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SYSTEMATIC STATEMENT OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S  
THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

DISSERTATION

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This study presents the major ideas of Mahatma Gandhi on social stratification and social inequality. The methodology consists of systematically reading and analyzing the literature through which the theoretical components of social stratification in Gandhi's writings become more explicit, and evaluating these theoretical components.

A systematic statement of Gandhi's theory of social stratification included the following five components. First, social differentiation is inherent in human nature. Gandhi believed in the universality of social differentiations and was convinced that societies were organized into the divisions on the basis of vocations. Second, relations among strata imply that a division of labor is essential for the stability and organization of society. Gandhi also implied that this division of labor is necessary and functional. Third, normative patterns establish traditions of heredity. To Gandhi, the four divisions in society defined a person's "calling" which is essential for social organization. Fourth, the system of stratification is the universal law that everyone is obliged to follow.

Gandhi tried to legitimize social stratification through moral and religious values of the society. Fifth, social stratification system defines duties only and does not confer any privileges. To Gandhi, the divisions of people into strata was the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress.

While accepting some form of social stratification for the benefit of total functioning of the society, Gandhi refused to accept that social inequality necessarily grows out of the process of social stratification. To maintain the hereditary law of social stratification and reduce the inequality, Gandhi suggested the abolition of the present caste system and the revival of four orders of social organization, the removal of the concept of untouchability, the regulation of trusteeship, decentralization of power, the increase of women's status, and vocational education for all.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major orientation of the study in terms of its objectives, significance, and conceptual framework.

The concept of "social stratification" implies "first, that unequally ranked strata or classes exist and, second, that these rankings are relatively stable over time" (1, p. IX). Social stratification is the system of a "more general phenomenon called social inequality--which may be defined as any evaluated social distinction among individuals or groups (17, p. 5). The term "social inequality" is so general that it applies equally to the minute differentiations within a small group and to the elaborate ranks, rules and rituals of an empire. It is the "condition whereby people have unequal access to valued resources, services and positions in the society" (13, p. 11). Examples of inequality are slavery, communism, caste, class, private clubs, and political parties. "Social inequality grows out of the process of social differentiation, which is the perception of differences in individuals, social positions or groups" (17, p. 5).

Physical attractiveness, athletic ability, or achievement, as well as any other quality or role which

is considered to be important in the culture can serve as the criterion for social differentiation which occurs in all societies. "The significance of social differentiation is that when it is combined with its twin process, social evaluation, social inequality emerges" (17, p. 5). Social evaluation is a common process by which people tend to approve or disapprove, develop preferences, and judge (3, pp. 47-48). Social inequality, the result of the social evaluation, often accompanies social differentiation. It occurs in most human relationships. Social stratification exists only when social inequality becomes structurally patterned and intergenerationally transmitted. Social stratification is usefully defined "as the institutionalization of power arrangements that perpetuate intergenerational patterns of economic, political and prestige inequalities among collectivities" (15, p. 128). In a stratification system, the alignments of strata or classes become permanent and are perpetuated from generation to generation. Social stratification assumes a variety of forms and is also quite complex as a process. Almost any philosopher and thinker has dealt with some aspect of the stratification of social structure. There have been some scholars such as Marx, Weber, Davis, Moore, and Lenski who focused on a systematic study of that phenomenon. Mahatma Gandhi has not yet been popularly known to be a theorist of social stratification as such. His writings were

diverse, and often unfocused. However, he discussed structured inequality and suggested ways to bring about equality between and among different strata of the society. His views were concept and action oriented. It is the concept rather than action aspect which provides the basis for this analysis.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to survey and present the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi in reference to social stratification and social inequality.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study are to (a) examine the major ideas of Gandhi related to concepts and notions of social stratification, (b) explain his logic of the bases for social stratification systems, (c) make an attempt to delineate a systematic statement about a theory of social stratification that is implicit or explicit in Gandhi's social thought in terms of selected criteria of a stratification system, and (d) provide a systematic evaluation of the various aspects of his theory of social stratification.

#### Justification

The impact of Gandhian thought in recent years has been known to be in several fields of study including

theology, political philosophy, and social change. However, social scientists appear to have paid little attention to Gandhi's ideas on social stratification. It is quite evident that in most of his social thought the statements about inequality and stratification do appear in various forms and multiple contexts. The present study intends to systematically present the ideas and thought processes of Gandhi on inequality, equality, and social order. Some of the expected contributions of this study are stated below.

First, it may be useful to make explicit in many of the implicit and complex ideas of Gandhi the notions such as inequality, exploitation, and social injustice. It seems that several of his ideas, particularly related to religion, morality, and social movements, have dominated his major themes and slogans in the literature. Therefore, his specific ideas on social stratification appear to have been ambivalent, almost being overshadowed or overwhelmed by other notions. The present study seeks to reveal the scheme of ideas of Gandhi on social stratification, and analyze the major concepts and philosophies explicit in that regard. Second, this study is intended to systematize, integrate, synthesize, and organize various aspects of Gandhi's writings on social stratification in order to analyze concepts which are widely dispersed in the literature. One of the most important attempts of this study is to systematically discuss and summarize his ideas on

the basis of several criteria of social stratification systems. Third, the interest in Gandhi's ideas on equality and social order coincides with the period of declining credibility of the conventional sociological approach of orthodox Marxism. The field of sociology has frequently been regarded as a discipline in a state of crisis (12). Gandhi's ideas on social stratification may provide a new dimension in this ongoing inquiry in sociology. Also, sociology has been known as a field of multiple paradigms and perspectives (14). This study attempts to provide Gandhi's perspective for social order which may offer an alternative to other social order. Fourth, Gandhi's work has often been considered reactionary and/or idealistic. However, many of his ideas have already been applied to particular situations. For example, Martin Luther King used his concepts of civil liberties movements in the United States. This study attempts to discuss policy implications of Gandhi. It may be used for resolving issues, and combating violence and inequalities.

#### Procedures Used

The major methodological orientation of this study consists of (1) reading and analyzing information contained in the literature through which the theoretical components of social stratification in Gandhi's writings become more explicit and (2) offer an evaluation of these theoretical

components. The major literature relevant to Gandhi's ideas on social stratification is categorized under three headings given below.

#### Gandhi's Major Written Works

Gandhi was not a literary scholar. As he said of himself, "I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain" (7). The only books he wrote, in his native language, Gujarati, were Hind Swaraj (8), a proclamation in the form of a dialogue; Niti Dharma (9), a collection of talks on morality and religion; Satyagraha in South Africa (10), an account of movements he launched in South Africa; The Story of My Experiments with Truth (11), an autobiography; From Yervada Mandir (6) and Ashram Observances (4), both collections of letters to the members of Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, India; and a pamphlet in the English language entitled "Constructive programme" (5), a sketch of eighteen items for reconstruction of India--beginning with communal unity, followed by removal of untouchability, and ending with a program of civil disobedience.

#### Gandhi's Speeches, Letters, and Notes

Although Gandhi did not write any conventional treatises, he wrote a large number of letters and notes and gave speeches which are recorded, in which he expounded on his concepts, explained their implications, defended

them against criticisms and misconceptions, and suggested applications. Two sources of collections of these publications are The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi published by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India in eighty-one volumes (the first volume was published in 1958 and all eighty-one volumes were completed by 1984) and Mahatma--Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, eight volumes of biography of Gandhi by his secretary which are regarded as standard primary sources on the life and thought of Gandhi.

#### Other Writers on Gandhi

These sources include comments about Gandhi by such writers as C. F. Andrews, Ashe Geoffrey, Joan Bondurant, Erik Erikson, and Louis Fischer; and also by his close associates like Jawaharlal Nehru, S. Radhakrishnan, Kishorlal Mashruwala, Pyarelal Nayar, J. B. Kriplani, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Vinoba Bhave (16).

The selection of all materials is based on the criterion of their relevance to the concepts and ideas of social stratification. The materials are reviewed systematically in terms of the following steps. First, the material is read to obtain an overview. Second, the literature is divided into headings and subheadings, and relevant materials are delineated using the five defined criteria of the social stratification system. The characteristics of Gandhi's stratification model are also

described in terms of the following parameters: (1) the idealist-materialist, which describes "in the one case those who view social reality as consisting primarily of ideas and in the other, those who think of it as a form of matter;" (2) the descriptive-normative, which describes in the one case "the factual or 'descriptive' element to tell us what society is" and in the other, "the normative, prescriptive or evaluative" element "to make recommendations for its improvement;" (3) the individualistic-holistic parameter which describes social reality in one case with "the significance attributed to the characteristics of the human individual" and in the other the significance attributed "to the qualities of groups or of society as a whole;" (4) the conflict-consensus parameter, which describes society in the one case "as organized conflict and competition" and in the other society is viewed as "agreement or consensus of holistic values;" and (5) the positivist-interpretative parameter which, in the one case described social phenomena with the approach "no different in principle from that adopted to natural or non-social phenomena, and in the other "the more common-sense approach of interpreting social behavior in the light of the meaning which is attributed to it" (2, pp. 25-43). Third, the writings of Gandhi's ideas and concepts on social stratification are drawn from and presented systematically under major headings and subheadings. Fourth, the material in Gandhi's

writings on social stratification is evaluated in terms of such criterion as adequacy, which means "the desire to which the vision makes sense of one's situation by knitting the various parts of it into a meaningful whole;" consistency, which means "a theory must not contradict itself by asserting or denying in one place what it denies or asserts in another;" clarity, which is an "important requirement of a social theory since what is unclear can be neither fully understood nor properly assessed;" and fruitfulness, which means that whether the "vision of the human condition suggests courses of action" (18, pp. 62-84).

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## CHAPTER II

### THE STRATIFICATION SYSTEM

The objective of this chapter is to define major concepts such as social stratification. It also identifies the major characteristics of a social stratification system which will be used later to analyze Gandhian concept.

#### The Notion of Theory

The most fundamental questions facing sociological theorizing are the bases and functioning of social order. This curiosity about the "problem of order" (7) has been translated into a large number of sociological theories. Whether investigation focuses on a small face-to-face group or a large and complex organization or an entire society, sociological theory is concerned with developing principles that will allow increased understanding of social structures and processes.

In any scientific discipline the "theory consists of a series of relatively abstract and general statements which collectively purport to explain (answer the question 'why?') some aspects of the empirical world (the 'reality' known to us directly or indirectly through our senses)" (18, p. 2). Theory is constructed with several basic elements or building blocks: (1) concepts, (2) variables, (3) statements, and (4) formats (20, pp. 2-12).

### Concepts

Theories are built from concepts, and concepts point to phenomena. Familiar sociological concepts include "group," "formal organization," "power," "interaction," "norm," "status," "role," and "stratification." The concept "stratification" has a meaning only when it is defined. Concepts are used to communicate a uniform meaning to all those who use them.

### Variables

Properties such as "age," "ethnic status," or "academic ability" are called variables. A variable is a measurable characteristic of a unit of analysis that can differ in value from one unit to another. Variables are concepts that allow investigators to distinguish different events and situations from each other in terms of the degree to which they reveal some important properties, such as size, weight, density, and cohesiveness. For example, to note that an unequal division of people denotes "stratification" does not indicate what type of inequality or how it compares with other groups of people. Scientific theory should describe the variable features of the social world.

### Statements

Concepts are related to each other with theoretical statements. The ultimate goal in social science is not only to point to the existence of a phenomenon, but to

understand the relationships among phenomena. A theoretical statement allows scientists to see the relation among concepts.

#### Formats

Theoretical statements do not stand alone. They are usually organized into systems. Such systems are formats of a theory. Theoretical statements may be organized into a number of different formats (16, pp. 83-114). However, it is appropriate here to argue that theoretical statements should be systematically organized with logical rules of the theorist's choice.

Much of what is labeled sociological theory is, as Turner states, "in reality, only a loose clustering of implicit assumptions, inadequately defined concepts and a few vague and logically disconnected propositions" (20, p. 13). A great deal of what is called theory in sociology is really a general "perspective" or "orientation" or "paradigm," for looking at various features and processes of the social world. This may, one day, lead to true scientific theory.

According to Martindale, "it is impossible to understand sociological theory without classifying the difference between ideologies, paradigms and theories" (12, p. 48). To him, a scientific theory is a set of generalizations for explaining a body of phenomena; an ideology is a set of

arguments advanced with persuasive intent. Theory is oriented to description and explanation to what "is"; an ideology is oriented to action, to some person's view of what "ought to be." Paradigm is a set of all forms containing a particular element such as the set of all inflected forms of a single root or theme. It is also a display in fixed arrangement of such a set.

To understand issues of social life one needs an ability to move back and forth along the continuum of abstractness. When engaged in gathering facts, one is working at the relatively concrete or less abstract end of the continuum. In interpreting the results of the research project, one moves toward the middle of the continuum. In theorizing, one is working with higher levels of abstractness. Theory "in sociology has consisted of terms that are so highly abstract and general that it is difficult if not impossible to relate the theory to the concrete world" (18, p. 6). Such "theory," therefore, fails in its essential function of helping to explain that which we know about empirical reality. So, instead of attempting to develop highly general and, therefore, abstract theory to explain the structure and function of total society, a series of less general statements "to explain smaller components of social reality" are presented in this study (13, p. 9).

