

Gandhi insists that the divine is the central truth in man. No one will we hope, dispute that Gandhi is extremely catholic in his conception of God. God is to him only another name for
reality, the truth, the law, the harmony that pervades the universe. His view that belief in God and soul is a matter of faith has the support of saints and prophets.\textsuperscript{17}

But the little freedom we have is real in the sense that we are free to choose how we use that freedom. God is the greatest democrat. He leaves us unfettered to make our own choice between evil and good. The right to err, which means the freedom to try experiments is the condition of progress.

But though one's will is free, "we cannot command results; we can only strive\textsuperscript{18}

and so far as I am concerned it is enough satisfaction to know that I have striven to discharge the duty that rested on me.\textsuperscript{19}

On the other hand, one can change his temperament, can control it, but cannot eradicate it, God has not given him so much liberty. According to him, man can still counteract the effect of past mistakes by attaining complete detachment between the mind and the body. Detachment enables one to overcome the effects of past faulty practice as well as handicaps of heredity and environment. There is a promise that if your have arrived at complete detachment you can rub out all evils, but in spite of the greatest effort to be detached no man can altogether undo the effect of his environment or transcended nature. Such
freedom will mean chaos. Due to his belief in the spiritual nature of man, Gandhi rejected the commonly accepted view that man is entirely the creature of his milieu. He does not, however, underrate the influence of the latter. The majority of people are controlled by their environment. But he holds that man should try to live by self-direction, i.e. by the exercise of his will, rather than by mere habit.20

Closely connected with the problem of evil is the fact that he can not account for the existence of evil by any rational method. He is not oblivious of the place of evil in the scheme of progress. Evolutions, he points out, is always experiment, and all progress is gained through mistakes and their rectification. Besides, the principles of Karma and rebirth suggest that through a gradual process man will be able to minimize the evil.

Gandhi is, however, concerned not so much with philosophical explanation of evil as with the specific kind of evil political, social or economic. C.F. Andrews has clarified Gandhi’s position with regard to one’s love for religion. It is not necessary for a Christian to identify himself with Christian orthodoxy, rather he should transcend the narrow religious commitments. He pointed out that Hinduism satisfied his soul, filled his whole being and he found a solace in the Bhagvad-Gita and Upanishads that he missed even in the Sermon on the Mount.21
It is worth noting that there was no contradiction in Gandhi between his immense love for Hinduism and his equal unprejudiced regard for other religions.

What attracted Gandhi to Hinduism was not its religious prescriptions or the rituals or the mysticism or the legends, but its propensity to accommodate the positives and eliminate the negatives of different religious persuasions. While spiritualism and renunciation are supposed to be the core of Hindu religion, Gandhi would not undermine the importance of these concepts, but he emphasised more on its ethical components. Rather than being one cohesive religion, Hinduism is the melting pot of various religions. But for Gandhi, religion did not mean Hindu religion alone, that is why he said, "By religion, I do not mean Hindu religion." Religion does not mean merely offering one's Namaz or going to the temple. "Religion means knowledge of oneself and knowledge of God." By religion, Gandhi meant that:

"religion which transcends Hinduism and all other religions and brings the follower face to face with the Supreme. The aim of all religions is to suppress the beast in man and to enshrine his spiritual and moral will. For example, the victory of Rama over Ravana is a symbol of the conquest of physical power by spiritual strength. Thus, Gandhi perceived religion in a very broad sense. "Man without religion is a man without root. Therefore, religion is the basis on which all structure has to be erected if life is to be real."
There is no doubt that Gandhi was truly religious in this sense of the term. Religion embraces the totality of man’s activities and personality. Any division of man into artificial compartments like political, economic and religious, would in the Gandhian sense be erroneous. Gandhi deemed an exclusively religious life as erroneous. Gandhi believed an exclusively religious life without human concerns would not be worth living. That is why he thought religion and morality to be the basis of politics. The origins of Gandhi’s political philosophy are traceable to his religious background. His political actions and techniques followed from his religious world view.

