

Gandhi's Approaches to Social movement¹

Abstract

M. K. Gandhi a well known figure of the Indian freedom Movement is popularly known for his practice of truth and non-violence. However, he led so many movements in India as well as in outside of India through nonviolence and involvement of masses. His focus on nonviolence and involvement of masses seeks *Swaraj*². Gandhi involved masses in his movements to achieve independence. In addition, he led movements against racial discrimination, peasant exploitation, class repression, untouchability, gender discrimination, British rule and to established a self-reliant society through his various establishments and practices. He wanted changes in society through individual transformation. He started such kind of ideal practices like simple and community living and advised the people to follow those ideas. It was Gandhi who gave unique theory of movement i.e. *Satyagraha* which he started when he was in South Africa. He gave a chance to the common people to participate in social transformation as well as in national movement.

Introduction

Gandhi led several social movements in both South Africa and India. He led movements against racial discrimination in South Africa, against peasant exploitation in Champaran and Kheda. Beside he also struggled against class repression, untouchability, gender discrimination and British rule etc. through mass actions. He has established a number of organizations and settlements like Natal India Congress, Phoenix Settlement, Tolstoy Farm, in South Africa and Kocharab Ashram and Sabarmati Ashram and Sewagram Ashram in India. In addition, he also established many other organisations and published newspapers to reach to the common people to raise their consciousness, make them

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² Swaraj seeks a society based on equality, cooperation, harmony, nonviolence, simple living and respect for all living beings.

aware and develop collective action among them. He also tried to bring about a radical change of the mindset of the individuals to that end, he introduced eleven vows (Satya-Truth, Ahimsa-Nonviolence, Brahmacharya-Celibacy, Asteya-Non-stealing, Aparigraha or Asangraha-Non-possession, Sharira-Shrama; Physical labour or Bread Labour, Asvada-Control of Palate, Abhaya-Fearlessness, Sarva-Dharma-Samanatva- Equal respect for all Religions, Swadeshi-Duty towards Neighbour and Asprishyatanivarana - Removal of Untouchability) which imbibed perfectly could really change the individual consciousness or new consciousness among the people. Now it would be relevant to note here that there were many views about the social movements for radical change.

For instance, there was a view that radical change should start at the individual level. If such a change turns into a mass movement that would lead to the emergence of good society, on the contrary there was another school of thought that change at individual level would take hundreds of years. Hence, they would have to be carried out at systematic level. In particular, Marxist believed in such approach to social change. They also believe that state power is the key factor and major instrument in any scheme or programme of the social change (Mishra, 1975). In sharp contrast to above Marxian perspective Gandhi believed that in the absence of state power civil society organisation could bring about radical change in a given a society. He did not have much faith in the institution of state as he looked at it as a symbol of organised violence. Therefore, he transcended the debate about individual verses systematic change. He suggested that in any scheme of social movement one has to work both at individual and systematic level (Thomson, 1993). To that end, he suggested three major instrument viz. eleven vows (for the individual and constructive programme, and Satyagraha at collective level. This is the distinct nature of Gandhi's approach to social movement. If we closely examine the social political movements led by Gandhi at different time and different places, we could find that he attempted to apply all the three above instruments of social change in his scheme of themes. The present paper seeks to examine some of the Gandhian social movements to see to what extent he succeeded in apply these instruments of change and to what results.

Gandhi's major works

With his experience of vegetarian club from England, Gandhi formed Natal India Congress, Phoenix settlement and Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and Sabarmati Ashram, Sewagram Ashram, *Harijan Sewak Sangh*, *Sarvodaya Mandal*, All India Charkha Sangh, *Satyagraha Sabha*, Gandhi

Seva Sangh, Adim Jati Seva Sangh, Gujarat Vidyapith (Educational), Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Samiti, Rahstra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, Puna Naturopathy Centre and many other educational, and social reform organisations in India. Though these organization and establishment he attempted to put his ideas on social movement in practice. Gandhi rejected class or caste approach to social movement and really put his faith in mass action and got cross sectional support that comprised different section of society. It was such a perspective that built up a new Congress organization across caste, class, creed, and religion thus congress became a fighting organization committed to the nation cause. Apart from that, Gandhi raised a number of social organizations as stated above for regeneration of Indian social economic cultural and educational field (Thomsaon, 1993: Gandhi, 1955). The main objective of his numerous establishment and practices were to inter mobilise the masses to carry out his ideas and approaches to social movements.