### Social Stratification

Society differentiates among its members, treating people who have certain characteristics different from those who do not. Every society, for example, distinguishes between the old and the young and between males and females. Moreover, a society also treats its members differently on a variety of other grounds, such as religion, skin color, physical strength, educational achievements, or economical possessions. Like the layers of rock or cake, people in all societies are grouped into "strata," so the society as a whole is said to be stratified. Rankings of a population into unequal "strata" is social stratification.

The usual result of such differentiation of people is social inequality. Social inequality is as old as society itself, and throughout history it has been a constant source of tension, conflict, violence, injustice, and oppression. Social inequality exists when people's access to social rewards, such as money, influence, or respect, is determined by personal and/or group characteristics. Such inequality is universal. In all societies there have been distinct differences in the statuses of the individual members. Individuals within a particular stratum share similar life chances or probabilities of benefitting from the opportunities that their society offers. They generally view others within their own stratum as in some way superior and those in any lower stratum as in some way inferior.

In many societies this social inequality is built into the social structure in such a way that it is passed down from generation to generation. In such societies, whole categories of a population are denied a fair share of their society's resources virtually from the moment of birth. India is the perfect example of such a society.

Thus, "social stratification is the structured inequality of entire categories of people, who have different access to social rewards as a result of their status in the social hierarchy" (17, pp. 235-236). Because these patterns of inequality characterize all societies, social stratification can be viewed as a fundamental social process.

#### Social Stratification Theory

In the study of social stratification, social scientists want to know why inequalities exist, how those inequalities are maintained, and what is the outcome of structured inequality for the society in general. That is, a social scientist wants to see the underlying meaning or logic of social stratification. And to do this, one constructs a theory.

Gerhard Lenski (10) maintains that historically the controversy over the existence and maintenance of social inequality and social stratification have been achieved by two major forces. Those believing that social inequalities

are necessary and justified have been referred to as conservatives, while those who take the position that inequalities are neither necessary nor justified have been referred to as radicals. Lenski traces this division between conservatives and radicals from the earliest writings of human beings to present functional and conflict theories of social stratification (10, pp. 3-13).

Over the years a number of writers in sociology have provided descriptions of main points of disagreements between these two general paradigms of social stratification. These two general paradigms of explanation of social inequalities are called order versus conflict, consensus versus dialectic, and, more commonly, functional versus conflict paradigms (3).

Both functional and conflict paradigms attempt to answer the most basic question in sociology--how and why is society possible? Why do most people obey the rules most of the time within the framework of structured inequality? Why do we have orderly interaction between differing interest groups?

Functional theorists maintain that society is held together primarily by a general consensus over the major values and norms in the society (15, pp. 151-198). Although Parsons is generally regarded as the most influential functionalist of the 20th century, it was his students, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, who presented

the strongest case for the functional explanation of stratification (5, pp. 242-249).

Functional theorists begin with an empirical generalization that all societies display some form of inequality which is stratification. To them, stratification simply refers to the unequal rewards that are attached to positions. They argue that in all societies varying levels and kinds of rewards are built into positions. These rewards are the duties associated with a position and its privileges. They further argue that if the rights and privileges of different positions in a society must be unequal, then the society must be stratified. To them "how" is more crucial than "why" in explaining social stratification.

The functional paradigm explains the functional necessity of social stratification as follows. First, all societies have a division of labor and a set of interdependent positions that have to be filled. Second, people must be motivated to fill positions and enact roles. Third, societies systematically use the existence of unequal rewards as the means of motivating people. Fourth, some positions have more important functions than others. Fifth, some positions are more difficult to fill than others because they require scarce talent and/or extensive training. Sixth, and the crux of functionalists' argument, is that in every society those positions that are both functionally important and require extensive training are

provided with scarce and desired rewards adequate to ensure that they are competently filled. Functionalists claim that stratification exists because it is necessary to society's operation.

Conflict theorists maintain that stratification is caused by the domination and exploitation of one interest group by another and is perpetuated by the holders of power in attempts to maintain and increase their influence (4, pp. 170-183). Contrary to the functionalists' notion that inequality emerges out of common values, conflict theorists maintain that what appear to be common values are really the values of the privileged strata, the purpose of which is the legitimation of the arrangement of power. The dominant groups are generally able to establish a value system favorable to them.

Classes emerge, according to conflict theorists, because in the struggle for dominance, some groups are able through inheritance or force to acquire sufficient economic and political resources to develop and solidify a privileged position. Since domination is based on coercion, resistance by the subordinated is always potential, therefore the dominant group attempts to legitimate its privilege through ideology and/or myth.

Reinhard Bendix argues that sociologists still "do not have a theory of social structure and inequality" (2, p. 149). He seems to be correct, especially if theory is

taken to mean a deductive set of propositions. Nevertheless, the functional and the conflict theorists mentioned have all contributed to the development of a theory of social stratification. This study provides an analytical framework for the study of social stratification and persisting patterns of inequality existing in any particular society, but especially in India.

#### Characteristics of Social Stratification

There are many studies of social stratification systems. Not all of them have indicated any general characteristics of social stratification system. However, there are some authors who have identified one, two, three, or four general features of a stratification system.

Celia Heller vaguely covers "the major aspects of the field of stratification" as "social differentiation" and "the degree to and way in which it is stratified" that "it involves differential ranking" which "displays relative constancy and stability, and is backed by ideas that legitimize and justify it" (6, pp. 3-4).

Beth Vanfossen, while defining social stratification, mentions "social differentiations," "social evaluation," "institutionalization of power arrangements," and "perpetuation" of these "patterns," without explaining them as general characteristics of social stratification systems (22, pp. 5-7).

Lopreato and Lewis, in their introduction to the study of social stratification, state "features of social stratification" as

the division of labor in society; people's differential evaluations of various functions in the division of labor, which produce different rewards and privileges, and the manner in which those rewards and privileges influence each other (11, p. 5).

Kerbo, while describing concepts in the study of social stratification, raises some questions for the "general understanding of inequality" as to "why" social stratification, "degree of inequality," "maintenance of inequality," "level of inequality," and "basis of power in society" (9, pp. 8-9).

Beeghley discusses "major elements that make up social stratification systems" under a heading "Heuristic Model of the Study of Social Stratification." Such an analysis "is not a theory, for it cannot be tested. Rather, it is conceived as a heuristic model that can sensitize observers to the common social processes that seem to characterize all stratification systems." He considers "the division of labor," "inequality," and "restrictions on access to positions" as major elements of social stratification system. "The starting point in this analysis of social stratification in societies is the division of labor." Also, "regardless of its extent or the spheres in which it occurs, inequality usually must be justified in terms of dominant values" (1, pp. 93-98).

Based upon the literature such as stated above, the following five criteria are used in this study to analyze and assess various aspects of Gandhi's theory of social stratification.

### Social Differentiation

Social stratification is too often treated as if it were synonymous with social differentiation, which it is not (6, p. 3). Social differentiation is a universal phenomenon. In all societies we have a separation of positions and roles, and some division of functions and labor. All the theorists mentioned in this study emphasize that the extent to which the division of labor is one of the keys to understanding stratification in a society. For Marx, the division of labor indicated people's interests and their class affiliation. "The division of labor determines the compartmentalization and stratification of men into unequal spheres of power, property, intellectual freedom, and work enjoyment" (11, p. 8). Weber suggested that with increasing division of labor in industrial society, social institutions emerge, each of which displays inequality. Writing about social stratification and division of labor, Weber argues that the economic factor pertained to one of three major "orders" of stratification: the economic one which yields "classes." Important also are the "legal" and

"social" orders, which yield respectively, "parties" and "status groups" (11, pp. 45-54). Davis and Moore speculated that some minimal division of labor among familial, economic, political, religious, and other institutional spheres is essential for the survival of society. Their reasoning is based on the insight that the basic tasks in each sphere generally must be performed and, except in the smallest and least complex societies, each person cannot perform them all (11, pp. 64-71). Lenski used the division of labor as an important indicator of the extent of industrialization and its evolutionary relationship to inequality (10).

#### Relations Among the Strata

Each of the scholars indicated above agreed to the fact that all societies display both a division of labor and inequality which refers to relations among the strata as to the expectations, demands, and power. Various components of the layers tend to interact with each other and thereby lead to a social network of relationships constituting a stratification system. "At base, social inequality, among strata, grows out of the process of social differentiation" (22, p. 5). Various statuses in society are unequally rewarded. "It is probably a universal fact of social life that in all groups and societies different positions receive differential rewards" (8, p. 68). These rewards, as Davis

and Moore observe, include prestige, property, and power. Therefore, relationships among strata actualize through a struggle of power and inequality.

The division of labor and inequality are related because, as both Weber and Davis-Moore argue, the various positions that are divided among the members of a society are unequally evaluated in terms of expectations. Some of the positions people occupy are seen as more worthy, more important, more popular, or more preferable than others. So the expectations from such positions and power of such positions are more in relation to other positions.

#### Institutionalization

Institutionalization of a stratification system consists of the development of a consensus on the basis of which a series of norms or principles are developed in order to carry out the functional requirements of that system. "Social differentiation alone does not constitute stratification" (6, p. 3) because it does not always involve ranking of positions. Positions may be differentiated from one another and yet ranked relative to each other. For example, in our society the position of the teenager is generally not considered superior to that of infant, it is merely different from the latter. Social stratification, however, does involve ranking of positions relative to each other in terms of establishment of layered hierarchy.

Although all societies seem to display inequality of rewards, it is unclear how much of this disparity is either necessary or beneficial to them (19). Nonetheless, positions are ranked in a society according to the kind and level of rewards the people who fill them receive. This ranking is done in terms of highly specific indicators, such as the level of wealth or income, occupational prestige, or education. These are the "main indicators used in the sociological literature today" (1, p. 96), to explain institutionalization or the establishment of layered hierarchy among different strata.

Social stratification is a complex process and, therefore, the institutional structures are not easily identified. One of the main points central to its function is "that it refers to an arrangement of positions in a graded hierarchy of socially superior and inferior ranks" (14, p. 4).

Moreover, there is an establishment of normative pattern with reference to ranking of stratified positions that "becomes structurally patterned and intergenerationally transmitted" (22, p. 6) on the basis of moral and religious values existing in the society.

#### Legitimacy

A social system must be a legitimized system for whom it functions. Social stratification constitutes not only

social differentiation, relationship among differentiated strata, and establishment of rankings relative to each other for the strata, but it also "involves differential evaluation" (6, p. 3) which is an overall acceptance of the ranked positions.

It was suggested in the first chapter of this study that the social stratification is a system of structured inequality in a society. Structure indicates arrangement of elements in terms of layered hierarchy as well as a system of some rules and regulations for legitimizing that hierarchial positions. "The inequality is not random but follows a pattern, displays relative constancy and stability, and is backed by ideas that legitimize and justify it" (6, p. 4).

Moreover, the significance of social differentiation lies in social evaluation. Social evaluation is the assignment of relative value to the characteristics that are differentiated. It is a common process; people tend to approve or disapprove to develop preferences and to judge (22, pp. 5-6). Unless there is some system of social evaluation and legitimizing that evaluation, social differentiation cannot effectively exist. Differential evaluation implies the existence of standards and values necessary to make social stratification legitimate. The division of labor, inequality and normative pattern of hierarchy are, to varying degrees, accepted by most members of the society.

In the society members share some common values. These common values provide the basis of legitimizing the acceptance of stratified positions.

#### Consequences

Social differentiations and patterns of social behavior because of such differentiations are the consequences of social stratification (6, p. 5). Effects of social stratification are seen more clearly in the realm of social mobility. This is seen as "behavioral consequences" in the literature (11, p. 5). This phenomenon of social mobility refers to the quantity and quality of movement from one class to another within a given time span, and the differential chances of the various class memberships from movement up or down the hierarchical structure.

Consequences of social stratification also refer to "restrictions on people's access to positions" (1, p. 97). For this study it also refers to functions of social stratification that produce a pattern of mutual dependence which is necessary for the stability of social order. It implies how social stratification impacts a social system and its components.

The above stated criteria of social stratification should be useful in identifying Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of social inequality. They will provide a frame of reference in evaluating various aspects of Gandhi's ideas

on the subject. These criteria are specifically used in discussing various characteristics of his stratification ideologies in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER III

### FOUNDATIONS OF GANDHI'S IDEAS ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The major objectives of this chapter are to identify the personal, political, and philosophical background of Gandhi's ideas, particularly on social stratification.

#### Gandhi's Life

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbander, a small, seaside town in the Kathiawar district in Northwest India, about halfway between Bombay and Karanchi. His early childhood passed without any personally important events. His early schooling was in Porbander and Rajkot, a district capital town. He was married at the age of thirteen when he was a high school sophomore. He passed his high school examination in 1887 and entered college. But after his first term he was allowed, by his family and kin members, to go to England to study law, only after administering an oath that he would not touch wine, women, or meat. He stayed in England for almost four years and passed the Bar examination in 1891. He returned home the same year and set up practice, first in Bombay and then in Rajkot, but met with little success. He then went to South Africa to instruct one company's counsel in a big case in 1893.

While working on the case he was studying social, economic, and political conditions of his countrymen in South Africa. It is well known that racial prejudice runs high even now in that part of the world. It was much worse in those days. Gandhi himself was often ejected from roads, trains, and stagecoach as a colored man. Many restrictions had been imposed on the freedom of movement for Indians. Gandhi began to educate the public by writing pamphlets on the grievances and hardships of his countrymen. He launched a weekly journal called Indian Opinion in 1904.