Gandhi imbibed his religious outlook from the very cradle. The saintliness of his mother greatly impressed him. Gandhi’s tolerance for all branches of Hinduism and other religions goes back to this early period. In his childhood, his father, though a Vaishnava, was frequently visited by Jain monks and Musalman and Parsi friends with whom he discussed their respective faiths, Gandhi would always listen to them with respect and often with interest. To be more precise, the religious evolution of Gandhi can be studied in four phases. Being a Vaishnava by birth, he did imbibe the sanctity of Ramayana from his family background. The recitation of Ramanam, the listening to the reading of Tulsidas’s Ramayana, and the Bhagvad Gita and the stories of Shravana and Harishchandra,
inculcated in him a deep reverence in the supremacy of truth as the essence of all morality. Indeed, in Gandhi's thought one finds crystalized the hard core of Vedantic tradition as the dominant one which makes Gandhi call himself a Vedantic.

A Hindu by belief and convictions, Ramanama from Ramayana of Tulsidas was an infallible guide to Gandhi. The Gita was his "dictionary of daily reference." He observed:

"Words like Aparigraha (non-possession) and Sambhava (equality)" gripped me. Though I admire much in Christianity, I find a solace in Bhagvad Gita and Upanishads. When doubts haunt me, I turn to the Bhagvadgita... My life... I owe it to the teachings of the Bhagvadgita."25

In England, he became acquainted with important religious books. He eagerly read Edwin Arnold's, The Song Celestial and The Light of Asia. His study of Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy, stimulated him to make deeper studies of Hinduism. He studied Christianity and Islam in South Africa. The New Testament apprised him of the former religion, while the latter he became will-versed with by reading of Carlyle and Washington Irvine. The Life of the Prophet Mohammad, he also read, The Sayings of Zarathustra. Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God Is Within You and Ruskin's Unto This Last, being of Christian inspiration, deeply impressed him. In fact, Gandhi was convinced
that the core of the Christian gospel was passive resistance to evil and it was similar in many ways, though not wholly, to the Jain doctrine of Ahimsa.

The fundamental notion of Gandhism is the metaphysical conception of an omnipresent spiritual reality, an all-embracing living light which can be called Sachchidananda or Brahman or Rama, or simply, Truth. This supreme absolute is both the starting point and final goal of Gandhian thought. Gandhi wrote:

"I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing and everything, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power and spirit is God, and nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist. He alone is, and is this power benevolent of malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent, for I can see that in the midst of death, life persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence, I gather that God is life, truth and light."26

The central conception of Gandhi's metaphysics is Truth or "Satya" which is the ultimate reality and is also called God. The very term "Satyagraha" has connotations of the union of ethical and practical action. The Satyagraha may be interpreted as clinging to, adherence to, or insistence upon truth, with "truth" having connotations of essence of being.
In the Hindu tradition, the search for truth becomes the search for God. Gandhi said, "God is Truth", and concluded by saying "Truth is God", because atheists may deny the existence of God, but none would deny the existence of Truth.

Gandhi sought Truth and found it identical with love, non-injury or non-violence. Thus, for Gandhi, there is no religion other than Truth. Truth is absolute, all pervading and spiritual. Gandhi refused to make any compromise with Truth on the grounds of category than even Swaraj. But although devoted to Truth, Gandhi never thought of imposing his creed of Truth on anyone.

Closely related to the conception of God is the conception of soul in Gandhi’s philosophy. Metaphysically, it is not different in essence from God of ultimate reality. Gandhi said:

"The only way to find God is to see him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by the service of all."

Gandhi’s constant aim was the realisation of God through the service of mankind. The services rendered to the poor, untouchables, disinherited and the forlorn are indirectly services rendered to God. Hence, Gandhi was greatly influenced by the life and teaching of Swami Vivekananda for Vivekananda’s
conception of Daridranarayana (the poor) as God, was adopted, elaborated and practised by Gandhi himself. He, therefore, emphasised again and again the spirit of service, dedication and detachment. Gandhi had no love for Sanyasa or Samadhi or Nirvana. He was a devotee of Karma, a Karma-Yogi. He believed that a man can fulfil three Ashrams of life simultaneously, Dharma, Artha and Karma. In other words he established superiority of Grihastha, (the family man) over the ascetic who renounced worldly goods.

