

# GANDHI MARG

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Gandhi Peace Foundation  
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# GANDHI MARG

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## Editorial

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS have passed since the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi. His martyrdom stirred the nation's conscience. Gandhi died when his actions were unpopular with most Indians, and his voice was against the tide. His martyrdom, although a blot on India, served a larger purpose. The communal riots in the wake of the partition stopped suddenly. It was a shock for many Hindus to learn that he was killed by one of their kind. Gandhi's martyrdom guaranteed the unity of India by bringing together two previously fighting communities, Hindus and Muslims, and two personalities, Nehru and Patel. Sardar Patel said, 'We did not follow him when he was alive; let us at least follow his steps now he is dead'. In his broadcast to the nation, Nehru said that we have 'to hold together and fight that terrible poison of communalism that has killed the greatest man of our age'. Patel assiduously undertook the task of integrating the 560-odd Indian princely states into the Union. Nehru could get down to government business. It took nearly a decade and more for another communal riot of a severe kind to erupt. Nehru used the interim period to promote his version of a secular and plural India. In other words, in death, the Mahatma conveyed a message of a pluralist and civic-national India, not a religiously oriented and majoritarian one. Although their approaches differed, Gandhi and Nehru strived to construct a civic nation of numerous ethnicities and religious groups.

Martyrs and martyrdom have come to be associated these days with valour and the reinforcement of the legitimacy of violence. This is a departure from the meaning attached to Gandhi's martyrdom. He died in defence of nonviolence and communal harmony, and he had the foresight to anticipate death in the hands of his countrymen as early as 1909. Godse was not just an individual but a representative of a group that was exclusivist in orientation and believed in using violence to achieve its goals. The efforts of Gandhi to persuade Godse to stay with him and dialogue with him never succeeded. Violence is

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the opposite of dialogue. When people fire into the effigies of the Mahatma and re-enact the deed of Godse, who is presented as the true Mahatma, they fail to understand that they are glorifying a philosophy that props up exclusivism and violence and not re-enacting the assassination of Gandhi as a body form.

This issue of the journal has seven articles. The first article looks at the developments in Cuba from a Gandhi-Kumarappa perspective. The second article examines Gandhi's Tour to Bihar after the Earthquake in 1934 and his utterances on relief and reform in that context. The third article examines the role of people's movements in making the parliament for the people in a truly democratic sense. The next article analyses Gandhi's views on caste, untouchability, and Hinduism. The fifth article examines the ascetic elements in Gandhi's discourse on the body, which is followed by an article on Gandhi's individuality. The final article makes an assessment of the progress in sustainable development goals in the context of Bihar. It is hoped that the diversity of the line-up of articles in this issue will provide enough food for thought to the readers.

JOHN S MOOLAKKATTU  
Chief Editor



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# Can Cuban Society Learn from the Gandhi-Kumarappa Economic Framework?

*Jos Chathukulam*

## ABSTRACT

*Foes of the Communist regime in Cuba hoped, mistakenly, that the July 11th, 2021, protests would turn out to be a ‘Cuban Spring’. A year later is a suitable time to review the government’s resilience over the years in handling various crises that threatened its fall. This article offers an account of present-day Cuba and some reflections based on a recent three-week visit there. I argue that the government should foster more cooperatives, promote decentralization, and thus incorporate relevant aspects of a Gandhi-Kumarappa framework to a sustainable economy under 21st-century conditions.*

Key words: Cuba, 1994 uprising, Gandhi-Kumarappa economic framework, solidarity economy, digitalisation

## Introduction

DURING THE 2010-11 ‘Arab Spring’, when a series of pro-democracy and anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions were taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, the Western media were rife with reports of a possibility of creating a ‘Cuban Spring’ to destabilize the Communist regime there<sup>1</sup>. One idea apropos was that ‘technology, and especially social media, could ignite a revolution’<sup>2</sup>, long-time critics of Cuba were toying with the idea that the USA could provoke a revolution there with the help of communications technology. Such an impulse has been part of the USA’s attitude toward Cuba for decades<sup>3</sup>. The notion that ‘the anti-government dissidents [in Cuba] will use the internet, cell phones,

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and social media to foment a popular uprising on the island, modelled after the “Arab Spring” was predicated on ‘a particular understanding of Cuba that portrays an imminent collapse of the Cuban experiment’. The notion was based on fallacious assumptions about Cuba.