The years 1904-1914 formed an important period in Gandhi's life. He dedicated himself to the service of his fellowmen and recognized the dignity of manual labor. No work was to be too low for him. He ignored all racial and religious distinctions and treated all men and women on the basis of equality. He organized many resistance movements during these years in South Africa. It was here that he forged his great weapon of Satyagraha. In 1914, through Gandhi's movements, a compromise was reached and all the demands of the Indians were conceded. Gandhi then returned to India hoping to serve his motherland with the experience gained in South Africa.

After returning to India in the beginning of 1915, he established an Ashram called Satyagraha Ashram, on the banks of Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad, the capital of

Gujarat State. Soon, in the same year, Gandhi undertook a tour throughout India as a result of his promise to his master, an Indian statesman Gokhale, that he would not express any opinion on Indian affairs without traveling all over the country. This tour convinced him that India was losing its individuality and becoming an imitation of the West. Therefore, he strove to achieve a new national orientation. He declared that the ancient civilization of India was superior to modern European civilization, because it was based on nonviolence, contentment, and cooperation and was spiritual in its outlook and character. He urged his countrymen to be true to their ancient ideals and remove such social evils as untouchability and to restore the prosperity of the villages. Thus he began his work in India with a great purification movement. The movement for India's independence came only afterwards. His independence movement against the British government was only the political counterpart of his purification (swadeshi) movement against the evils of Indian social life. These movements went on for over thirty years (10).

The principles, including his methods of ahimsa and satyagraha, on which Gandhi fashioned his life and tried to fashion the life of the Indian society, are best studied in the issues of Young India, an English weekly which he started in 1919, Nava Jivan, a Gujarati weekly started in the same year, and in Harijan, another English weekly which

he started in 1933, after Young India ceased publication. Ironically, his life ended through violence. He was killed on January 30, 1948.

### Hindu Philosophy

Gandhi's thinking and ideas are a reflection of certain fundamental metaphysical and religious beliefs underlying Hindu society. Without understanding these beliefs that influenced Gandhi's thinking, it is very difficult to understand the meanings of his ideas about society, social stratification, and equality.

Indian social thought is shaped in the system-forming endeavor to a metaphysics of transcendence since the vedas more than forty centuries ago. Whatever might have been the specific socio-economic conditions in which the creative genius of the Vedic period, approximately 3000 to 5000 B.C., flourished, its influence on the entire growth of Indian consciousness has never waned. In the Vedic literature, including the Upanishads, spontaneity, poetic imagination, and a feeling of gravity of the fact of existence surpassed intellectualism. Perhaps that is why India, notwithstanding her socio-political-economic changes, retains its weary mood eternally, a mood running more after the otherworldly and the inane than after the empirical and the concrete (28).

There are two ideological concepts underlying Hindu philosophy that reveals two aspects of life--the goal of life and the means to achieve that goal.

### Goal of Life

The Hindu view of life can be best brought out by its theory of fourfold objects of life (purusartha theory). It is true that the end of life is conceived to be liberation from the cycle of births and deaths by Hindus. Yet it is equally true that Hindu philosophers recognize and assert categorically the reality of the universe and the inevitability of the life of action. The wish for a long span of life is not inconsistent with the devout wish for liberation, and the harmony between the two was unfolded by Hindu sages in their theory of purusarthas.

According to this theory there are four purusarthas, or aims of life: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksa. Moksa represents the end of life, the realization of an inner spirituality in man. It means that the true nature of man is spiritual, and the mission of life is to unfold it and to derive thereby the meaning and joy of it. The Hindu sages have attempted to work out the proper mode of this process of unfolding. The normal life was conceded its full expression; and the attainment of spiritual progress was sought by assigning proper values to each of them and by prescribing the mode of its expression. Artha refers to the acquisitive instinct in man and signifies his acquisitions, enjoyment of wealth, and all that it connotes. By according artha a place in the scheme of life, Hindu thinkers applauded the pursuit of wealth as a legitimate

human aspiration. By recognizing artha and kama as desirable for man, the Hindu sages indicated that man unfolded his spirituality only when his life was not economically starved or emotionally strained. But while accepting the sex instinct, emotional urges, and economic drives as necessary and even desirable, it is stressed that they are not the ultimate ends of life. Kama, the satisfaction of the instinctive life, is recognized as one of the aims of marriage, along with dharma and procreation. The Hindu thinkers tried to assign the place of sex in the life of man. But kama does not mean only instinctive life; it means emotional and aesthetic life as well. To Hindu thinkers, man is by nature creative, and the best part of his personality is stifled if he is not allowed to give expression to the creative in him. Life finds its greatest joy in this act of creation. Repression of emotional expression recoils on the health and sanity of the individual. The healthy development of the personality calls for the expressions of the emotions. What is needed is their proper channelling. Dharma provides a link between the two, the animal and the God in man. Dharma is knowing that kama and artha are means and not ends. A life that is dedicated to the unrestrained satisfaction of these urges is undesirable and even dangerous. It is consequently necessary that it should be regulated by the ideal of spiritual realization, dharma. By providing direction to

the acquisitive and emotional drives in man it makes the enjoyment of life consistent with man's spiritual progress. Purusarthas seek to coordinate material desires and spiritual life. It comprehends life as a whole.

#### The Means to Achieve Goals

Ashrama.--The theory of Purusarthas is given concrete expression in the Hindu scheme of Ashramas. According to this scheme, life is divided into four stages: brahmacharya, grahastha, vanaprastha, and samnyasa, with every stage having its own duties and functions. The prescribed duties of these stages of life provide healthy restraints on the instinctive and impulsive nature of man and thereby prepare him for moksa, freedom from the cycle of births and deaths.

An individual enters upon the first stage of life, brahmacharya, on the performance of initiation rites. The initiation ceremony initiates man into disciplined life, which is an important ceremony in the life of a twice-born. Man is born a sudra; he becomes dviya (reborn) by sacrament. The initiation rites mark the beginning of schooling where study is an important duty in man's life. Besides intellectual equipment and a disciplined life, the training in character or ethical life were necessary. A student should learn to restrain his senses. In this control of the senses the control of the sex instinct was prominently stressed. This stage in life was called brahmacharya,

because every individual going through it was expected to observe complete celibacy. An individual was supposed to learn to regulate life. The rules were intended to teach, at a very early stage in man's life, that the material side of life is not more important than its spiritual counterpart. One should have learned, even in childhood, that material needs should be few and simple, because they are only a means to a higher life. Man thus learned his proper dharma in the first stage.

The second stage of life, grahastha, is the life of a married man. The aim of marriage, according to Hindu philosophy, was dharma, progeny, and sex. Personal gratification is one of the ends of marriage, but the last place assigned to it clearly indicated that it should not be the guiding rule of life. Marriage is more a social obligation as its main purpose is the performance of dharma and the perpetuation of family, as well as the continuation of the group, through progeny. The householder's obligations were thus not confined to the bonds of his family and kin but embraced a wider group of persons. Dharma and praja (progeny), the more important aims of marriage, reminded a man how much more he had to live for others than for himself. The proper utilization of wealth consists in the distribution of part of it to satisfy the needs of others.

On entering the third stage of life, vanprastha, man continued to perform all the duties of the second stage.

But the achievement of this stage lies in the discipline that prepares a man finally for the renunciation of familial ties and social relations. All the bodily comforts had to be gradually dispensed. This austerity was eminent to cultivate in man indifference to his own body.

The last stage of life, samnyasa, was the life of an ascetic. The Hindu ideal of life is moksa (salvation), and that can be achieved, according to the Gita, by cultivating detachedness to worldly things. The duties of this stage were mainly defined with the purpose of attaining this state of detachedness. In a sense the individual in this stage was mainly concerned with his own realization of spirituality; society was overshadowed (28).

Varna.--Hindu society is highly caste-structured. Studies about the Indian society have given considerable attention to this phenomenon (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 19, 21, 31). To get a better picture of existing caste structure one has to see it in terms of its origination.

The racial theory of the origin of caste talks about unadulterated and pure blood of Aryan race (21). Pitirim Sorokin believes that "ideas of racial purity were common among the Hindus some three thousand years ago" (30, pp. 219-210, 669) and uses this as a basis for explaining race relations today. Barnes and Becker conclude that

it is significant that the four varnas providing the main scaffolding of Indian caste structure means the four "colors." The castes shade from light to dark, with the priestly bramans, purest blooded and most jealously endogamous descendants of the "Aryan" invaders of about 3000 B.C. and therefore, at the highest and lightest part of the framework" (5, pp. 71-72).

The caste system as we know it today, however, is not based upon racial antagonism. "We do not have any record of the racial composition of different varnas" (7, p. 89). Nesfield, affirming the essential unity of the Indian race, emphatically denied that racial distinction was the basis of caste. Along with Ibbeston, Nesfield endorsed the view that caste is mainly occupational in origin. Occupations which were organized into guilds became exclusive and stratified into castes (8, 27).

The word "varna" is practically all that the pure-blood race theorists have in support of their position. They conclude that the difference in color was one of the causes that lay at the foundation of caste, for the caste originated from varna (color) organization (19, p. 40). As a matter of fact, however, in Sanskrit the word varna means appearance, exterior, color, kind, species, caste; and Manu has used varna synonymously with jati which means birth, the form of existence determined by birth, position, rank, family, descent, kind, species (25). Moreover, according to scriptures, color really means attributes. The white color attributes goodness, red color means an

attribute of passion, and black forms the quality of darkness. But "we were not even certain which skin color, if any, was always preferable among the early Aryo-Dravidians" (7, p. 95). So "the case for color as a dominant factor in the development of caste, then, does not seem to be supported by the use of the word 'varna' in the literature" (7, p. 96).

Dr. G. H. Mees has developed a varna theory of caste based upon the idea of a morally stratified society. Caste or class differences, in East and West, were at first based on merit and social usefulness, and later tended to become hereditary and economic (24, p. 96). To Mees, a man's varna is his natural and rightful position in society; it was the early Hindu ideal. "Varna . . . is the Hindu ideal and theoretical picture of class based upon dharma, the good life" (24, p. 51).

This varna system of India was an open system in the beginning. "Though the orthodox Hindu holds caste to be divine, caste was not known to the rigveda which did, however, distinguish between priests (brahmans), nobels (rajenyas or kshatriyas), tillers of the soil (vaishyas), and slaves (sudras)" (24, p. 180). During that period though "the functions were regarded as hereditary, exceptions were freely allowed. The brahmin had the possibilities of a warrior. The rsis (priests) of old were agriculturists and sometimes warriors too" (28, p. 112).

Similarly the "kshatriyas were frequently adding to their numbers both from foreign incoming elements and others in the country who rose to power and authority" (26, p. 249). Though "the classes had come to be almost stereotyped by the end of the vedic period, it was not altogether impossible for an upward or downward change to occur" (19, p. 45).

For the historical treatment of varna system the history of India could be divided into four periods. First, the vedic period ending about 600 B.C. and comprising the literary data of the vedic samhitas and bramanas; second, the post-vedic period, extending to about the third century of the Christian era. The third, period of the dharma sastras, ended during the 11th century A.D. Manu, Yajnavalkya, and Vishnu are the chief exponents of the social ideals of this period. The fourth, modern period, began during the beginning of the 19th century. The customs and beliefs of contemporary Hindu society are those that were mostly fixed and classified by the writers of this fourth period. It was during this period that the present-day vernaculars of India were being evolved (19, p. 43).

In the rigveda, the earliest literature of the first period, three classes of society are frequently mentioned and named brahma, kashatra, and vis (19, p. 44). The origin of four classes is repeated in most of the later works of this period. These four classes are described as

of divine origin, and these classes or orders are regularly referred to as varnas (19, pp. 46-48). The brahmanic literature of the post-vedic period, while reiterating that there are only four varnas, mentions certain mixed castes and also a group of outcaste classes (19, p. 54). The sacred laws of the Aryans are designed to expound varna dharma, i.e., the duties ostensibly of the four orders. The importance of sacrifices and ritualism had been growing, as well as with the prestige of the priest (19, p. 56). In the Gita the creator is said to have apportioned the duties and functions of the four castes according to the inherent qualities and capacities of individuals (19, p. 65). This period testifies to the rigid stratification and internal solidarity of the four varnas, and the rules and regulations governing social life and individual conduct differed according to the orders in society.

The third period of the Indian social history "is marked by two developments in the ideals of the Hindu, which had an important bearing on the theory and practice of caste. The glorification of gifts to Brahmins, which became so absorbing a feature of later Hinduism, was largely the contribution of this age" (19, pp. 89-90). Another noteworthy development was the schematic growth of imaginary hells as punishment for certain offenders and the progressive application of the doctrine of rebirth (19, p. 89). In the fourth period, the laws and regulations

giving divinity to the origins and functioning of four varnas and other mixed castes as well as outcastes were created. The solidarity of a caste as a unit of social organization was more and more acknowledged. Gradually, then, the caste system became ordered and stabilized, with priests giving a religious interpretation to all questions of moment (7, p. 116).

From this system of varna organization, new castes may be formed by groups separating from the parent body and migrating to areas out of range of normal communication, or by occupational changes within the caste, by religious schisms, by fragments from other caste groupings about some common objective, by the offspring of crossings between two or more castes, or by sects. When the caste is established it will ordinarily claim specialty in some vocation, and it will claim distinction on the basis of some fictitious or real cultural heritage, which it will try to guard (27, p. 107; 29, pp. 75-79).

