

## RELEVANCE OF GANDHIJI AND AMBEDKAR, AS SOCIAL REFORMERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

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### ABSTRACT

Contemporary social order in India is at once anxious and fear stimulant especially from the point of view of the marginalized sects like Dalits and other minorities, who get deprived of their fundamental freedom and rights. Academics related to social analysis, inclines to the teachings of Gandhiji and Ambedkar, for solutions in the present problems, as they are the two of the greatest masters of social reformation, from the perspective of the underprivileged. The present study makes an attempt, to look into the attitudes and ideals, put forward by these two social reformers in a comparative study framework. Only a few contributed to the social empowerment and the plight of the Harijans, as Gandhi and Ambedkar did.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Analysis, Gandhiji and Ambedkar, Greatest Masters

### INTRODUCTION

The dichotomy of views between these two thinkers might have brought about, by the different background they belonged to. When Gandhi belonged to a caste of Vaishya status, Ambedkar was born into an Untouchable caste. It is this belonging difference, that made wide discrepancies in their attitudes to the social problems, like untouchability in India. When Gandhi took the problem from the viewpoint of an upper caste Hindu, who wanted to eradicate Untouchability from the fabric of Indian society, Ambedkar identified himself as championing the fight against the exploitation, which the untouchables had been suffering under the upper caste Hindus, down centuries. If the former took a sacred view towards Hindu doctrines, the latter believed that, the social inequality in India has been partly contributed by the structural conscience of Hinduism. Still, both these thinkers wanted an Indian society, based on social justice and fraternity, equality but differed on the manner to achieve it.

Looking into the formative influences on these two philosophers, we can see that, the early phase in their life contributed much to their ideas. Gandhi belonged to the Kathiawad peninsula, which is a part of Gujarat now. He was from the Vaishya caste, known as the modh Bania. The Bania caste was rich and prosperous. They were much orthodoxical and conservative. They highlighted tradition in every walk of their life. They were influential among their contemporaries. They were political leaders and some of the members from Gandhi's family were prime-ministers in the prestigious states of the peninsula.

Gandhi diluted his rigid views, with his interaction with the life, at Africa. There, he developed the capacity to compromise. He was tolerant to the core and a humanistic religion, beyond traditional notions came to his very blood and he started respecting the dignity of man in general, irrespective of caste and creed. It can be argued that, it is this village background that instilled the spirit, for tolerance and non violence in Gandhi's blood. Gandhi disapproved conflictual

struggle, throughout his social career. If we look at Gandhi's life, in its formative days we can see that, here was a constant search for amity and consensus, in village affairs and staunch opposition to partisanship. He emphasized the need to avoid open clashes, celebration of victories and mortification of defeats, as a widely prevalent means of resolving disputes and scuffles.

His empathy with the under privileged class, can be seen from an instance in his autobiography, which can be cited as a valid document for social equality. He was for the cause of admitting the untouchable family, to his ashram near Ahmedabad. In 1920, Gandhi said: "Swaraj is unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability, as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity. In 1921 he said, "I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an Untouchable".

In 1937, Gandhi said, "One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood, by being a scavenger, and then, do whatever else he likes. For, a scavenger is as worthy of his hire, as a lawyer or your President; that, according to me is Hinduism". From this statement, it is implied that, all varnas have equal worth and value. Gandhi believed in Varnashramadharma, the religious division of society into four groups: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. These four-fold ranking of societal order and the associated traditional duties were important, for the preservation of harmony and the growth of the soul. Gandhi says: "The law of Varna prescribes that a person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers". It is here we can see one of the pertinent views, where he differs from Ambedkar.

Looking into the formative influences on Ambedkar's early years, we can easily make out that, there was a gradual but deliberately voluntary distancing from Hinduism and a caste ridden - Hindu society. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar had a childhood facing the harsh realities of life. His elders were serving the upper class and the bitter experiences in the family exerted indelible influences, on the formation of Ambedkar's social views. Rooted in the fundamentals of religion, his elder generation was very pious and they were very strictly regular in religious observances. Their piety towards divine values and the faith in the equality before God, played much role in the later years of Ambedkar's social conscience. A sort of esoteric belief in the direct communion with God, defying the established structure of religions and traditionally rooted dogmatic system, made its impact in Ambedkar's decision, to reject Hinduism in his later life. Ambedkar somewhere believed that, it was this structure of Hinduism that legitimized caste system and untouchability. Untouchability is one of the cardinal areas, where Gandhi and Ambedkar converge in their opposition, traditional Hinduism. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar believed, untouchability as a symbol of the evil of inhumanism in Hinduism. Ambedkar's experiences from childhood and early youth in the cantonments at Bombay, where his father was working during his last years of High school education, gave opportunities to have an idea on how Untouchable youth of his time suffer.

