SOCIAL INCLUSION OF UNTOUCHABLES IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES OF MAHATMA GANDHI

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Abstract

The social exclusion and inclusion have come up a lot on different social levels. Today we talk much about ways of possible development. However, mostly keys to development should be found in the past, on the first steps of an idea. That is why it is crucial to be able to turn back and to use the most effective Indian and world practices to get the best results in the future. Indian best social inclusion practices have roots in Mahatma Gandhi philosophical and views. The purpose of the article is to examine and investigate the leading position of Gandhi sociological paradigm and to show its influence on Indian modern social inclusion theory as well as social diversity and sustainability practices.

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Recent studies from India and abroad have shown that the problem of social inclusion and exclusion of vulnerable population are still in the focus of view (Apassami, 1996). Problems of diversity, inclusion, sustainability are in the focus of attention of most modern Indian social studies. The rates of social and economic inequality facing Indians of different origin compared to their fellow citizens are very high (Thorat, Joshi, 2015). Dalit and the Advisees, as a part of Hindus population who belongs to the lowest castes, faced discrimination in skilled and semi-skilled occupations in the informal sector of the economy (Singh and Thorat 2014). The same situation is in job discrimination in hiring in the private sector labour market (Thorat and Newman 2012). In the case of the ex-untouchables, the lowest of the castes, the possibility to get some jobs are still mostly linked to caste identities. The problem can be solved by providing diversity, inclusion, stereotype-free critical thinking, tolerance, equality as the primary social values. Also, the great source of such values can be found in the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, the most exceptional Indian leader and philosopher.

Gandhi was engaged in the study of interpersonal, intergroup and individual-group relations that affected society and started many reforms and revolutionary changes in the contemporary Indian society.

Gandhi represented his views on social, cultural, economic and political problems along with the possible solutions, identifying the individual as the most critical element of the society. Society and world is the only summation of individuals.

That is why in Gandhi's views; the transformation of the individual is preferred more than a change of society or world in whole. Gandhi always believed in the power and responsibility of a person as the leading creator of reality.

Gandhi shared his sociological and philosophical ideas as the concept of eleven commandments aimed to complete transformation of the individual and international system, "Satyagraha" as a political, social and economic transformation of society. These Gandhian ideas represent his vision to change the existing world order and to provide diversity, inclusion, tolerance, equality as the principal social values.

The eleven commandments or "vows", in the context of Satyagraha, are the basic principles of social harmony and establishment of the world order by Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi, the core values of new world order are (1) Satya (truth); (2) Ahinsa (non-violence); (3) Asteya (non-stealing); (4) Aparigraha (non-possession); (5) brahmacharya (celibacy, self-restraint, chastity); (6) Sharir-shrama (physical or manual work, or bread-labour); (7) Aswadya (control of the palate); (8) Abhaya (fearlessness); (9) Sarvadharmasambhaava (tolerance and love for all religions); (10) Swadeshi (love for one's country/ neighbour); and, (11) Sparse-bhavana (abjuring untouchability) (Singh, 2018).

Gandhi's world is man-centred, not system centred. Gandhi always talked about personal moral autonomy and the possibility of lasting liberation of personality from his own lower self and social dictates. On Gandhi's views, the ideal social order should allow realizing moral autonomy for every person and encourages personality to find a way to get this autonomy in a conducive to individual and social well-being manner.

The problem of attitude towards the lowest caste representatives, untouchables, was tightly connected to Gandhian social views; thus it was the first point and the milestone of his ideas of social development at the same time.

Untouchability is a type of ostracism towards a minority groups by exclusion or segregation them from the active social life using social custom or legal mandate. The term describes the treatment of the Dalit communities in India. A recent study of attitude towards the vulnerable population in India assumed that "Notwithstanding the likelihood of under-reporting of the practice of untouchability, 70 per cent of the population reported not indulging in this practice. It is an encouraging sign (Thorat, Joshi, 2015).

Mahatma Gandhi was fighting against untouchability as a kind of discrimination and intolerance during the whole life. It was a core of his sustainability and social growth movement.

Gandhi opposed untouchability despite active resistance from the side of his closest associates. His speech on untouchability at Nagpur in 1920 was one of the best examples of social struggle for the rights of vulnerable Indian citizens; Gandhi called untouchability as a great evil in Hindu society. According to his words, phenomena of untouchability is not unique to the Hindu society, but has deeper roots because Europeans in South Africa treat "all of us, Hindus and Muslims, as untouchables; we may not reside in their midst, nor enjoy the rights which they do" (Gandhi, 1961).

In 1932, Gandhi made a new attempt to improve the lives of the untouchables. He created a new name for untouchables whom he started calling as Harijans or "the children of God". On 8 May 1933, Gandhi began a 21-day fast of self-purification and launched a one-year campaign to help the Harijan movement. However, this new movement was not only for the Dalit community. It allowed the leader of Dalit Ambedkar to blame Gandhi as paternalistic and undermining Dalit political rights person. Ambedkar used the situation and described Gandhi as someone who wished to retain the caste system. Ambedkar and Gandhi debated their ideas and concerns, where both tried to persuade each other.