For the "purposes of sociological analysis castes cannot be treated in isolation" (1, p. 13) because they are inseparable elements of the society. "One caste cannot exist in an otherwise casteless society, for castes are interdependent social phenomena" (7, p. 3). A caste can only be recognized in contrast to other castes with which its members are closely involved in a network of

economic, political, and ritual relationships (23, p. 5). This network outlines the working of the caste system.

The problem for the student of the caste system is the identification of various attributes by which the caste system functions. An individual may not understand this phenomenon but can become aware of the fact that Hindu society is divided into socially differentiated groups, the membership of which is determined by birth (19, pp. 1-31).

First, caste membership was not voluntary, and one's whole status in a society depended on one's caste. The caste system provided a fixed social status from birth which could not be changed under any circumstances. An individual could fulfill many needs with the help of caste. Each caste had its own council, which in ordinary village terminology is called "caste panch," which was in a position to control the behavior of all its members. An individual was subject to its authority. It had the power to punish individuals by out-casting, and could levy fines of cash or kind which included a caste-feast. Individuals were provided with a permanent body of associations which controlled all behaviors and contacts, and with whom cooperation was necessary in daily life.

Second, all castes were not equal in their positions but there was rather a hierarchy among these groups. This hierarchical order was not precise. Ranking in this

hierarchy was loose except that brahmin caste was considered the highest and the bhangi caste was considered the lowest. But in between these two ends, the order of castes in the hierarchy was not very clear. An individual's social status depended on caste. Social respect depended on the bases of position in the social hierarchy.

Third, there were minute rules in caste regarding from whom a type of food or drink could be accepted. There was an idea of pakka food (food prepared in milk and/or butter) and kaccha food (food prepared in water). An individual would never eat kaccha food from anyone unless it was prepared by others of the same caste, or a high-caste such as brahmins. This restriction applied also to drinking water; no one drinks water from a vessel belonging to another caste fellow. People kept their own water pots. The taking and giving of food, drinking of water, and even smoking, were connected to the idea of pollution. People felt polluted not only by touch, but also if they took food, water, or a smoke from or with persons of lower castes. An individual's food and social exchanges depended on caste.

Fourth, each caste had civil and religious disabilities and/or privileges. The members of lower castes lived on the outskirts of a village while members of higher castes or dominant caste (31) lived in the middle of the village. The lower caste members were not allowed to enter certain premises where higher caste people lived. They were not

allowed to use drinking water from the wells built for higher caste people. Individuals belonging to a lower caste were not allowed to enter the holy temples of high caste Hindus. Thus, individuals enjoyed privileges or suffered (socially) on the basis of caste.

Fifth, each caste had its own occupation which every member followed. No caste would allow its members to take any task which was either degrading or impure. Caste put a check on its members in following or not following certain occupations. An individual's occupation depended on one's caste.

Sixth, every caste being endogamous unit, had restrictions over its members regarding marriage. An individual's marriage relations and choice of partners depended on caste. No individual was allowed to marry outside of the caste, and any individual venturing to transgress this law would be excommunicated.

It is a general notion that

the spread of education and Western ideas and values, advance urbanization, industrialization, democracy and forces of modernization have, since independence, tended to undermine the traditional role and rigidity of caste in India and promote social mobility across the caste barriers.

But at the same time the "influence of caste on political and administrative life has been on the increase in recent years" (22). This study maintains that caste remains a central element of stratification system of

Indian society even while adapting itself to the values and methods of democratic social structure. Far from disintegrating under the impact of modern trends in the fields of communications, transportation, marriage, education, and occupation, caste feeling seems stronger than ever. Caste is a dominant force in the political behavior of the Indian society. Not only elections are fought and party tickets are allotted on caste lines, but also recruitment and promotions are determined on caste criteria. A caste which is politically strong seems better able to fight successfully for schools, roads, hospitals, electric power, and industries in the area in which it is dominant. The cabinet ministers are expected to give due considerations to claims of their respective castes if they wish to continue in power. In Southern India we witness the fantastic spectacle of competition to be included in backward classes with a strong vested interest developing in being called "backward" (32).

While on the one hand, the Constitution has abolished caste, on the other hand, certain factors have emerged as a direct result of the Constitution which influence the caste structure. Acceptance of the democratic form of government implies adult franchise, the result of which "has been that many social groups have become aware of their strength and realize that they are in a position to wield power" (3). Throughout India there is evidence that

castes, organized on the width of the linguistic region, are politically active and courted by political parties. Another political factor influencing the strength of the caste system in India has been the lack of organized special interest groups; therefore, there are few outside loyalties to temper with the intensity of caste membership. Each caste has become conscious of the power it can wield. The members vote on various issues, not from the viewpoint of the total community, but of exclusive caste interests (4). Some of the modern manifestations of the caste system in India are caste journals, visibility of caste in trade unions, caste associations playing central roles in politics and educational institutions, and youth centers and clubs serving exclusively to their own caste members.

Karma.--Another important component of Hindu social thought is karma as depicted in Gita, the holy book of Hindu religion. The Gita forms part of the mahabharata, which depicts the great war fought somewhere about 1000 B.C., is supposed to have been compiled in its present form by about A.D. 400, and represents in simple yet sublime words a new philosophy of life, the philosophy of karma. The Gita has a particular significance for a sociologist because the vedic ideals of sacrifice and knowledge and karma developed in the upanishads are not only coordinated, but are given new meaning and significance.

The Gita touches upon the traditional modes of salvation and also refers to the traditional doctrine of karma. All are coordinated, synthesized, and harmonized forming the alternatives for development of the individual. Yet the karma, as depicted in the Gita, insists that a man cannot attain his freedom by not engaging himself in action or by mere renunciation because one cannot cease to perform actions (karmas) even for a moment. The goal of life is achieved by continuing to perform the actions from which there is no escape. Thus, the Gita insists on a normal life which promises the realization of spirituality and shows how the higher purpose of life can be realized in and through society by karma. The law of karma includes the law of causation, of action and reaction, of compensation and retribution. It predestines nothing and makes every soul a free agent for action. It is not merely an effect, but it is also a cause, as our past karma (actions) determines the field of our life. It is our duty to make what we can of it, and that will determine our future life. This philosophy is the theory of reincarnation. The concept of personal duty helps maintain the balance between community and the individual. It implies action oriented society (17, p. 7).

## The Philosophy of Nonviolence and Civil Disobedience

Gandhi is faithful to the traditions and ideals of Hinduism. For him nothing is, or nothing exists, except truth, and where truth is, there also is true knowledge, and where true knowledge is, there also is bliss (15, pp. 96-97). These fundamental religious and ethical beliefs acquired within Hinduism influenced his thought process and determined his way of life (6, pp. 192-193).

### Truth and Nonviolence

Truthful action, for Gandhi, was governed by the readiness to get hurt and yet not to hurt, action governed by the principle of nonviolence. Central to his thought process was the concept of Truth. It is evident that he sought to live his life in the spirit of truth and in accordance with the religious and ethical ideals of the Hindu way of life.

In his existential quest for truth, Gandhi stresses the importance of ahimsa (nonviolence), two interrelated concepts. "They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which one is the obverse, and which the reverse?" (9, p. 81). Ahimsa could be described as the means leading to the realization of Truth as the end or goal.

Gandhi took the position that suppression or annihilation of the opponent by direct or indirect violence would

really perpetuate the social contradiction instead of resolving it. "Those of who seek to destroy men rather than their manners," he said, "adopt the latter and become worse than those whom they destroy under the mistaken belief that the manners will die with them. They do not know the root of the evil" (33, p. 255). The argument follows logically from Gandhi's conviction, largely derived from the Hindu social tradition as depicted in the doctrine of karma; that the end, meaning the actual result of social action, is determined by the nature and quality of the action itself rather than by the motive of the doer. Writing to the imaginary reader who was arguing in favor of the forcible overthrow of the British from India, Gandhi argues that

your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose by planting a noxious weed. We reap exactly what we sow (11. p. 43).

His primary concern had always been the conservation and progressive use of the means, since he knew that the end would inevitably follow from them. "Means and ends are convertible in my philosophy of life" (18). Therefore, he did not believe that equality could be achieved through violent means. He argued

True democracy . . . of the masses can never come through untruthful or violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the

suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa or non-violence (13).

Ahimsa to Gandhi, is an evolutionary stage. He argues

If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards ahimsa. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for his food. Thus from being a nomad he settle down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and became a member of a community and a nation. These stages are signs of progressive ahimsa and diminishing himsa. Had it been otherwise, the human species would have been extinct by now, as the lower species of the past (14).\*

#### Civil Disobedience

Ahimsa and satyagraha (civil disobedience) are closely intertwined concepts in Gandhi's social thought. Satyagraha is a direct corollary of nonviolence. It is the way in which ahimsa is implemented or put in action; it is the technique of nonviolence. The principle of satyagraha existed before the term was coined, and since Gandhi was dissatisfied with the phrase "passive resistance" he felt the need for a more suitable term. The term that was first suggested by one of his followers in South Africa was sadagraha, which literally means holding firm to reality.

\*The author is aware of the poor English translation.

Gandhi changed it to make his principle more explicit, as he explains

I liked the word (sadagraha), but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished to connote. I therefore, corrected it to "satyagraha." Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement satyagraha, that is to say, the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence (16, pp. 150-151).

Satyagraha has been referred to as the weapon of the strong and not of the weak. It is not possible for those who are weak to apply this techniques for it makes great demands on those who would use it because it "excludes the use of violence in any shape or form, whether in thought, speech or deed" (15, p. 185).

This method depended on certain stringent conditions. The essential preliminary steps of this method were an objective investigation of facts, followed by a sincere attempt of arbitration. Satyagraha, as seen by Gandhi, must be a last resort in an unbearable situation which allows for no other solution and is representative enough to merit a commitment of unlimited suffering. Moreover, in any campaign the widest publicity was necessary in order to induce the public either to intervene in advance, or to provide public pressure in support of the action to be taken. That action, in fact, had to be announced in all detail in advance, with a clear ultimatum binding to all, and yet permitting the resumption of

arbitration at any stage. Therefore, an action committee, created for this purpose, would select such forms of force-- as noncooperation, strike, boycott, civil disobedience--as would seem fitting as the minimum force necessary to reach a defined goal. No quick triumph would be permitted to spread the issue beyond this goal, nor any defeat to narrow it. The quality of such fitness, however, would vastly depend on mere feasibility because it would encompass issues which are central to the practical life of the community and symbolic for its future.

The technique of satyagraha was applied successfully by Gandhi. It was applied against the discriminatory laws of the Transvaal government in South Africa, one of which required Indians to procure a certificate of registration from the Registrar of Asiatics or else face the threat of deportation. Another law declared Hindu, Muslim, and Parsee marriages to be illegal (11, pp. 28, 137, 353).

It was applied against the British Indigo planters at Champaran in Bihar state of India, where peasant cultivators were being unfairly treated. It was also used to settle the disputes between the textile mill owners and laborers in Ahmedabad. It was used in the case of the peasant cultivators of Kheda district, who sought suspension of the payment of an annual revenue assessment because of the failure of crops and an impending famine. It resulted in a government compromise (12, pp. 78, 371, 379, 197, 497).

The technique of satyagraha was used also on behalf of the untouchables who were forbidden to use the roads in the vicinity of the Vykom temple in Travancore state of South India. The immediate aim was to open the roads to and from the temple to untouchables, but it proved to be a symbol of the movement to eliminate discrimination against untouchables in all spheres of life and a pointer to the need to abolish the rigidity of the caste system.

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## CHAPTER IV

### GANDHI ON STRATIFICATION AND INEQUALITY

The objectives of this chapter are to make (1) a statement of Gandhi's concept of social stratification, (2) an analysis of his concept utilizing five basic components of any social stratification system, and (3) an evaluation of his concept based upon five sociological parameters.

#### Gandhi's Concept of Social Stratification

Gandhi was fully aware of the caste system and its social divisions in the Indian society. While accepting some form of social stratification system for the benefit of the total functioning of society, Gandhi favored the stratification system as depicted by the Hindu tradition as having four orders. To Gandhi, the social stratification system had its limitations but "there is nothing sinful about it" (22, p. 193). His social stratification system consisted of "four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other and each as necessary for the whole society" (22, p. 193). The four divisions served as the functional distinctions based on the different abilities of various members of society, and preserved the stability of social life.

Such social divisions ought to be regarded as natural in society with no notions of superiority or inferiority (3, pp. 301, 522).

To understand fully the implications of Gandhi's treatment of the organization of four orders, it is necessary to examine the traditional attitude toward castes in India. Though it is difficult to be precise about the origin of the caste system, it might be safe to suggest that the Aryans who "invaded" India distinguished themselves from the original inhabitants as "twice-born" as distinct from "once-born." This notion of "twice-born" and "once-born" implies some form of ranking. The appellation of twice-born means that they were entitled to study the Vedas and invested with a sacred cord at puberty which is a symbol of re-birth. Three classes of twice-born are distinguished; the Brahmins, who upheld the cultural order and fulfilled sacred functions; the ksatriyas, who maintained the political order and performed military functions; and the vaisyas, who maintained the economic order and performed the necessary functions of agriculture. The once-born are the non-Aryans and are classified as sudras, who represent domestic servants approximating the position of slaves. They are not permitted to hear the Vedas, let alone study them. Outside this four-fold division of society fall the "outcastes" who performed menial tasks as scavenging and cleaning human waste.