It is to be noted that, the liberal attitudes supported in the English education has made an impact in the perspective formation, in Ambedkar's life. Here, he was a little bit different from Gandhi, who was a staunch opponent against English culture, as we see it in his Hind Swaraj. In the political and social climate too, there was a democratic interest in launching also, horizontal caste solidarities and dilution rigidity and an encouragement intercaste relationships. Coupled with the interest in English education and hatred towards Hindu caste ridden social structure, Ambedkar yearned for a social fabric, rooted in the democratic ethical values.

A kind of split in the conscience of Ambedkar, can be seen as an ambivalence played between his reverence towards the scriptures and abhorrence towards the inequality, in Hinduism. His upbringing colored in the ambience of the

recitation of the Hindu epics, mellowed his sensibility with great devotion. But, when he realized the space that, the scriptures give for caste ranking and that, within Hinduism, there could be no liberation from untouchability, he was hardening his sensibility to distance from the scriptures.

He bucked himself for the reformation of the society and the upliftment of his people, in the early decades of twentieth century and in 1927, things went so radical and his mind was already made up, for fight against inequality confidently, when the Manusmriti was burnt in his presence, at a large public meeting. In 1935, he made the historic and historical announcement, about his decision to leave Hinduism. On October 14th, 1956, Ambedkar did without Hinduism and embraced Buddhism, along with hundreds of his followers. Buddhism, he found as a space for equality and non violence, towards anybody in any sense. He accepted Buddhism as he believed that, it espoused egalitarian values, without resorting to the violent methods of the then communism.

The Indian National Movement led by Gandhi in the first half of the twentieth century left no one in the country untouched and in fact inspired the workers, the peasants, middle class youth as well as the upper class to forge a meaningful unity and orientation against British imperialism.

Ambedkar freed his people started working like them, and wrote a series of literary pieces in his later years on religious, social, and political philosophy with a view to concretizing the forgotten message of Budha, of early Christianity and of major philosophical foundations in the world. If, Ambedkar was using his pen and speech, as a powerful weapon for social change, Gandhi was a political activist in the true and manifold sense of the term. The energy generated by these leaders was indeed immense, in the history of the emancipation of the marginalized sections in India. Perhaps, it is their writings concerning freedom, national identity, social equality and democracy, that assumed them an indelible position in the mindscape of, both the nations and their people. The two greatest leaders, who preached universal love, non-violence, concern for the marginalized, a moral stance in whatever we do, argued for a non-violent resolution of conflicts among individuals, groups and nations.

Gandhi's principles are based on his faith in Indianness and it is here that, he differs from Ambedkar who even radically deviated from Indianness and embraced Buddhism. His book Hind Swaraj, reiterates this. If we make a detailed evaluation of this work, from an ethical criticism's framework, we can see that, he has high rated Indian civilization to all other civilizations, from the rest of the world. In chapter VI of the book, Gandhi dwells in detail his views on Civilization. He denies material well-being, as the mark of civilization. He says, modern civilization is not just materialist, but is indulged in immoral and irreligious aspects. Modern civilization enslaves people with "the luxuries that money can buy". In the chapter titled "The Condition of India" he writes "India is ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization.... We are turning away from God." India's suffering is due to our turning away from a religious life and accepting modern civilization. His moral and social activism takes much space in the present study. Gandhi nationalism and anti colonial resistance are to be seen in a work that deals with the sentiments of the marginalized. In the chapter "What is True Civilization?" he writes "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty." In this sense, India has nothing to learn from anyone else. "the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immortality." Passages of these types will be examined in the Cultural Studies platform from a Fourth World Literature point of view. Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God is Within You is compared to Hind Swaraj in the course of this project. The study gives a broad review of how Mahatma Gandhi had found

in Leo Tolstoy, a true mentor and moral guide and their mutual support for mankind. Tolstoy's last letter and his entries in his diary indicate that, Tolstoy had greatly admired Gandhi's work, as a unique effort in non-violent resistance. If we place this book against the Annihilation of Caste by Ambedkar, we understand the fundamental difference of opinion between the two.

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