Gandhi's Movement against Racial Discrimination

Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893 to practice law under one-year contract. He faced racism in South Africa due to a law. Gandhi found that this law restricted the rights of Indians in South Africa. During a journey Gandhi was forced to leave from the first-class compartment of the train. However, Gandhi refused to leave first-class compartment, therefore; he was thrown off from the train. After this incident, Gandhi decided to fight against injustice and defend the rights of Indians who were living in the South Africa.

When his contract with Abdula Seth expired, he spontaneously decided to remain in South Africa. He launched a campaign against a legislative law because this law had provision to denie right to vote for Indians in South Africa. He formed the Natal Indian Congress and drew international attention to the plight of Indians in South Africa. In 1906, the Transvaal government brought another law, which restricted the rights of Indians. This law had provision to legitimate only Christian marriages. Gandhi organized a campaign against this law. It was his first campaign of *Satyagraha*, or mass civil disobedience in South Africa. After seven years of protest, he negotiated a compromise agreement with African government where it was provision that non Christian marriages would also be recognized (Nauriya, 2006: Gandhi, 1968).

Gandhi's Movement against Peasant's Exploitation

Gandhi's thought and action seeks wellness of common man and rural people because majority of Indians resided in rural area and they were depended on agriculture. Therefore, it can be said that his emphasis on rural area is directly connected with wellness of peasants. However, through the Champaran peasant struggle Gandhi directly came into contact with the peasants. Champaran and Kheda movements are recognized major agitations against peasant exploitation led by Gandhi.

Gandhi went to Champaran on the request of Rajkumar Shukla. There he saw the problems of peasants. The problem of peasants at Champaran was, related with *Tinkathiya* rule. According to *Tinkathiya* rule, peasants had to cultivate indigo plants in three *Kattha* out of every *Bigha*. Gandhi saw that farmers were afraid of their landlords and government servants. Gandhi thought to make them fearless, therefore; he requested to some lawyers for their advocacy. Gandhi along with landlords, met with collector and there officers but collector asked him to live Tirhut. However, Gandhi refused it. Gandhi was summand to the court. This news spread everywhere like wildfire. A large number of farmers came to the court to see Gandhi. So, magistrate gets back summon. Now peasants became fearless and Gandhi felt face to face with Ahimsa. This was Gandhi's first movement in India for peasants.

Gandhi visited in different villages of Bihar. He saw the actual condition of Bihar. He found dirt at in villages, dirt on roads and dirt at every place, and untouchability. Gandhi realized that villagers were not practicing organized work. Therefore, he thought their mode of living required a change. As per his experience, he thought that work of permanent nature was not possible without proper village education. Therefore, Gandhi decided to open primary school in six villages. He gave one condition to villagers that they would provide boarding and lodging for the teachers and his colleagues would see after to the other expenses (Gandhi, 1927: Tendulkar, 2016: Prasad, 1957).

The Kheda movement was second major move of Gandhi for peasants. It was the consequence of the financial atrocities afflicted by the landlords of Britishers on the farmers of the Kheda a village in Gujarat near Anand. In 1918, the villages of Kheda were massively affected by the floods and famine that resulted in the destruction of the crop. The farmers requested the British government to exempt them from the payment of taxes. However, the authorities refused to give exemption. Therefore, villagers started movement under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahatma Gandhi. They launched a campaign against the government and in addition to it they took pledged for the non-payment of taxes. As a result, the government threatened the peasant that government would seizure their land. However, the peasants remain undeterred. After five months

of persistent struggle, the British government agreed to off the payment of taxes and also returned the seized properties of the peasants, in May 1918 (Gandhi, 1927).

Bardoli movement was third major move of Gandhi for peasants. It was launched in mid-February 1928. The reason of Bardoli movement was quite like Kheda. Gandhi selected Bardoli as a suitable place for launching civil disobedience campaign and stated some constructive work in the entire Bardoli taluka. Peasants of Bardoli participated in constructive work with great enthusiasm. Therefore, Gandhi said that peasants of Bardoli were the child of the non-cooperation movement. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel became the principle figure of this movement. Later on Sardar Patel advocated farmer's cooperatives for the benefit of farmers (Vasava, 2017; Mandal, n.d).