One can see that caste was originally related to functional distinctions within Aryan society. Differences of color and culture may have initially played a part in distinguishing the Aryans from the Non-Aryans as there were references of aryavarna and dasavarna where varna had the connotation of color, but the distinctions were primarily functional. Later distinctions ceased to be simply functional and were related to birth. These social divisions related to functional distinctions were considered to be of divine origin. The Gita echoes this divine origin when it attributes the four order caste system to God, but at the same time emphasizes that the distinctions are functional and not from birth--"the four-fold order was created by Me according to the divisions of inherent qualities and capacities of the individuals" (12, p. 7).

Gandhi wanted to revive this four order social organization, thereby challenging the traditional, rigid, and orthodox teaching concerning the caste system. He was questioning the rigidity and inflexibility of the caste system. He emphasized the duty aspect rather than the ranking aspect. Gandhi defended the four-fold social divisions in the sense of varnashrama dharma, that is, in the sense that there were certain social functions or duties which were related to one's order or status in society. He approved of a society with functional distinctions based on

the different abilities of different members as a way of preserving the stability of social life. Individuals were expected to develop hereditary skills, and thereby follow the vocations of forefathers as a matter of course. Gandhi assumed that a person might inherit the natural tendencies and particular characteristics necessary to enable him to follow the same vocation as his forefathers. One form of occupation should not be considered superior or inferior to another. The law of varna, he explained, resulted from a realistic appraisal of the fact that men are not born equal in the sense that they do not all have the same abilities. Some are born with definite limitations which they cannot be expected to overcome. The law of varna ensures that each person is provided with a sphere of activity which establishes a place in society and guarantees that labors are rewarded. In this sense the law of varna was good and it was Gandhi's conviction that the ideal social order would evolve only when the implications of the law were fully understood. He also maintained that the acceptance of hereditary calling would necessarily limit or preclude the development of ambition and serve instead to release surplus energy for spiritual development (4, pp. 329-331).

Gandhi's ideas of the four-order social organization had neither a superiority-inferiority notion nor any unnecessary competition for achieving that superior status.

While addressing Constructive Program workers he was asked the question, "What then is your ideal social order?"

Gandhi answered that

Every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a careful observation of those limitations the law of varna (four orders) was deduced. It established certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. While recognizing limitations, the law of varna admitted no distinctions of high and low; on the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labors, and on the other, it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbor. This great law has been degraded and has fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to . . . By constant striving we have to enrich the inheritance left to us. This law determines the duties of man. Rights follow from a due performance of duties (24, p. 17).

Although Gandhi firmly believed in reviving the functional orders of Hindu traditions and reducing the enormous number of castes through merger, he was against the use of violent means. When asked a question "if you are so keen upon reviving varnashrama why do you not favor violence as the quickest means?" Gandhi firmly denied the use of violence to reorder the society. "Surely the question does not arise. Definition and performance of duties rules out violence altogether. Violence becomes imperative when an attempt is made to assert rights without any reference to duties" (24, p. 17).

To Gandhi, the functional stratification system is a "universal law . . . In Hinduism it is seen as a law of spiritual economics. The nations of the West and Islam itself unwittingly are obliged to follow that law" (23, p. 283). The four-order organization's duties, obligations, and functions defined by Hindu Sastras are viewed by Gandhi as a "law discovered by our ancestors, who saw that if they were to give the best part of their lives to God and to the world, and not to themselves, they must recognize that it is the law of heredity. It is a law designed to set free man's energy for the higher pursuits of life" (23, p. 283).

Gandhi summed up his idea of revival of the four-order functional social organization and removal of the rigidity and number of castes as follows:

(1) I believe in varnashram of the Vedas which, in my opinion, is based on absolute equality of status, notwithstanding the passages to the contrary in the Smritis and elsewhere. (2) Every word of the printed works passing muster as the shastras is not, in my opinion, a revelation. (3) The interpretation of accepted texts has undergone evolution and is capable of indefinite evolution, even as the human intellect and heart are. (4) Nothing in the shastras which is manifestly contrary to universal truths and morals can stand. (5) Nothing in the shastras which is capable of being reasoned can stand if it is in conflict with reason. (6) Varnashram of the shastras is today non-existent in practice. (7) The present caste system is the very antithesis of varnashram. The sooner the public opinion abolishes it the better. (8) In varnashram there was and should be no prohibition of inter-marriage or inter-dining. Prohibition there is of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing

practice is, therefore, doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about inter-dining and inter-marriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation. (9) Though there is in varnashram no prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual, as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of varnashram is observed, there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own varna. (10) There is no such thing as untouchability in the shastras. (11) The most effective, the quickest, and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and, where necessary, take the consequences of social boycott (24, p. 42).

Thus Gandhi wanted the revival of the vedic stratification system of four-orders functional organization.

#### An Analysis of Gandhi's Concepts of Social Stratification

Gandhi's concept of social stratification will be analyzed utilizing the five components of any social stratification system which were stated in Chapter II: (1) social differentiation, (2) relations among strata, (3) institutionalization, (4) legitimacy, and (5) consequences.

#### Social Differentiation

To Gandhi, social differentiation is inherent in human nature. He perceived a need for the division of labor in terms of functional necessity as well as "spiritual economics" (23, p. 283) for the benefit of all. To Gandhi, this system of social differentiation "establishes certain

spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies" (24, p. 13). Such a system of social differentiations as a characteristic of social stratification merely means following the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers (4, p. 330). He believed in the universality of social differentiations and is convinced that societies all over the world are organized on the principle of varna-- organization that is the divisions of society into classes on the basis of vocations (23, p. 283). To him, social differentiations of Hindu caste system was not merely an inert, lifeless institution, but a living one and has been functioning according to its own laws. "Our society," he declared, "was organized according to varna-vyavastha (division by vocation) for the purpose of self control, or self-denial. It is a vain effort to replace this structure by a single community" (3, p. 301).

Human differentiations are inborn which leads to social differentiations, Gandhi believed. Moreover, he also believed that from a careful observation of human differentiations and their limitations our ancestors have deduced the law of division of labor which in turn have produced four orders stratification system. So his conviction was that "an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law (law of social differentiations) are fully understood and given effect to" (24, p. 13).

### Relations Among Strata

Relations among strata, to Gandhi, implies division of labor which is essential for the stability and organization of society. The four divisions have different necessary functions for society--the brahmin imparts knowledge, the kshatriya has power to protect, the vaishya has commercial ability, and the sudra has strength for bodily labor. However, all of these varnas are equally important and none is superior to the other (23, p. 283). Gandhi implied that division of labor is necessary and functional for the society as humans are different from each other, but at the same time he refused to accept that social inequality necessarily grows out of this process.

To Gandhi, the stratification system "has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority" (23, p. 283), so it should not produce inequality by itself. To him, social inequality is the outcome of misrepresentation in the stratification system. He says the "hideous caricature" of four orders "is responsible for the air of superiority that the so called brahmin and kshatriya assumes and the status of inherited inferiority the poor ryot submissively recognizes as his deserved lot in life" (23, p. 283). To him, the necessary and functional relations between strata gives recognition and importance to all kinds of labor, which is necessary "if Indian society is to make real progress along peaceful lines" (23, p. 308). And, the

order that claims superiority and pride themselves upon their special qualities, falls because stratification of four orders implies relations of self-restraint and economy of energy.

### Institutionalization

Institutionalization as it is defined in this study is the ranking of positions in terms of a layered hierarchy. It also involves the normative pattern for the establishment of such ranking.

The normative pattern is seen by Gandhi as established traditions of heredity. He defends this doctrine of heredity and through it the social stratification system.

The four divisions, to him, define a man's calling which is essential for social organization. However, he maintains that it is against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower status. To him, all of different levels of stratification are born to serve--a brahmin with his knowledge, a kshatriya with his power of protection, a vaishya with his commercial ability, and a sudra with his bodily labor. The only aspect of the pattern of social stratification he was against was untouchability because "it is the product not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it" (22, p. 193).

However, in Gandhi's social thought, it is incorrect to assume that a brahmin is absolved from bodily labor or the duty of protecting himself from others. Birth makes a brahmin predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing to prevent a sudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes, only he will best serve with his body, and need not envy others their special qualities for service. This is exactly how the varna system was in the vedic time when "functions were regarded hereditary but exceptions were freely allowed." Thus, the institution of varna-vyavastha, to Gandhi, implied self-restraint, conservation, and economy of energy (5, p. 247). And, "while condemning the crazy tangle of sub-castes, and the taboos that went with it, he could see the merits of functionalism in the original four orders of social organizations" (18, p. 242).

#### Legitimacy

Gandhi accepted divisions of society as natural and essential. He believed in a system of stratification as "a universal law," a "law of spiritual economics" of Hinduism. He also believed that every individual on earth is "obliged to follow that law." The customs and traditions as integral part of different strata are viewed by Gandhi as a "law discovered by our ancestors," and "a law of heredity" (23, p. 283).

Gandhi tried to legitimize one's social position in a society by emphasizing ancestral obligations and by constantly striving to enrich inheritance. This law determines the duties of man. Rights follow from a due performance of duties" (23, p. 283).

In Gandhi's opinion, varna-shrama-dharma (social organization of duties and obligations) is inherent in human nature; Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his varna by choice. Not to abide by one's varna is to disregard the law of heredity. To Gandhi, recognition of the stratification system is a recognition of scientific fact whether "we know it or not." And if "all of us followed this law of varna, we would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God" (23, p. 283).

To Gandhi, though varna-shrama-dharma is not affected by rules of inter-dining or inter-marriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage these practices. This discouragement of inter-dining and inter-marriage among the strata, to Gandhi, shows the value attached to self-restraint in Hinduism. By restricting a Hindu man's choice of a bride for his son to a particular strata or group he exercises rare self-restraint. Prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining is essential for a rapid evolution

of the soul. A system of systematic prohibition on the relations of different strata is essential for the spiritual evolution and the salvation of soul (13). Here, Gandhi is trying to legitimize social stratification through moral and religious values.

Gandhi accepted this prohibition in terms of social relations among strata but rejected the system of untouchability because it is not within the four order stratification system. He could not conceive of the practice of keeping certain groups of people out of this system. To him, it amounts to total prohibition of any social interaction. So, "if untouchability is an integral part of Hinduism, the latter is a spent bullet," he declared (24, p. 99).

To Gandhi, the law of heredity is an eternal law; any attempt to alter it will lead to utter confusion. He defended and justified the four orders caste system with the doctrine of heredity because the system did not base itself upon the distinctions of wealth and possessions. He justified the stratification of society into four orders as an extension of the principle of the family. The family and the stratification system were governed by blood and heredity. As a devout Hindu, Gandhi believed in vedas and all the Hindu scriptures. This led him to believe in legitimacy of four orders organization as a divine law of heredity.

### Consequences

To Gandhi, the divisions of society into strata define man's calling, but do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, but do not confer any privileges.

Stratification of varnashrama, to Gandhi, is self-restraint and conservation as well as the economy of energy. He refers to the functions and effects of caste stratification system as "the vast organization of caste answered not only the religious wants of the community but it answered its political needs too" (3). In one speech Gandhi says

I have devoted much thought to the subject of the caste system, and come to the conclusion that Hindu society cannot dispense with it, that it lives on because of the discipline of caste. Societies all over the world are organized on the principle of caste or varnashrama, that is divisions of society into classes on the basis of vocations. Our society was organized in this manner for the purpose of self-control (3).

Gandhi believed that caste stratification system contained the seed of swaraj (self-rule) and that it could carry out social reform. For this reason he was opposed to the movements for the destruction of the caste system.

He favored dining and marriage restrictions between strata because they would maintain the social organization of four orders. He believed, in his mystic way, that the process of eating was as unclean as excretion. He maintained

Prohibition of marriage with any one not belonging to one's community promotes self-control and self-control is conducive to happiness in all circumstances. . . . The caste system has struck such deep roots in India that, I think, it will be far more advisable to try to improve it rather than uproot it. The more numerous the communities, the better it would be (3).

To Gandhi, this law of heredity was useful. He explains this usefulness as that if people follow the law of heredity for their order, they reincarnate in the same or higher order (4, p. 85). To him, divisions of people into strata was the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. It was a system of culture (14).

Since Gandhi saw the four orders social stratification system as a law of heredity and as a way of preserving the stability of social life, he did not favor social mobility from one strata to another to avoid unnecessary competition. Also, such a mobility is not necessary because "each order is complementary of the other and each necessary for the whole society" (22, p. 193).

Regarding the negative consequences of social stratification, Gandhi did refer to inequality, exploitation, and monopoly of resources because of distorted presentation of stratification system by vested interests of society (23, pp. 283, 308, 380; 22, pp. 192-194; 24, pp. 17, 42).

#### An Evaluation of Gandhi's Concept of Social Stratification

Gandhi's concept of stratification is evaluated utilizing five sociological parameters: (1) the

idealistic-materialistic, (2) the descriptive-normative, (3) the individualistic-holistic, (4) the conflict-consensus, and (5) the positivist-interpretative (2, pp. 25-50).

#### The Idealist-Materialist Parameter

One of the

most fundamental divergencies in social theory is between those who regard human societies as an expression of mind or consciousness and those who think of societies in terms of physical or material properties. The former may be called sociological idealists, the latter sociological materialists (2, p. 28).