In September 1932 Gandhi, being imprisoned in Yeravda Jail, he even went on a fast expressing protest against the untouchables discrimination and segregation in the electoral arrangement for the new Indian constitution.

"Untouchability, as it is practised in Hinduism today is, in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. In our opinion, it has no sanction whatsoever in the Hindu Shastras, taken as a whole" (Gandhi, 1961)

Gandhi often repeats that the untouchables were not depressed; they were suppressed by the Hindus, who had suppressed themselves by suppressing them (Gandhi, 1961).

Grounding on his ten values, Gandhi proposed a new system of social change. Gandhian social change system should be identified with such social concepts as human dignity and equality; the improvement of attitude towards labour as towards the highest dignity; national self-containment policy; the trusteeship principle proclaiming; truth and ahimsa domination; the establishment of a socially inclusive educational system; tolerance recognition as a fundamental value; inseparability of results and measures or tools; preference of rational and scientific view of life (Gandhi, 1961) .

In Gandhian system of views, human dignity and equality are recognized as the guiding principles and objectives for social reconstruction. Such attitude refers to his belief that every human being as a part of divinity in him must be recognized as having worth and the highest respect, in order to feel and have enough freedom to achieve his full potential. It was expected that these concepts should be held beyond individuals to group identities (religious communities, cultural and linguistic entities, regions, and other distinctive social collectives).

Indian political leader believed that people must fight for their right but using peaceful weapons in order to achieve sustainability and social harmony. The person must struggle for her liberation, and it does not matter if it is struggling against untouchability and for gender equality, because the differs of struggle differ, means and tools are the same.

Gandhi stayed on a position that caste or classes are based neither on inequality nor on inferiority (Gandhi, 1961). He was sure that Indians could freely intermarry whomever they want to, but no one should expect everyone to become his friend. Every personality, stated Gandhi, has a right to choose his or her inner circle.

Gandhian views had a great influence to the modern concepts of personal and social development in India. Today the countries like India are well known for their diversified nature in different aspects (rituals and customs, faith, geographical differences, linguistic elements and other social aspects).

Social Diversity in modern Indian society mostly is the differences caused by religion, culture, incomes etc. Mostly people who belongs to different religions, have another cultural backgrounds, social and economic status, use different language live side by side, are neighbors or even relatives. This phenomena has a name of social diversity, which is regarded as something which makes this universe to be more livable and attractive.

Gandhi wrote: "If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch, I shall have to pay for it; and if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and, according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation" (Gandhi, 1961).

This principle, known as "Satyagraha" was the main tool of social inclusion development in India. Satiagraha is a form of nonviolent resistance or civil resistance. "Satyagraha" was created as a combination of Sanskrit words Satya ("truth") and Agraha ("polite insistence", or "holding firmly to"). Satya is derived from the word "sat", which means "being". Nothing exists in reality except Truth. Satyagraha says that truth means: a) truth in speech, as opposed to falsehood, b) what is real, as opposed to nonexistent (asat) and c) good as opposed to evil, or bad. This was very important due to Gandhi's understanding of and faith in nonviolence: "The world rests upon the bedrock of Satya or truth. Asatya, meaning untruth, also means nonexistent, and Satya or truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that which is, can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of Satyagraha in a nutshell" (Gandhi, 1961).

For Gandhi, Satyagraha went far beyond meaning of "passive resistance" and became the main source and power in practice of non-violent behavior. Gandhi proposed Satyagraha as not only a tactic to be used in social or political struggle, but also as an universal methodology to keep resistance to injustice and harm. Gandhi founded the Sabarmati Ashram in order to teach Satyagraha. He asked Satyagrahis to follow the proposed principles:

- to have a living faith in God
- to be leading a chaste life, and be willing to die or lose all his possessions
- to be a habitual khadi weaver and spinner
- to abstain from alcohol and other intoxicants (Gandhi, 1961).

Proposed rules of Satiagraha were the first steps towards future sustainability and independence.

Modern principles of social diversity are grounded on the Satiagraha as an effective way of community development. Being proposed by Gandhi, Satyagraha played very important role in the Indian independence movement during Gandhi's earlier struggles in South Africa for Indian rights and later while fighting for independence. During the second half of 20 century Satyagraha theory influenced Martin Luther King's and

James Bevel's campaigns during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and many other social justice and similar movements. During the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany, Gandhi offered Satyagraha as a method of combating oppression and genocide.

Such ideas were born in Gandhi's activity and later have influenced the aims, methods, curriculum and subject of modern education. Gandhi believed that only through education could a society excel and improve. He thought that a poor education would lead to the downfall of people.

Secrets of Gandhi's success are Faith, Action and Populism, the three most important aspects of his life. Gandhi's extra ordinary communion with ordinary people was another of his secrets. In contrast to many of our present day leaders of this highly democratic world, Gandhi was a true leader and friend of the people.

Consequently, the views of Gandhi formed a philosophical and sociological concept of the modern understanding of inclusion and diversity. Providing nonviolent civil disobedience as principal life and social paradigm, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

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