Gandhi's Movement against Untouchability

Gandhi wanted total eradication of untouchability because for him, untouchability was one of the questions of life and death for Hinduism, he repeatedly said it. Gandhi believed that if untouchability remains in Hinduism it would perishes Hinduism and if untouchability would eradicate from the Hinduism, Hinduism would give a definite message to the world (Gandhi, 1980;; Rao, 2017). Therefore, Gandhi started the temple-entry campaign and the travelling campaign against untouchability in 1932 and got greater success. He established an extensive organisation, the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* to eradicate untouchability and got massive support.

The *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (hereafter HSS) was founded by Gandhi in 1932. The main cause for its establishments was Gandhi's worried about Harijan service and the promotion of village industries. Gandhi selected Sevagram due to a number of reasons. Harijan Seva was one of them. He wanted to make HSS a laboratory to fight against untouchability and other social evils. It was a non-profit organization to work the issues of untouchability as well as the upliftment of the Harijans i.e. scheduled castes and dalits in India. In addition, the objective of the HSS was to enable the depressed classes to access public spaces like temples, schools, water resources and roads because in those days these things were severely restricted to the untouchables in parts of the locality. The acts of inter caste marriages and inter dining were also restrained. The HSS worked on these issues under the leadership and guidance of Gandhi. These were the attempts by Gandhi and his colleague to create a society based on equality for all and bringing change among the people, and community (Gandhi, 1980; Gandhi 1936; Rao, 2017).

Gandhi's Movement against Gender Discrimination

There were two schools of thoughts, which explained the condition of women in India. The first school of thought believed that the status of women was never been good in Indian society, while second school of thought believed that the position of women in Indian society was quite respectable. Shrimati Sarojini Naidu, who played an important role in the Indian independence movement, believed that the position of women in the ancient Indian society was very respectful. In this connection, the example of Maitreya and Gargi is given. Therefore, she emphasized that women should get rights as they enjoyed in ancient India. The historians of first category say that the condition of women worsened during the Mughal period. Due to renaissance of nineteenth century in India, women got some respectful position in the society because of the efforts of some thinkers and reformers like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Verislingam, Swami Vivekananda and Jyotiba Phule etc (Pradhan, 2008). During Indian national movement, Gandhi played important role in women emancipation and brought them into Indian national movement.

Gandhi opposed those practices that were injurious to women, girls and gender equality. He was against the practice of female infanticide. He observed that the birth of a girl was generally unwelcome because of customs like girl was to be married off and had to live and work in her marital home and dowry. He considered these practices as evil and found that lack of education and information was the root cause of all kinds of women's exploitation. Therefore, Gandhi emphasized that education is necessary for women as it is for men because education is an essential aspect for enabling women to assert their rights. He was also in favour of economic independence of women while some people had fear that economic independence of women would lead to disrupt domestic life. Gandhi recommended the work like spinning that would help the women to get economic empowerment without disturbing the domestic life. Moreover, Gandhi recommended equal payment for men and women and equal property rights to women (Kaushik, n.d). When Gandhi started active participation in the Congress, he contributed to associate women in the freedom movement. He organized several conferences that were held at national and provincial levels in various cities of the country. As a result of it, women participated in the freedom movement. They burned holi of foreign clothes, raised their voice for prohibition and Sarojini Naidu led salt movement (Pradhan, 2008).

Gandhi's Movement for Self-Reliant Society

Gandhi was a prominent leader of the freedom movement. He wanted to make India free from British rule as well from inequality, injustice and poverty etc. He called it *Swaraj* and wanted to work out a path towards it. He fought against inequality, extreme poverty, backwardness, and socio-economic challenges throughout of his life. In other word, it can be said that he wanted a society based on decentralized economy, self-sufficiency and involvement of common people. In his all moves he emphasised on *Swadeshi*, constructive work (1. Communal Unity 2. Removal of Untouchability 3. Prohibition 4. Khadi 5. Other Village Industries 6. Village Sanitation 7. New or Basic Education 8. Adult Education 9. Women 10. Education in Health and Hygiene 11. Provincial Language 12. National Language 13. Economic Equality 14. Kisans 15. Labour 16. Adivasis 17. Lepers 18. Students village industries), *Panchayati Raj*, nonviolence and non-cooperation. He also presented a scheme of basic education or *Nai Talim* and built institution on the idea of it. His institution built on the idea of basic education cantered on the principles of economic self-sufficiency and Self-Reliant Society (Gandhi, 1921: Bhuimali, n.d).

Gandhi's Movement against British Rule

Mahatma Gandhi a most recognized figure of the Indian Nationalist Movement led so many movements against British Rule in South Africa as well as in India through nonviolence, started with South Africa. He led three major movements against British rule in India.