From the preceding discussion, one might infer Gandhi's traditional mental make-up as well as his striving for spiritualism. However, such an inference is bound to be partial, since Gandhi had the propensity for the deeply religious and he accepted the fundamental tents of Hindu religion, with an unflinching faith in God. He also believed in the Karma theory and transmigration of soul to the extent that for him these beliefs worked as inexorable laws of nature. Hence, he believed that even a little of meritorious Karma performed would be conserved and yield fruit. Despite his innate faith in Hinduism, he aspired for a universal humanistic religion which imbibed the best elements of all religions. In fact, he viewed every religion to be a specific road to the same divine goal.
"Even as a tree has a single trunk but many branches and leaves, so there is one true and perfect religion, but it becomes many as it passes through the human medium."\textsuperscript{29}

Gandhi's concept of religion was most comprehensive and deep. He endowed it with the quality of tolerance. He found all religion valid and none exclusive. He observed:

"I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe in the Bible, Quran and Zend Avesta, to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas."\textsuperscript{30}

Similarly, Jainism and Buddhism had tremendous inspiration for him for they stressed on non-violence, celibacy, non-possession and non-stealing. Gandhi was as much a Hindu as a Buddhist for he did not differentiate in practice the philosophy of Nirvana. Moksha or salvation, the ultimate goals of life. Virtually, the genesis of Gandhi's religion can be traced to non-Indian sources as well, for example, Gandhi's emphasis on truth is as much a part of his borrowing form Hinduism as embodied in Confucianism and Taoism.

In England, Gandhi came in touch with the Bible, and he sought to discover some positive ingredients of Christianity. No doubt, the Western Christian tradition added a new dimension to his theosophical approach to religion in terms of strengthening of his Hindu roots. He did not absorb
Christianity in full for there were several aspects of Christianity which he did not approve. Nevertheless, Christian social philosophy appealed to Gandhi a lot. The "Ten Commandments" were for him a code of personal conduct and social ethics. The virtues of charity and love so boldly written in the Gospel became his watchword. True to Christian teachings, he too never prescribed fasting for personal gain or publicity. He considered a fast for Satyagraha as a means of self-purification and not a method of pressurising or coercion.

Gandhi borrowed the best from every religion and at the same time believed that the salvation for him was possible only through Hinduism. He remarked:

"The Gita contains the gospel of Karma or Work, the gospel of Bhakti or devotion and the gospel of Jnana or Knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three." 31

However, Gandhi did not approve of everything in Hinduism and maintained an independent critical attitude towards Hindu texts. Gandhi's attitude towards Hinduism was liberal and comprehensive and not dogmatic.

No doubt, he justified, Varna-Ashrama and the division of society in broad economic classes, but the criterion behind this division was duty and not privileges. What he accepted was
horizontal case system on a functional basis whereby none of the four functional groups were higher or lower but were of equal importance in the functioning of social organisation. He approved Varna-Ashrama as a system of self-restraint and conservation of energy.

That Gandhi was opposed to Machiavellian approach to politics seems plausible. His exhortations with regard to the restoration of moral values in political practice might appear utopian in the present context when politics has gone downhill. But for him, it was a practical proposition. His periodic reference to conscience in dealing with decision-making in day to day functioning was an indication of his faith in the corrigibility of man. Gandhi was disturbed by the emergence of religious intolerance, communal frenzy and the like, which marred peace and harmony in society. He perceived in the national development, an underlying current of communal hatred and violence and stressed Hindu-Muslim unity to the extent that he supported the Khilafat Movement.

However, his support to the Khilafat Movement was misinterpreted by many of his colleagues as a move towards appeasing the Muslims. Gandhi, to his utter discomfiture, found in nationalism, an overt and covert use of religion and religious symbols for political purpose. Gandhi made a break
with this tradition and coined new phrases and terminology suited to attract the Hindus. In spite of all his efforts to assuage the feelings of the Muslim community, his position on the Hindu-Urdu controversy attracted the attention of Muslims. Gandhi who favoured Hinduism in Devanagiri and Persian script greatly indentified Hindustani with Hindi in Nagri script to the near exclusion of the Persian script.