The labels "idealist" and "materialist" are not being used here in their moral or evaluative senses in which an "idealist" is someone who has high moral aspirations and a "materialist" someone who is concerned only with money and possessions. Here, these labels describe in the one case those who view social reality as consisting primarily of ideas and, in the other, those who think of it as a form of matter.

The contrast between idealism and materialism

appears in social theory in the split between those who think of society primarily as a mental phenomenon to be analyzed in terms of thoughts, feelings, and divisions, and those who look upon social relationships as an expression of physical facts such as economic goods, physical power or biochemical reaction (2, p. 29).

Using the concept of "social norm," the idealist conceives of society as a set of rules, roles, and institutions.

Using the same concept, the materialist would argue that

"either social norms are mere expressions of underlying material factors or that they have little importance so far as the decisive determinants of social behavior are concerned (2, p. 33).

Looking from this parameter, Gandhi was an idealist and Marx was definitely a materialist, who regarded all moral, religious, and legal rules as the expression of the material interests of the dominant social class (2, p. 33). In Marxist thought, liberty, equality, and fraternity are relative values which in a class society are enjoyed only by the exploiting classes. The realization of these values by the masses of exploited and alienated people is contingent upon the emergence of "classless" society. True equality is, according to Marx, contingent on the socialization of production because the distribution of the means of consumption is a corollary of the distribution of the means of production (20).

Gandhi's social thought had deep idealistic moorings. It was more of a direction-indicator for purposes of social action than an immediately realizable social objective. Of course, he was aware of the fact that his social reconstruction program represented more of an ideal intellectual abstraction than a practical social goal. He often compared his program for an ideal social order with the Euclidean point or straight line which exists only in theory, but is nevertheless useful for solving the concrete

problems of geometry (9). Being an idealist, Gandhi regarded all heavy machinery as ideally undesirable and accepted it in society only as a necessary evil subject to the inalienable condition of maximum possible economic decentralization, with the economic reconstruction of villages as the nucleus (24, p. 11).

The time-scales on which Marx and Gandhi visualize the transformation of the state to create the ultimate "ideal society," also represent materialist-idealist differences. According to Marx, after the victory of the proletarian revolution and the socialization of means of production, the state would wither away in the not too distant future.

The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself as the representative of the whole society--the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society--is, at the same time, its last independent act. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself (20, p. 430).

Gandhi, on the other hand, visualized a gradual, continuous, and virtually perennial process of social transformation toward that "ideal society." He shared with Marx a vision of a utopian society, but not Marx's belief in a sudden and quick method of achieving it. "A few thousand years," he said, "are but a speck in the vast time circle. Someone has to make a beginning with a faith that will not flinch" (15).

### The Descriptive-Normative Parameter

"Most theories attempt not only to tell us what society is but also to make recommendation for its improvement. The former is the factual or descriptive element in a theory, the latter the normative, prescriptive, or evaluative one" (2, p. 34). "For the idealist," like Gandhi, "society is by this definition a normative order" (2, p. 34). For a descriptive theorist, social norms "are to be construed as threats"; for normative theorists, social norms are "the objects of rational institutions" (2, p. 34). To describe norms is not equivalent to making a normative statement. The term "normative," therefore, means

the assertion (or criticism and evaluation) of norms and behavior of the sort that occurs when we are not engaged in talking about morality, for instance, but asking ourselves what we ought to do, when this involves asking not what is in fact expected of us, but what ought to be expected of us (2, p. 34).

Such questions cannot be answered without adopting some standard or ideal of what social relationships or individual behavior should be like. When Gandhi emphasizes morality in social behavior, it is in this sense "a critical activity since it involves opening up questions about the correctness of social norms" (2, p. 35).

Gandhi's entire ideological thinking is geared towards some ultimate normative values. His ultimate value-goal is truth, which empirically means justice. This concept of justice consists, in the Gandhian scheme of values, of

nonviolence, which to his mind is a wider name for liberty and equality. The task of social engineering, according to Gandhi, is the progressive instantiation of these values through the reconstruction of both individual and collective social life. The tools of social transformation devised by him are expected to perform a value-creating function and achieve a successive approximation of the "ideal society."

Arguing in favor of revival of four orders social organization and maintain a status quo thus created, Gandhi tried to legitimize such stratification system through moral and religious values. The norms as integral parts of different strata were viewed by Gandhi as forming the basis for a "law of spiritual economies" and "a law of heredity" (23, p. 283). He was like

pre-modern social theorists such as Aristotle, Hobbs, and Plato who happily incorporated a measure of prescription into their theories, while modern theorists, such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, attempt to purge their theories of all normative elements and present a purely descriptive system of thought (2, p. 36).

#### The Individualistic-Holistic Parameter

Social theorists "inevitably seek to strike some kind of balance between the latitude or freedom permitted to the individual and the requirements of society" (21, p. 605). This is the difference between some social theorists who explained behavior by characteristics of the individual with those social theorists who explained it in terms of society as a whole (2, p. 36). The individualist "deduces

all social organization from the proprieties of individual human beings . . . independently of the social relationships into which they enter," where as the holist "sees the society as an independent force that gives form and substance to the life of the individual person" (2, p. 36).

Gandhi was a holist in a sense that to him, the interests of society as a whole take precedence over those of individuals. He wanted to "purify the caste system . . . into four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other and each as necessary for the whole society" (22, p. 193). Of course, he believed in the goodness of an individual, but only for the preservation and stability of the collectivity. He developed a concept of sarvodaya which means "the welfare of all" or "the rise of all" and not just the welfare or rise of the greatest number. The term signifies an ideal of all-round prosperity. He did consider the individual freedom, but, to him, "the individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa or nonviolence" (10). Describing his program for the transformation of social relationships, he says "what is needed is not the extinction of landlords and capitalists but the transformation of the existing relationship between them and the masses into something healthier and purer" (1, p. 93).

The Conflict-Consensus Parameter

On this parameter

at one extreme are those theories, according to which, a society is organized conflict and competition . . . at the other extreme are those theories which view conflict as only a surface matter obscuring large areas of agreement or consensus on basic values and the prime modes of social organization (2, pp. 38-39).

Conflict theories stress elements of coercion and power, while consensus theories tend to assume that the use of sanctions can only be peripheral to the attainment of social order (2, p. 39). Both conflict and consensus are closely tied to the concept of "power" or the capacity to obtain compliance, but in a different way.

Marx's social conflict theory unfolds itself first in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat which involves an increase in the power of the state. By using this heightened state power dictatorially, the proletariat is expected to destroy the exploiting classes. In Gandhi's social consensus theory, too, the state is allowed not only to extend, but also to increase its power and functions. He declared categorically that although he regarded the state as ideally undesirable, state ownership of the means of production was "better than private ownership" (24, p. 11). Two years before his assassination he further expressed his views on consensus. "Without having to enumerate the key industries, I would have the state ownership where a large number of people have to work

together. The ownership of the products of their labor, whether skilled or unskilled, will rest in them through the state" (25, p. 188). He also envisaged the possibility of cooperative farming by the peasants, subject to state ownership of land (11).

The argument that class contradictions can be resolved only through violent revolutions is central to Marx's social theory. Since all power is concentrated in the hands of bourgeoisie, the proletariat, though numerically much superior to the former, has no alternative but to seize power through armed revolution. Gandhi, on the other hand, argued that no social contradictions are really antagonistic. In fact, he believed that the suppression or annihilation of the opponent by direct or indirect violence would really perpetuate the social contradiction, instead of resolving it. "Those of who seek to destroy men rather than their manners," he said, "adopt the latter and become worse than those whom they destroy under the mistaken belief that the manners will die with them. They do not know the root of the evil" (23, p. 255). Writing to the imaginary reader who was arguing in favor of the forcible overthrow of the British from India, Gandhi argued that

your belief that there is no connection between the means and end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose by planting a noxious weed. . . . we reap exactly as we sow (6, p. 43).

Gandhi's primary concern had always been the conservation and progressive use of the means, since he knew that the end would inevitably follow from them. He put this bluntly as "means and end are convertible in my philosophy of life" (16). Therefore, he did not believe that liberty and/or equality could be achieved through violent means. The "exploitation-free" society visualized by him could only be established, in his opinion, when "the supreme instrument of defending just rights lay within the grasp of the unarmed individual" (22, p. 216). He accepted the Marxist's goal of classless society since his own ideal was one of abolishing all social distinctions; but he did not believe in eradicating evil from the human society at the point of a bayonet. As he said, "I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself" (7, pp. 4, 6).

#### The Positivist-Interpretative Parameter

This parameter deals with "the assumptions made by theorists about the type of explanation suited to social phenomena." Positivists consider that the "approach to social phenomena should be no different in principle from that adopted to natural or non-social phenomena." The alternative, interpretative parameter, "is the more common-sense approach of interpreting social behavior in the light

of the meaning which is attributed to it" (2, pp. 40-41). This interpretation involves considering motives and reasons of social agents and explaining why they behave as they do in terms of their beliefs and values. The objective of this approach is "to describe social phenomena in such a way as to give us the sort of understanding of the, which is, at least in principle, available to the agents themselves but cannot in any straightforward way observed by the onlooker" (2, p. 42).

Gandhi's explanation of social relations and human behavior closely falls under the interpretative parameter. During the noncooperation movement (1920-22), which was the first Gandhian mass movement against British rule in India, Gandhi explained the existing relationship between two countries as unequal and forcibly imposed. Real unity in this relationship could be established only when the negative relationship involved in the imperialistic connection was ended and a voluntary relationship reestablished on the basis of freedom and equality. "Rejection of the untruth," he argued, "was necessary for the vindication of truth" (17).

In the same way, the conflict between labor and capital, Gandhi believed, could not be resolved without eradicating the inequality between the two. Moreover, "a nonviolent system of Government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the

hungry millions persists" (8, pp. 20-21). He advised the landlords and capitalists to accept his scheme of trusteeship under which they were to reduce themselves to poverty and live at the same economic and social level as the peasants and workers, drawing only a reasonable commission for performing a managerial function. In his scheme of social organizations of four orders, men of all varnas are sought to be equal through the institution of an economic system with equal emoluments. However, he was aware of the fact that it was difficult to attack the caste system without "indefinite revolution in the interpretation of accepted religious texts" (24, p. 42).

Gandhi's explanation of the functional necessity of the four divisions of society also brings him closer to an interpretative parameter. He approved of a society with functional distinctions based on the different abilities of different members as a way of preserving the stability of social life. To him, a man was expected to develop his hereditary skills, and thereby follow the vocations of his forefathers as a matter of course. The law of varna, he explained, resulted from a realistic appraisal of the fact that men are not born equal in the sense that they do not all have the same abilities. Some are born with definite limitations which they cannot be expected to overcome and what the law of varna does is to ensure that each man is

provided with a sphere of activity which establishes him a place in society and guarantees that his labors are rewarded (24, p. 13).

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## CHAPTER V

### GANDHI ON EQUALITY

Gandhi wanted a society of complete equality among people (Sarvodaya), which meant the improvement or welfare of all, not just the welfare of the greatest number. His staunch followers, Nehru and Bhave, who practiced sarvodaya, believed that this Gandhian concept had values of spirituality and science that replace politics and religion in human interaction (8, 11).

The sarvodaya was the ethic of the social movement based upon Gandhian thoughts. The sarvodaya fundamentally redefined the varna, ashram, and dharma, the three basic tenets of Hindu social organization. This ethic underlying sarvodaya was redefined as applying to all varnas. Men of all varnas sought to be equalized by instituting an economic system with equal emoluments. Since everyone is an equal spiritual entity, he is also equal in the secular organization. Vinoba Bhave, who institutionalized this concept, interprets Gandhi's sarvodaya and varna organization of society as essentially entailing the removal of differentiations between men.

This sarvodaya ethic of Gandhi seems to be competing with the ethic of Western liberalism, as adopted in urban

India. One particular feature of the sarvodaya ethic raises it from the Indian culture to the world scene. That is the concept of sarva-dharma-samanatva, the principle of coexistence which accepts the ways and value patterns of all people.

Gandhi, in order to achieve the kind of equality he advocated, suggested the abolition of the present caste system and the revival of varna-shrama-vyavastha, the removal of the concept of "untouchability," trusteeship lending to bring economic equality, the decentralization of power to reduce rural-urban inequality, the equal treatment of women to raise their social status, and the education of all.

#### The Abolishment of the Caste System

Gandhi suggested the abolition of numerous castes which were responsible for the inherited superiority-inferiority statuses. The large number of castes did not serve any function in society, but is really a hindrance for the real progress of Indian society (12, p. 193).

Gandhi approved the system of social and functional division, but he did not approve of the degenerated caste system which, in his view, was the very antithesis and perversion of the original idea of varna-shrama-dharma. When unjust social distinctions became attributed to differences of divine origin and when the inequitable

stratification of society received religious sanction, then a system of divinely ordained superior and inferior beings had emerged. Gandhi proclaimed the view that such a rigid birthright caste system had to be abolished since it was contrary to basic, elementary, moral, and religious principles and was positively harmful to the spiritual and moral growth of the nation (2). To him,

birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's inferiority. Character is the only determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority; no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or degrading because of his or her birth can command our allegiance, it is a denial of God and truth, which is God (2).

Gandhi knew the seriousness of the norms and rigidity of caste structure in the Indian society. He advocated reform and reconstruction within the structure with the revival of the four-order functional organization. He was aware of the fact that it was difficult to attack the caste system without "indefinite resolution in the interpretation of accepted religious texts" (13, p. 42).