The Non-Cooperation Movement

The non-cooperation movement was the first freedom movement led by Gandhi. It was started in September 1920 after Jallianwala Bagh massacre and continued till February 1922. Gandhi called it non-cooperation because he believed that the main reason for British success in India was the support of Indians to British administration and the east India Company. Gandhi was of the view that if Indians would stop co-operating with the Britishers, they would be forced to give rights to Indians because Britishers were in minority. This movement gained popularity; millions of people came to boycott establishments of British Government. Many people left their jobs, removed their children from government schools, and avoided government offices. However, the Non-Cooperation Movement ended when a violent mob erupted at Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh. The mob burned a police station and killed 23 police officials (Pradhan, 2008: Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Panikkar & Mahajan, 2016).

The Civil Disobedience:

Gandhi launched the civil disobedience movement on March 12, 1930. The Dandi March, was a part of this movement. Gandhi also practised *Satyagraha* in this movement. For Gandhi, this movement was second move towards freedom. Dandi march was a campaign designed to oppose the British monopoly on salt. Gandhi started it with 79 followers and ended with thousands. They marched for 240-mile in 24 days. The protesters reached to the coastal town of Dandi and produced salt from saltwater without paying tax to the British government. Gandhi gave moving speeches about the inhumanity of a salt tax and told the salt Satyagraha as a struggle of the poor people. British authority arrested Gandhi. However, the movement earned national and international attention and increased the number of Gandhi's followers (Pradhan, 2008: Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Panikkar & Mahajan, 2016).

The Quit India Movement

During the Second World War the British Government promised Indians that they would be given some independence after the war. However, they offered only some concessions to the Indian demands such as the right to make independent provincial constitutions. This proposal was not acceptable for the leaders of Indian national movement. This disagreement resulted into the quit India movement. The Quit India Movement began on August 8, 1942. The India National Congress Committee, under the leadership of Gandhi, called for a mass movement against the British government. Gandhi made a “Do or Die” speech. British authority acted immediately and arrested active members of the Indian National Congress party. However, the nation once again entered mass civil disobedience and introduced the idea that now the British government would not be able to control Indian emotions. This movement somehow, made it clear that British would not remain in India for long time. And, at last, India gained independence from British rule in 1947 (Pradhan, 2008: Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, Panikkar & Mahajan, 2016).

Gandhi's Movement for Communal Harmony

Gandhi felt the need of religious unity during his stay in South Africa. He worked hard to establish harmony between Hindus and Muslims. He worked for it in India also. Gandhi supported Khilafat Movement. The Khilafat issue greatly agitated the minds of Muslims Gandhi delivered speech at the Khilafat Conference held on 24- 11-1919 to bring the two communities together. Gandhi felt that there are no huge differences between Hindu-Muslim. Therefore, Hindu-Muslim unity could easily be strengthened. He never found serious differences between the Hindus and Muslims and

among other minorities as well. He insisted that the Hindus who are in a majority in the country should help the minority community and should never entertain any idea of enforcing their rights but try to win the hearts of the minority community (Mazmudar, 2003).

Gandhi tried to unite all sections of Indian people against British rule and get independence. We got independence on August 15, 1947. However, independence came at a huge cost. Hindus and Muslims who fought soldier to soldier against the British Rule. On the eve of independence, they fought against each other that led ultimately to the partition of the country. They became enemy of each other. The Noakhali riot that began on 10 October 1946 is generally considered as a reaction to the great Kolkata killings of 16 August 1946. However, it had certain characteristics that make it imperative to study it differently. Gandhi worked hard to stop communal violence. When India was becoming independent, Gandhi fasted in Kolkata to stop communal riots that began on 10 October 1946 (Batabyal, 1997).

Conclusion

Gandhi successfully led different movements through his idea of non-violence and *Satyagraha* and engaged common masses with freedom movement. He worked for betterment of the society. He fought for right of Indian residing in South Africa through various establishments. He launched non-cooperation movement, civil disobedience/ salt Satyagraha and quit India movement to make India free from British rule. At the same time, he worked for Swaraj that seeks a society based on equality, cooperation, harmony, nonviolence, simple living and respect for all living beings etc. Gandhi made different establishments, practised eleven vows, constructive programmes etc. to achieve freedom and social transformation. Therefore, it is essential to understand Gandhi's role to meet the problems that we are facing today. He made establishment as per need and time that is still relevant in present Indian context. India still needs the same kinds of establishments that Gandhi did, to tackle contemporary problems.

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