His remarks that,

"Muslims did not yet regard India as their home: and the Musalman as a rule is a bully provoked the Muslims."\(^{32}\)

Probably, he made up for his lapses by undertaking "Padyatra: and "fasts" in Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and Delhi in order to protect the Muslims from Hindu assaults, Lord Mountbatten had then remarked:

"What fifty thousand well-equipped soldiers could not do, what Mahatma had done. He is the one man boundary force."\(^{33}\)

With a noble heart, Gandhi in a rather over-simplified manner, had developed the notion of treating all religions alike without differentiating the essential religious identities which were responsible for the latent and obvious enmity between the Hindus and the Muslims. In 1938, Gandhi elaborated:
"My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. I approach politics as everything else in a religious spirit. Truth is my religion and Ahimsa is the only way of its realisation. I have rejected once and for all the doctrine of the sword. I may have not leave a single stone unturned to achieve Hindu Muslim unity, God fulfils himself in strange way.\(^{34}\)

Gandhi also emphasised that the Gita, the Quran, the Bible, The Granth Sahib and Zend Avesta contained gems of wisdom. Now it is up to the followers whether they follow to believe their teaching.\(^{35}\) The dichotomy between theory and practice of religion by itself baffles everybody.

Thus, Gandhi is justified in interpreting Secularism in his own terms, giving it a spiritualist base. Gandhi embodies a Vedantic vision of a core of truth in all religions and teaches not only tolerance of, but respect towards all religions. He stood for secularism though he claimed to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu and Vaishnava. He argued that his faith was based on the understanding of the Shastras among which he listed the Vedas, Upansishads, Puranas and the Bhagavada Gita. His secularism finds theoretical justification in his working. He recommended a daily reading of the Gita the Quran, and the Bible to the Hindu, Muslim and Christian students respectively. He stress the need for a curriculum of religious instructions of basic principles of all other faiths than
one's own. He rejected the concept of coercion in the field of religion and earnestly pleaded for leaving every individual to follow the religion of his choice, without any interference from the State. He categorically stated that the state should undoubtedly be secular. He did not accept the concept of State Religion, neither did he favour institutionalisation of any kind.

Mahatma Gandhi considered a self-regulated stateless society as his ideal. But the imperfections of the individuals who constitute society compelled him to content himself with the second best, namely, a society with a predominantly non-violent Government which governs the least. Gandhi tried to eliminate poverty from society. Plato attributed pauperism to a lack of proper education and training, as well as unjust social laws and an unjust constitution of the State. Suggesting the means of quelling communal riots non-violently, Gandhi wrote in September, 1940: "Goondas do not drop from sky, nor do they spring from earth like evil spirits. They are the product of social disorganization and society is therefore responsible for their existence. In other words, they should be looked upon as a symptoms of corruption in our body politic. To remove the disease we must first discover the underlying cause."
To him the individual is the one supreme consideration. He elaborated this idea in 1935:

I look upon an increase of the power of the state with the greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.37

His concern for the freedom of the individual led him to propound a view which bears a close resemblance to philosophical anarchism. But it is worth noting that with the growing importance of the socialists in the Congress organisation from 1934 onwards he did not hesitate to call himself a socialist and on some occasions even a communist. In 1937, he claimed that socialism and even communism, are included in the first verse of the Ishopanisad. In 1940, he claimed in his writings that he was a socialist long before those he knew in India had avowed their creed. In 1946, he claimed to be the foremost communist.

Socialism is usually taken to mean a form of society and government under which the state assumes ever-increasing functions regulating the life of the individual in different fields of activity. It is in this sense that Gandhi professes Socialism. It is necessary to go into these problems in chronological order with a view to finding out the extent to
which his ideas on State and Society underwent change in course of time under the impact of changing circumstances. In every age and every country, social and political environments have moulded political thoughts. Gandhi could not have been an exception to this. The influence of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73) was predominant when Gandhi was receiving his education in England. He refers to the works of Spencer and Mill in his Hind Swaraj. But he was not an individualist like Spencer and he differed considerably from Mill. The latter made a distinction between self-regarding faults and other regarding faults. Mill said that no person ought to be punished simply for being drunk: but a soldier or policeman should be punished simply for being drunk on duty. In 1930, Gandhi attacked this theory when he stated that:

"there are some people who think that we can afford to act as we please in matters that affect only ourselves but no man can, in fact, do anything in the World which does not, directly or indirectly affect the welfare of his fellowmen."