"Caste must go," Gandhi declared. He also maintained that

The present caste system is the very antithesis of varnashram. The sooner the public opinion abolishes it the better. . . . The existing practice of prohibition of intermarriage and interdining or change in caste occupation is wrong and should be the unfettered choice of the individual. . . . The most effective, the quickest, and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with

themselves and, where necessary, take the consequences of social boycott. The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The change will be gradual and imperceptible. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make any impression upon the so-called lower classes (13, p. 42).

When Gandhi said "caste must go," he was aware of the need of some sort of social organization to replace it. He never wanted to abolish the functional order of the caste system, he only wanted to abolish the numerous caste groups and the rigidity of their customs which separates castes. He wanted to reduce the number of castes to four in which each caste is based on the abilities and vocations of individuals. In advocating the removal of caste and the revival of the four-order functional organization, Gandhi probably was presenting an idealistic picture of society. He may have been correct in maintaining that varnashrama vyavastha, the four order social organization, did not imply notions of superiority or inferiority based on one's birth. Nevertheless, it could be argued that if work determines one's place or status in society, and if the work one does is decided by one's birth, than birth becomes the most important factor in determining one's place or status in society.

#### The Removal of the Concept of "Untouchability"

To Gandhi, the loss of the functionality of the four orders of varnashrama led to numerous rigid caste groups

which eventually led to the development of the notion of untouchability. Although Gandhi favored stratification of the four-order caste system, he was categorically against untouchability in any form or fashion. To him,

Untouchability is the product not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is an attack upon this high and lowness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified (12, p. 193).

In dedicating himself to the cause of removal of untouchability, Gandhi had "no less an ambition than to see a full regeneration of humanity"; and while fully aware that "it may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea shell" and not sure as to its realization "while the dream lasts," he quotes Romain Rolland that the "victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it" (12, p. 193).

As noted earlier, the untouchables are not included in the caste system. They are out-caste people and no out-caste could ever hope to enter the caste system--once an out-caste always an out-caste.

Gandhi's sense of kinship with all men and his concern for the welfare of all is revealed particularly in his attitude towards the system of untouchability and his treatment of the untouchables, the "harijans" (children of God). By use of this term he is suggesting that untouchables derive from Brahma (creator) in the same way as the

twice-born brahmins, kshatriya, and vaishya and the once-born sudras.

By taking up the cause of untouchables, Gandhi was challenging much of the traditional and orthodox ideas concerning the caste system and deep-rooted customs. He did approve of a society with functional distinctions of varna vyavastha. But he maintained that varna relating to man's duties or vocations in society did not in any way imply the notion of untouchability.

To him, the untouchable epitomized the weakness and imperfection of Hinduism. He was so much opposed to untouchability that if it were to be considered an integral part of the Hindu way of life, he would stop calling himself a Hindu, as he would prefer rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived (3, pp. 289, 346, 445). He compared untouchability to arsenic in milk that destroys the life of Hindu society. To him, the justification of the untouchables cannot claim the sanction of religion because it is contrary to truth. To say that God has deliberately set one section of society apart as untouchable is nothing short of blasphemy. He argued that if Hindus maintain that they have the sanction of religion to segregate the untouchables, then it is possible for the white man also to maintain that he has a similar sanction to segregate Hindus or Indians. So it is necessary that "we first cast out the beam of untouchability from our

own eyes before we attempt to remove the mote from that of our masters" (3, p. 445). Gandhi felt so strongly about the inequality of untouchables that he expressed the desire, should he not attain moksa or liberation from the birth and re-birth cycle, to be born as an untouchable in order that he might identify himself with their suffering and sorrows.

While he was incarcerated in Yervada jail, Gandhi fasted on behalf of the untouchables as a protest against Hindu maltreatment of them. He regarded fasting as one of the weapons of satyagraha. His action did have the effect of producing a spirit of penance and reform throughout India and led to some improvements in the treatment and the conditions of the Harijans. It did not abolish untouchability, but it was effective in the sense that it made the practice of untouchability less socially acceptable (3, pp. 7-572).

The immorality, injustice, inequity, and inhumanity in the practice of untouchability is both explicit and implicit in Gandhi's thought. "What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch" (6, p. 443). This statement not only indicates Gandhi's desire to form a society that approximates to the ideal, but perception of the inextricable relationship between religion and morality. Hinduism had ignored this relationship and had departed from its ideals and from its

unequivocal declaration concerning the unity of existence. The whole purpose of the anti-untouchability campaign of Gandhi was to restore this purity of the Hindu way of life.

#### Trusteeship for Economic Equality

E. F. Schumacker writes in the forward of the book entitled Equality Through Trusteeship that

The theory of capitalism suggests that the only way to run an economy efficiently is to let everyone pursue mainly, if not exclusively, his own advantage. The theory of communism, is that the economy works best when everybody acts according to plan for the public interest. Both theories are plausible enough; but in practice they often do not work. Mahatma Gandhi put forward his trusteeship model as a via media or middle way (9, pp. i-viii).

Under state regulated trusteeship, Gandhi proposes that the individual will be free to make as much money as he likes, but will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of the society. Gandhi proposed equality through trusteeship.

Gandhi always emphasized the interrelationship between ethics and economics. True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics, to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics. True economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life (4). He believed that India, with its own culture and tradition, could employ this method to bring the "haves" in the present-day

industrial society to behave in the interests of all, including the "have-nots."

To Gandhi, the riches are, in a way, a form of might. A rich man does not harm others so much by being rich as by using his riches in an anti-social way. All that Gandhi wanted was that the rich should employ their resources in the service of mankind, after satisfying their own legitimate needs. He was not for expropriating nor liquidating the rich. He actually wanted them to continue to function and utilize all their skills and talents to earn more, as this would benefit the whole society for long.

Gandhi's concern for individual freedom prompted him to evolve his "trusteeship" concept. Pyarela explains this concept as a formula for equality. All are agreed that there can be no peace in society so long as glaring inequalities exist and the wide gap between the high and low, haves and have-nots remains. There are two ways of removing disparities. One is by lopping off the tall poppies, liquidating of the owning class and redistributing its assets. The other is through state action by nationalization, expropriation, and the establishment of a system of steeply graded taxation with an all-pervasive system of controls. Now levelling down can achieve a dead uniformity, but it does not add to anyone's stature. The sum total of the assets of the community at the end of the process,

therefore, will be at a lower point than before. Variety is the law of nature. No two individuals are exactly alike. Not even two leaves of a tree are exactly alike. Inequalities are, therefore, bound to crop up as often as they are removed owing to the natural differences in the talents and capacity of different individuals. We are faced with a dilemma. Left alone, people become unequal; if we try to make them equal, they cease to be free. Gandhi's trusteeship theory provides the way out of this dilemma (10, pp. 622-624).

Gandhi's approach to trusteeship was all-comprehensive based on his approach to life and society. To him it was not a makeshift formula to make some concession to his capitalist followers, but a philosophy of life and organization. To Gandhi, trusteeship was a method of management, a method to bring about interpersonal relationship where status symbolized by riches or heredity merges itself with the common man. It envisages a new structure and a system of organization based on nonviolence, the welfare of all, the sharing of responsibilities, fruits of production as well as decision-making (10, pp. 629-630).

Gandhi had no illusion that this doctrine would automatically become a voluntary code of conduct. His reply to a question as to how long the country should wait for the capitalists to convert themselves was "I will be very happy, indeed, if the people concerned behave as

trustees; but, if they fail, I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possession through the state with the minimum exercise of violence" (10, p. 629). As a prerequisite to the enforcement of the rights and obligations of trusteeship, however, he wanted public opinion to be created at the grassroot level. What is significant in Gandhi's formula of trusteeship is that it gives a chance to all possessors of property to voluntarily liquidate their rights of exclusive ownership and identify themselves with the people. If they do not do so voluntarily there would have to be social sanctions like noncooperation and satyagraha to convert private ownership to trusteeship. Thus, Gandhi did foresee compulsion of trusteeship by legislative action.

The question is whether moneyed people will live up to this ideal? Will they agree to hold all the wealth that they have amassed in trust for the lower classes of society? Can such love and equality in the economic field be possible in an industrial society which measures progress and advancement in terms of wealth and power and not in moral terms?

The term "trusteeship" in Gandhian thought implies man's attitude to his entire life. The acceptance of trusteeship is sanctioned, approved, and desired by the Gita since "those who desire salvation should act like trustees, who, though having a control over great possession,

regard not an iota of them as his own" (10, p. 630). To him, property must serve the cause of human happiness and should also uplift the person who manages it. The industrial revolution has increased the productivity of man and has created new, vast and complex forms of prosperity. The present possessors of that property are not its exclusive owners; they are only its temporary trustees and the society has an overriding right to regulate the use of that property in its own interests (10, pp. 631-634). Moreover, Gandhi himself thought of industry as a joint enterprise of labor and capital in which both owners and workers are co-trustees for society.

Gandhi offered trusteeship not only to encourage social responsibility of business, industry, and the wealthy classes, but also as an alternative to what Schumaker referred to as Western capitalism, on the one hand, and communism, on the other. As Pyarelal suggested, Gandhi's trusteeship formula is not a device to accommodate the owning class, with its shady past and shadier current practices in the framework of the existing order, but a means of putting an end to that order by transforming the basis of ownership. The owning class dare not shut their eyes to the plain writing on the wall. This is their last, perhaps, their only chance (10, pp. 631-634). The concept of trusteeship, then, is not only an answer to class conflict, but also a vindication of the power of the people

vis-a-vis the power of the state. When class contradictions are resolved by applying social sanction and not legal sanction, man may be said to have moved up in the orbit of moral values.

Gandhi's concept of trusteeship can be summed up as follows.

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except insofar as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of ownership and use of wealth.

4. Under state-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.

5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, a limit should also be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time, so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference eventually.

6. Under the Gandhian economic order, the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed (9).

#### The Decentralization of Power

Gandhi believed in minimizing the power of the central government. To him, a major evil of the state is its coercive character. It represents violence in a concentrated organized form. He maintained that "the individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from the violence to which it owes its very existence" (13, p. 11). The concern for individual freedom prompted Gandhi to evolve his idea of decentralization of power.

To Gandhi, next to the family, the social environment that is most natural to man is the local community in which he resides. It is not an artificial creation, but rather it comes into existence through a process of growth. The village is not a mere territorial settlement, it is a face-to-face community where there is a feeling of participation and identity of interests. To Gandhi, this village will manage all its problems and activities through a Panchayat, a body of five members.

The next step in the building up of an integrated society is for a number of neighboring primary communities to cooperate and build a regional community which will have

its own organizational structure and its own school system. The regional communities will likewise integrate into a district community, which in turn will federate to form a provincial community. When the provincial communities come together, we get the national community. And finally, "a day might come when the national communities might federate together to form the world community" (5).

In this scheme each level has its limited power to manage its own affair. The relationship between the "higher" and "lower" level will not be a power relationship. The power exercised by the higher community over the lower will be mainly moral, its function advisory and cooperative rather than authoritarian and dictatorial. It is not as if the district panchayat is over the village panchayat or the provincial over the district. There are certain activities and certain functions which have to be performed on each level. Thus, the distribution of powers and functions will follow a rational system. The powers enjoyed by the "higher communities" will have been delegated to it by the "lower communities." The possibility of any superimposition is therefore ruled out by declaring that the higher communities are the result of an organic growth, created by the lower communities and enjoying powers delegated by the lower communities.

Decentralization of power, Gandhi believed, will bridge the gap between economic and social inequality that exists

between urban and rural areas of the society. In his social organizational structure, village, villagers, and village industries play very important roles. As he wanted to revive the four order social organization of varnashrama, he also wanted to revive the village community and village industries. He believed that "revivification of India's villages is a necessity of our existence. . . . Thereby only can we root out untouchability and feel one with all. . . . We must mentally go back to the villages and treat them as our pattern, instead of putting the city life before them for imitation" (13, pp. 1-2). By reviving the village industries, Gandhi believed, we can stop the progressive poverty of enforced unemployment.

Gandhi's belief in the society of decentralized power can be effectively seen in his treatment of the khadi (home-spun cloth) industry. In the annual meeting of All India Spinners Association in 1946 at Delhi, Gandhi was entirely in favor of the maximum decentralization of the khadi work. He favored authority to the local khadi organizations and their complete independence from the central organization.

#### Raise Women's Status for Gender Equality

Gandhi's lifelong fight on behalf of lower strata in general and untouchability in particular is matched by his attitude of equality towards women. The status of women in the traditional Indian social system was not that of

equality to men. They had been reduced to the status of second-class citizens by laws formulated and introduced by men. According to Gandhi's basic principle of the essential oneness of humanity (sarvodaya), men and women cannot be regarded as different in essence. However, even though they complement each other and have the same basic human feelings, Gandhi maintains that men have tended to dominate women with the result that women have developed a sense of inferiority and have come to believe that they are indeed inferior to men. Gandhi's argument is that women require different qualities than men in order to fulfill the obligations of motherhood, and in many ways it is a sad reflection on society when it encourages women to foresake their customary duties as custodians of family life to take up duties normally performed by men, such as taking up arms in defense of one's country. In Gandhi's view, the duties involved in maintaining moral standards and a good home in the midst of bad social influences require as much courage and fortitude as those involved in defending one's country against an aggressor. To him, "of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity . . . to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex" (1, pp. 160-161).

In support of the cause of equality of women, Gandhi advised that they should rebel against man and refuse to be

treated as things or playmates. By doing so, according to Gandhi, they would acquire freedom and the ability to show clearly the powerful force they were capable of exercising in the world. To him, women had greater moral power, courage, and endurance than men, and also an infinite capacity for love and suffering.

If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women. . . . Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman? . . . God has vouchsafed to women the power of non-violence more than to man. It is all the more effective because it is mute. Women are the natural messengers of the gospel of non-violence if only they will realize their high state" (1, pp. 162, 167).

On the question of marriage, Gandhi notes that the ideal approach is to regard it as a sacrament. It should be a spiritual as well as a physical union. His view of marriage as a sacrament means that he disapproved of arranged marriages on the basis of monetary settlements or dowries or on the ground of caste. He also strongly disapproved of child marriages and showed the weaknesses of such an institution in his autobiography. He regarded it as a cruel custom and considered it disgraceful that it should be given religious sanction. As he said, "brahminism cannot tolerate untouchability and virgin widowhood" (7, pp. 482-489).

He also approved of widow remarriage. Usually, in the higher castes it was the custom for women who had lost their husbands to remain widows for the rest of their lives, but

the custom did not apply to men. Gandhi advocated, on the basis of sex equality, that widows be given the right to remarry should they so desire. "If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood" (7, p. 494).

Another restriction imposed on women that Gandhi vigorously opposed was that of pardah. Originally pardah applied to the Islamic practice of veiling the faces of women, but it became a symbol of female segregation accepted by the Hindus. The main purpose of pardah was to preserve the purity of women by keeping them confined. At best it was an attempt by husbands (men) to protect their wives (women) from marauding male predators; at worst, it was a violation of basic human rights which resulted in wives being treated as slaves, or as the property of their husbands. In Gandhi's opinion it was a barbarous custom to the question whether a man should consider himself to have the right to guard his wife's purity. Women had no reciprocal rights in the case of male purity, so if male purity was the prerogative of the male, why should not female purity be the prerogative of the female? To him, it was a mistake to assume that chastity was like some kind of hot house plant that could be protected by the walls of pardah. Chastity was not something that could be imposed from without; it was something that grew from within (7, p. 489).

### Education

Gandhi favored compulsory primary education for all, including women and untouchables, but he insisted that it should be combined with vocational training. He was realistic enough to see that apart from the educational benefits of a vocational approach no program of compulsory primary education was likely to succeed. The economic survival of the family unit required that there should be the full cooperation of all members, including children. He also conceived his theory of education to be "the spearhead of a silent social revolution fraught with the most far reaching consequences" (7, p. 512).

The villages of India were in a state of progressive decay since they were regarded simply as appendages to the cities which exploited them. By relating vocational education to the requirements of the villages, Gandhi was setting in motion a program of social reconstruction and laying the foundation for a more equitable social order.

By suggesting vocational education, Gandhi was recognizing the need to cultivate a proper attitude to manual labor. His stress on the importance of manual labor derived from the fact that approximately 80 percent of the population of India lived in rural areas where labor was an essential and integral part of daily life. Gandhi's emphases on the dignity of manual labor contrasted strongly with the general attitude of the educational

classes at the time, who regarded manual labor as degrading and befitting only to the lower strata of society.

Education was in some way associated in the Indian mind with status and with the more refined occupations in society. Perhaps that is why Gandhi ironically refers to the British education system as "producing or making Indian clerks and interpreters" (7, p. 512). To him, the divorce between education and manual labor had led to social differentiation and a sense of superiority-inferiority status.

There is a form of caste distinction implicit in the attitude of superiority displayed by members of the educated elite towards manual laborers. To Gandhi, the British system of education fostered such an attitude and also alienated a man from his fellow man, created barriers in society, and denied essential unity for equality among people.

He also favored education of basic ethics in the schools. He favored students studying the main tenets of faiths other than theirs to cultivate toleration and breadth of vision, but helps them to appreciate their own faith better. His idea of study of basic ethics and the fundamental tenets of other religions is the kind of phenomenological, historical, and philosophical approach to the study of religion that would exclude the narrow, exclusivist, and dogmatic approach. In this respect he

shows a commendable openness to religious pluralism (7, p. 519).

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## CHAPTER VI

### A SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE OF GANDHI'S THEORY

The major objectives of the present study were to (1) identify the major ideas of Gandhi on social stratification, (2) explain his logic of social stratification system, and (3) make an attempt to delineate a systematic statement of a theory of social stratification that is implicit or explicit in Gandhi's social thought in terms of five selected components of a stratification system. The methodological orientation of the study consisted of reading literature by or about Gandhi by ascertaining the theoretical components of social stratification in Gandhi's writings and offering an evaluation of these theoretical components. The selection of all material was based on the criterion of their relevance to the concepts and ideas of social stratification.

#### Summary

Five major components of stratification systems were used in studying various aspects of Gandhi's stratification system. The study also identified selected personal, political, and philosophical aspects of Gandhi's ideas on social stratification. The relevance of his concepts of

"nonviolence" and "civil disobedience" to his concept of social structure were also discussed.

A systematic statement of Gandhi's theory of social stratification included its characteristics in terms of the following five components. First, social differentiation is inherent in human nature. Such a system avoided all the unworthy competition among the members of the society. Gandhi believed in the universality of social differentiations and was convinced that societies were organized into the divisions on the basis of vocations. Second, relations among strata implied that division of labor is essential for the stability and organization of society. He also implied that this division of labor is necessary and functional for the society as humans are different from each other. Third, normative patterns established traditions of heredity. The four divisions in society defined a person's "calling" which is essential for social organization. The only aspect of the pattern of social stratification he was against was untouchability; he did not consider that as a product of the caste system. Fourth, regarding the criterion of legitimacy, Gandhi asserted that the system of stratification was the universal law that everyone was obliged to follow. Customs and traditions, integral parts of different strata, were viewed by Gandhi as reflecting a law of heredity. A system of systematic prohibition on the relations of different strata

was essential. Gandhi tried to legitimize social stratification through moral and religious values of the society. Five, one of the consequences of social stratification system, Gandhi emphasized that it defined duties only and did not confer any privileges. To him, the divisions of people into strata was the best possible adjustment of social stability and progress. These components are also evaluated utilizing five sociological parameters.

Thus, while accepting some form of social stratification for the benefit of total functioning of the society, Gandhi favored that stratification system as depicted by the Hindu tradition of four orders in the social organization. He approved of a society with fourfold social divisions as functional distinctions based on the different abilities of different members of society and as a way of preserving the stability of social life. Such social divisions, to him, were expected to be regarded as natural in society and no notion of superiority and/or inferiority should be involved in it. He refused to accept that social inequality necessarily grows out of the process of social stratification. To him, social inequality was the outcome of misrepresentation of the stratification system by people pursuing vested interests in society. To maintain the hereditary law of social stratification and at the same time reduce the inequality created by distorted presentation of the system by vested interests, Gandhi

suggested (a) abolition of present caste system and revival of varnavyavastha, (b) removal of untouchability, (c) state regulated trusteeship, (d) decentralization of power, (e) raising women's status, and (f) vocational education for the masses.

#### Critique

"Theory only attempts to describe an idea, and the idea is the most important feature of any theory, formal or otherwise" (4, p. 43). From this point of view Gandhi had an idea of social stratification or the order of society which he did attempt to describe. His explicit or implicit statements on social stratification do have their strengths and weaknesses.

The following critique of Gandhi's ideas of social stratification system utilizes four "general standards," assessing the quality of his theory in terms of adequacy, clarity, consistency, and fruitfulness (5).

#### Adequacy

Adequacy means "the degree to which the vision makes sense of one's situation by knitting the various parts of it into a meaningful whole" (5, p. 78). This is not the same as assessing the thought according to whether one likes it or not. Further, "judgement of adequacy only makes sense when applied to visions that tend toward factual accuracy, precision, consistency and coherence"

(5, p. 79). However, "there is an element of insight in the judgements of adequacy that is not reducible to the formal standards" (5, p. 79). Adequacy can also be judged by "the richness of a vision and its plausibility" (5, p. 80).

Mahatma Gandhi wrote and spoke about social order in society. He did not seem to be interested in developing a theory to create "a meaningful whole." In that sense, his vision was not "adequate" for the statement of a theory of social stratification. It seems that Gandhi's ideas on social stratification are quite diffused, unfocused, and scattered around several relevant topics. While some of his ideas, such as on four social orders and inequality, appear to be well developed, many others have not been elaborated in order to provide a relatively complete picture of what he was talking about. In other words, Gandhi's theory of social stratification lacks a comprehensive treatment of pertinent subjects in that context. For example, he failed to elaborate on socio-economic bases of stratification systems. His over-reliance on the moral and religious bases of stratification seems to characterize his ideas as "one-sided," and even deterministic. Although he touches on various subjects relevant to stratification, he often leaves many as underdeveloped and even meaningless.

However, thinkers such as Gandhi are like social reformers who are generally committed to lessening the gap

between the possibilities of a larger vision of life and social realities. Gandhi, as a social thinker, presented four orders of social organization as a middle approach between numerous caste groups and a utopian ideal of total equality.

In assessing the adequacy of social thought of Gandhi, it is important to realize that he was essentially a political moralist who wrote from the standpoint of improving the moral fibre of Indian society. He was a man of action rather than an abstract theorist, and he had more to say about moral problems facing the population than the postulation of a theory. Gandhi's concept of social stratification rests upon his metaphysical presuppositions, which introduce a strong subjectivist element into his basic concepts. His views also reflect a sustaining conviction that conduct ultimately and necessarily must be based upon what is morally right. His ideas, therefore, have been largely reactionary, with jargons of political and social ambitions for change.

#### Clarity

Clarity is an "important requirement of a social theory since what is unclear can be neither fully understood or properly assessed" (1, p. 41). Clarity reduces confusion and ambiguity of thought. However, "this is not necessarily a vice since we need to refine the language of untrained social comment if we are to achieve precision" (1, p. 42).

Gandhi lacked clarity in thinking as he was an eccentric as well as a complex thinker. He did not define his social thinking clearly. When he talked about social stratification he buttresses ideas about social differentiation. There is an ambiguity of thought about castes and varnas.

Gandhi's social thinking "sometimes lacked logic and reason" (3, p. 783), and there was an absence of a systematic composition on his basic theory. His writings were unsystematic, sometimes unscientific, and full of repetitions. As Nehru, though a close associate of Gandhi who knew his writings and speeches well, once remarked, "in spite of the closest association with him for many years, I am not clear in my own mind about his objective" (3, p. 782). Aware of this weakness, Gandhi once declared, "As a matter of fact, my writings should be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said and written" (3, p. 782). He was not very clear in writing about the complex social phenomena as he was not a literary genius.

#### Consistency

If clarity is a prerequisite for entry to the field of social theories, "Consistency is required to remain there." Consistency refers to internal coherence. "A theory must not contradict itself by asserting or denying in one place what it denies or asserts in another."

Moreover, "a theory is judged by how well it hangs together as a mutually supporting set of assumptions" (1, p. 46).

Much of the inconsistencies of Gandhi's ideas of revival and reconstruction of society and social relations are reflected by the following quotes.

A man who believed in the gospel of caste by birth-cum-hereditary vocation and disapproved of inter-caste marriages, under the soothing but deceptive balm of the principle that all professions were equal, but shoemakers must remain shoemakers, from generation to generation so that the God-ordained caste system might prevail can hardly be called a lover of social equality and social justice.

He "came forward to put back the hand of the clock of progress." On the one hand, it could be argued that Gandhi advocated the removal of the untouchability because untouchables were treated unequally, yet, on the other hand, he implied the belief that poverty is God made and untouchability "is the result of sins in a previous life" (3, pp. 361-369, 781-782). As has been discussed earlier, Gandhi rejected caste system and advocated a revival of the four-order social system in India based upon the varnashram. However, his interpretation of the divine origin of four varnas based upon functional equality is not consistent with the Hindu scriptures. The Brahminical interpretations of the varnas imply a direct hierarchy in that four-ordered system. Gandhi himself appears to be disjointed and contradictory in elaborating his notion of

the "equal varnas" and is not defensible on that concept through the established literature.

### Fruitfulness

In a social science, when one clarifies one's image of the human condition, certain modes of action seem more reasonable to undertake than others. The fact that each image of the human condition "suggests courses of action leads to the judgement of these images on the basis of their fruitfulness for action" (5, p. 81). The fruitfulness of a theory refers to the accomplishment of implied action or the exposition of alternative actions. Gandhian social thought was fruitful insofar as it advocated democracy (including the participation of all strata) and revolutionized the values of Indian society (2, p. 113).

Gandhi attempted to apply his concept of social stratification to a variety of modes of action--the relationship between capital and labor, the decentralization of power, social inequalities and different types of exploitation, the connection between individual liberty and national independence, the promotion of collective welfare and village self-government, the equality and brotherhood among various communal and religious groups, attitudes toward work and the problem of full employment, the alienation of the intelligentsia, the universal obligation of manual labor, and educational and social

reconstruction. His concept of ahimsa or nonviolence has potential for application in various areas of today's troubled society. By far, Gandhi initiated ideas that have not only been adopted in the Constitution of India, but also have implications for social movements in the world at large.

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