He goes so far as to emphasise the importance of thoughts because evil thoughts affect not only the individual but also his fellowmen and society. He was generally averse to compelling an individual to adopt a particular course of action. But, during his crusade against drinking in 1921, he departed from this principle. He wrote that people can not be made sober
by compulsion, and that those who wish to drink must have facilities provided to them. The State does not cater to the vices of its people. We do not regulate or license house of ill fame. We do not provide facilities for thieves to indulge in their propensity for thieving. He declared:

"I hold drink to be more damnable than thieving and perhaps, even prostitution. Is it not often the parent of both."39

He supported compulsion on the ground that drinking propensity is more a disease than a vice. As such, he held that diseased persons have got to be helped even against themselves. In another case too he was in favour of using compulsion, it was concerning the parents or guardians neglecting to send their children to a primary school. This may be justified on the ground that the guardian is a trustee of the children under his care and that he becomes guilty of breach of trust if he does not send them to a school in a community where free and compulsory education is provided.

Barring such exceptions, Gandhi was against the use of compulsion even with a view to making an individual virtuous. In August, 1946, he therefore observed: How can I, the champion of Ahimsa, compel anyone to perform even a good.40
It is interesting to note that he does not prohibit the slaughter of all sort of goats, sheep and cows. He specially stated that the she goats and cows which are either pregnant or milch are not to be slaughtered nor their young ones which are less than six months old. He prohibits the killing of balls set at liberty and the boneless fish. Has not a well known Englishman said that to make mistakes as a freeman is better than being in bondage in order to avoid them? Gandhi believed in the truth of the saying that the mind of a man who remains good under compulsion can not improve; in fact, it worsen and when compulsion is removed all the defects came up to the surface with even greater force. To both Gandhi and Thoreau government appeared to be unnecessary if and when individuals acquire perfect self control. In 1931 Gandhi wrote:

"Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self regulated, no representation becomes so necessary. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State, but the ideal is never fully realised in life. Thoreau had further strengthened this argument by stating that government is the best which governs the least."\(^4\)

We shall have to examine carefully whether Gandhi struck to this theory till the last. To Thoreau as well as to Gandhi,
the vice of the enlightened conscience of the individual was superior to the dictates of the laws of the state. Thoreau appealed to the citizens to have the courage to rise in revolt against laws which appear immoral to them. He disregarded the order served upon him not for want of respect for lawful authority but in obedience to the higher law of our voice of conscience. He had written four years earlier:

"Whether therefore, I am in the minority of one or I have a majority, I must go along the course that God seems to have shown me." 42

Gandhi allows disobedience to law only when there is public opinion in favour of the person claiming to voice forth the grievance of the people. But he makes an exception in the case of worst Governments under which public spirit is as much crushed as in India. So much so, that the disobedience to law by an ethically disciplined Satyagrahi appeared justifiable to him. When India attained independence Gandhi laid emphasis on the necessity of obeying the law of the State. In September, 1947 he wrote that:

"in democracy, the individual would be governed and limited by the social will which is the state, which is governed by and for democracy. If every individual takes the law into his own hands, there would be no State. It would be a reign anarchy in the sense of almost to be absence of social law or state."
He admitted that in a reasonable good state, citizens do not refuse to obey very single unjust law. He wrote that he would be deeply distressed if on every conceivable occasion every one of us were to be a law unto oneself and to scrutinise in golden scales every action of our future National Assembly. He would surrender his judgement in most matters to national representatives, taking particular care in making his choice of such representatives. He knew that in no other manner would a democratic government be possible for one single day. He considered it necessary to reserve the right of individual judgement in some special cases. Again in 1939 he wrote:

"I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He has risen to his present state by learning to adjust his individualism to the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learnt to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint. Willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well being of the whole society, enrich both the individual and the society of which he is a member."44

We know to our cost how rationing, control and food zones have increased the power of the bureaucracy enormously. One of the cardinal features of Gandhian society was the
insistence on bodily labour. The American writer, Edward Bellamy proposed that every one should work as a common labourer for three years before being selected for his profession. Gandhi tried the experiment of inducing the members of his Tolstoy Farm to undertake labour voluntarily in 1910. In 1925, he propounded the view that franchise should be restricted to those adults who perform some kind of bodily labour. In 1947, he elaborated the idea and stated:

"Thus a simple labourer would easily be a voter, whereas a millionaire or a lawyer or a merchant and the like would find it hard, if they did not do some body labour for the state."45

In his view, the only way of eradicating idle parasitism in society is to insist on the performance of physical labour. As is well known that Gandhi was an advocate of Rama Rajya. In 1946, he explained how his conception of Rama Rajya does not mean replacement of British army by an Indian army.

Gandhi held the view that unless we switch our minds off from cities to the village we can not serve them. It is not the cities that make India. Real India lives in the villages, and villages can be reconstructed only by reviving the defunct handicrafts of the countryside.
In independent India, rural community must achieve its own welfare and thus point the way to the welfare of Mankind. Gandhian constructive worker can give attention to the following seven-point programme of Rural Welfare.

1. More food through better agriculture and an equitable redistribution of land through peaceful methods of persuasion.

2. Quality food through mass education in the elementary rules of dietetics at the village level.

3. Better health through the above and through a rational sanitation drive.

4. Improvement and re-organisation of cottage and village industries.

5. Promotion of co-operation to make panchayats real.

6. Promoting education of Adults in particular and liberal education should be available to every boy and girl without any discrimination of caste or class.

7. Moral rearmament of the people through cultural and recreational programmes deriving inspiration from the past traditions of India and going forward to link up with the past traditions of the modern world.
None of these are new items. But they must be taken up in a new spirit. Special priorities should be given to Rural Youth programme and out of school education which will prepare a really good citizen. Gandhi was of the view that unless and until we befriend the Harijan, unless and until we treat him as our own brother, we cannot treat humanity as one brotherhood. The whole movement for the removal of untouchability is a movement for the establishment of universal brotherhood and nothing less.

It has to be admitted, however, that the Hindu Society has on the whole been unfair and unsympathetic to women during the last two thousand years. They could have no education worth the name and could hardly take any part in social and public life. Gandhi brought them outside their homes with the discovery of "Satyagraha." In 1920, 1930, 1942 and onwards a large number of women came outside the four walls of their families and took part in National movements, gave inspiration to men folk, and worked shoulder to shoulder with them. Today, Indian women have occupied various posts from Prime Minister to a maid servant.

Gandhi has expressed his opinion on a variety of other social problems as well. He does not believe in unnatural birth control. He was a staunch believer of "self-control." His principle of "Brahmacharya: or self control should be brought
to the notice of the youth.

Through Satyagraha he tried to control the sale of liquor and introduced "Nira". Similarly, Gandhi finally planned for the welfare of family, age of marriage, child welfare and various other social problems.

National regeneration, according to Gandhi, could not be brought about by reviving the Golden Age of the past. He doubted if there ever was one and insisted that even if there was, if was wholly irrelevant. Each Yuga or historical epoch had its own distinctive requirements and needed to interpret afresh the central insights of the Indian civilisation. Here lies his modern outlook. Gandhi, like Hindus in general, believed that the past was a source of inspiration and self-confidence, never a model or blueprint for the present. Gandhi argued that although India could not adopt the modern civilisation, there was "much" that it could "profitably assimilate for it. Gandhi's notion of social change basically stemmed from his firm belief that reform is to be sought first in the character of man before it is attempted in society. It is a tribute to Gandhi's sagacity that he realised that no man is perfect, everyone experiences a sense of inadequateness and requires help, albeit in different fields. The wealthy man having all material benefits requires spiritual upliftment,
while a pauper seeks a full stomach. Both must be provided for. In this context, Gandhi’s concept of Daridranarayan, i.e., divinity in the poor and trusteeship, i.e., goodness in the rich are, in fact, the cornerstones of his theory of social change which bears striking resemblance to the idea of Nobleness and Charity.

In fact, Gandhi’s social philosophy stems from his morality for he was essentially a Karmayogi and believed that God could be realised only through disinterested service of making. For Gandhi, social transformation was, therefore, a mode of personal conduct and a form of service to the people. The basic reason for all troubles was that the human beings had lost their humanity. The distinguishing feature of his message, unlike that of Marx, is that he did not take into consideration only society but also individuals. Therefore, in order to bring about an effective change in the social order there should be transformation in man’s character. Bolsheviks forgot man and his soul. Consequently, they did not care for his freedom and liberty and gave up all consideration for morality. In fact, it was Gandhi’s broad-minded vision that made him view life as a whole and believe that social reconstruction is impossible unless we try to remake the individual as well. With this end in view, whereas on one hand, he visualised the vivid picture of a desired social order, on the other, he also formulated a
complete ethics for remaking the man and thus tried to make up for the deficiencies and to rectify the discrepancies in the former social philosophies.\textsuperscript{46}

Indeed, the Gandhian concept of social revolutionary change conforms to modern thinking where the destruction of the older and the creation of a new one are supposed to go hand in hand. In Gandhism, the distinction between revolution and evolution is lost. For him, what mattered most in social change was the capacity to assimilate the new radicalism. In effecting such social change, Gandhi was governed not by world appeal to the masses. Gandhi once wrote:

"I have come to the fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy reason, you must move the heart also."\textsuperscript{47}

Besides an appeal to the heart, what was necessary also was a conversion of human nature through service and love which provided the basis of Gandhi's social change towards a social order where the greatest good of each and everyone is ensured.

Gandhi said, "I have claimed that I was a socialist long before those I know in India have awoved their creed. But my socialism was natural to me and not adopted from any book. It comes out of my unshakeable belief in non-violence. No man can be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice where it occurred."\textsuperscript{48}
A Sarvodaya society, according to Gandhi, would be ideal society. It is a self-regulated society in which social harmony would be the main object of life. A state based on Sarvodaya ideal would not be Sovereign state. It is a state where the concept of service rather than of power would predominate. While Gandhi’s ideas were a conglomeration of humanist philosophies of the West, he had skillfully and deftly adapted them in an indigenous idiom with the result that the idiom acquired a new meaning altogether.

The classical four-fold division of Hindu society (Varna Ashrama Dharma) has been equated with caste. Gandhi’s reference in his earlier writings of the caste has to be seen in a historical perspective. Gandhi had said:

“The vast organisation of caste answered not only be religious wants of the community but it answered to its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it dealt with any ruling power. It is not possible the cast system its wonderful power of organization.49

In an article, Gandhi unequivocally attributed the sustenance of Hindu social structure to caste system which contained "the seeds of swaraj" and social reform because of its descriptive and organisational potentialities. Initially,
Gandhi supported caste prohibition on interdining and intermarrying but later on he changed his orthodoxy to permitting this kind of intercourse.

Articulation in favour of Varna system with emphasis on its functional inter-dependence can be traced in most of Gandhi's predecessors and contemporaries. Gandhi continued along the same line, but in so doing, he revised substantially some key concepts.

Untouchability, indeed, is the greatest blot on Hinduism and to remove it there has to be a penance that the caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of untouchables but of the so-called superior castes. Gandhi called these untouchables, Harijans,⁵⁰ the sons of God, and even designated his last Newspaper as Harijan.

Gandhi always regarded non-violence and truth as an instrument for the removal of untouchability. It is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is readily, and in law, an active participant in it. You, must therefore, begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines.⁵¹
Gandhi considered the entry into the temple as a spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables to assure them that they were not outcastes before God. Gandhi wanted the State to undertake the following activities vis-a-vis untouchables:

(a) The temples are renovated spiritually and the correct kind of instruction is imparted;

(b) The State has to improve the economic life of the Harijans, without neglecting either their mental training or literary training;

(c) The State must raise the social status of the untouchables.

He even started a new Weekly entitled Harijan devoted to the campaign of the removal of untouchability, because he felt that, in this matter, education and the like should be presented with all the possible vigour. Gandhi considered education to be a dire necessity for the untouchables. He proposed a few residential schools which would compare favourably with well conducted public schools. As regards parliamentary representation, Gandhi felt that separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. The only thing necessary was to put them on the voter list and provide fundamental rights for them.
in the constitution. Gandhi raised his voice against the British policy of fragmenting India into religious communities under the guise of protection of minorities.

The solution of the communal tension, he wrote, can be made if, firstly, all minorities are given representation in the elected bodies in appropriate proportion and secondly, the public employment should be made by a committee including representative of minorities also. He wanted reservation of seats in the elected bodies only for the transitional period. He suggested that measures should also be taken to reduce the educational, social, political and economic backwardness of various minorities instead of giving artificial protection. Grounds of adequate protection were so well prepared by Gandhi that the Constituent Assembly agreed for reservation of seats to Scheduled Castes and Anglo Indians in the House of people and State Legislatures. Articles 331 and 333 empower the President and Governors respectively to ensure this. Since he began his championship for the cause of the depressed, he paid whole-hearted attention to the cause of the resurrection of the status of women. Several years ago, Rudyard Kipling, an eminent English poet, had opined that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male." 52 Gandhi's conviction about women also bore resemblance to this unusual but meaningful remark. Gandhi believed that the female of the species is
difinitely more courageous and morally superior to the male and that the economic and moral salvation of India rested mainly with the Indian woman for they were going to nurture the future generation. In this, he was governed by the traditional Indian adoration of woman as a deity and the western concept of liberated women. Gandhi believed that the women is man’s co-sharer and co-equal and that the existence of one without the other is meaningless. At the outset, Gandhi was opposed to the inhuman custom of child-marriage which is, in fact, both a moral as well as physical evil. Enforced widowhood was another curse but the reform lay in the hands of the parents who had to be courageous enough to get their child widows remarried. Gandhi strongly condemned prostitution and Devdasi custom which according to him ought to be declared illegal by law. The best solution lay with the women who would carry out a double propaganda, first against women who sell their honour for a livelihood, and then against men who perpetuate prostitution by regarding the women as a symbol of pleasure.

Dowry system was another evil with which marriage had come to be associated. Gandhi believed that a marriage was not a financial transaction, but a sacred relationship and hence, both the dowry givers and takers ought to be taken to the task. Gandhi idolised the Indian women as Grihalakshmi i.e., Goddess of the household, she is the housekeeper and her job is
to create and care for and human race. This definitely reflected the traditional side of Gandhi. Gandhi also believed that an awakening would have to be brought about in the minds of women, coupled with literary education which is so necessary to enable her to assert her natural rights to make her economically independent and also an equal participant in the freedom movement of the country. Thus, both the elements of tradition and modernity were combined in his thought.

Another dimension of Gandhian reform was in the field of education. Educational system and social order are closely related. The former aims at social system preparing the individuals with a particular end in view. In fact, education has been one of the most influential instruments of modernisation. It has led to the mobilisation of people's aspiration for nationalism, liberalism, and freedom. It alone has been responsible for the growth of an enlightened intelligentsia which carried forward not only our movement for independence but relentless struggle for social and cultural reform.

The concept of non-violence is not new to the World. There is enough evidence, when in the past, non-violence was applied on an individual plane in the manner of resistance. But Gandhi's non-violence was clearly innovative in the sense that
he transformed a moral perception into a practical device. It was a successful and scientific technique of social revolution aimed at creating a social order based on a classless and stateless society.

To Gandhi, as against many other philosophers, who have advocated methods of transformation, Satyagraha was a revolutionary technique involving self-suffering, purification and love. Gandhi visualised humanity as a large family and, sought to apply Satyagraha to various fields of activity. It was not necessarily only a political instrument but a much more comprehensive one meant for bringing in its fold all the aspects of life with a view to change the basic structure of society. It was more through the appeal to the heart than to the head. Explaining it, Gandhi says that:

I have come to the fundamental conclusion that if you want something really to be done you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head but penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up to the inner understanding of man and, therefore, is more enduring. The method of self-purification is the root of the technique of non-cooperation.\textsuperscript{53}
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