### Two Cuban Julys

July is a politically special month for Cuba<sup>4</sup>. It was on July 26th, 1953, that *El Comandante* Fidel Castro<sup>5</sup> launched a historic attack<sup>6</sup> on the Moncada Military Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, to overthrow the government of USA-backed dictator Fulgenico Batista<sup>7</sup>.

The July 2021 protests began in San Antonio de los Baños, a town on the outskirts of Havana hit by hour-long daily power cuts for a while. Shortage of basic amenities, including food and medicine, and a surge of Covid-19 infections (amidst a notably slow vaccine roll-out) were other facts prompting Cubans to take to the streets to express their concerns and raise their demands. News of the protests spread like wildfire as images (including videos) and write-ups were all over social networking sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Within hours the protests spread across the island, from Holguín, Santa Clara, Matanzas, and Camaguey to Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba. Protesters looted shops and walked off with washing machines, mattresses, and bottles of rum. Video footage from Havana showed young men striding through streets, clutching rocks and throwing them at police patrol cars<sup>8</sup>. Images on social media showed the security forces detaining, beating, and pepper-spraying some of the protesters<sup>9</sup>. More than 300 people have been sentenced to lengthy jail terms (6 to 30 years) for taking part in the protest<sup>10</sup>. It is notable that artists<sup>11</sup>, musicians, writers, performers, and academics who are part of a Cuban art-collective called ‘the *San Isidro* movement’ played a significant role in the protests. Such collectives have been campaigning for greater freedom under the Communist government in Cuba<sup>12</sup>.

### The 1994 Uprising

The closest Cuba ever came to something like an ‘Arab Spring’ was in 1994 during a ‘special period’<sup>13</sup>. On August 5th of that year, there was an uprising in Havana’s Malecón district (in retrospect, the uprising is called ‘the Maleconazo’); a riot took place, and several attempts by residents to flee Cuba by sea were thwarted violently by the local authorities. When Castro came to know about it, he rushed to Malecón, the rioters fell silent upon seeing him, and he gave on that same night a televised address to the nation and announced that any Cuban who wanted to leave the island nation could do so. Around

35,000 people left Cuba in improvised boats and rafts and sailed to Miami. It was an embarrassing episode of Castro's regime<sup>14</sup>, but it led to a significant number of 'troublesome malcontents' leaving the island<sup>15</sup>. Discontent over frequent blackouts, shortage of food and medicines, poor water supply, curbs imposed on freedom of expression, and a stagnant economy triggered the protests in 1994. Those reasons were similar to most of the reasons for the unrest in 2021, but the Covid-19 pandemic aggravated the problems in 2021, and another major difference is that the 1994 incident took place in the pre-internet age when demonstrations were easier to contain. The economic situation in recent years in Cuba has been less dire than in 1994, but the 2021 protests were bigger and more threatening to the Communist regime. The prevalence of social media in 2021 and how the pandemic exacerbated economic problems were salient new factors.

Communist regimes in several parts of the world<sup>16</sup> have been known to use cold-blooded murders in order to crush dissent, but the Cuban government did not resort to such gruesome practices to handle the July 11th, 2021 protests; instead, the Communists in Cuba showed a modicum of governmental maturity by avoiding violent suppression.

### **Covid-19 in Cuba**

Cuba's first known Covid-19 case was confirmed in mid-March 2020. Already before then, the government had come up with a "Plan for Prevention and Control"; it included<sup>17</sup> healthcare-worker training, expansion of laboratory infrastructure and facilities for molecular-level diagnosis of Covid-19 infections, reinforcement of the National Program of the Surveillance of Acute Respiratory Infections, widespread testing of civilians and contact-tracing, and enforcement of rules for wearing masks in public places and likewise for social distancing. This scheme worked well for several months, and Cuba was praised internationally for bringing the pandemic under control better than many other countries. As of March 22nd, 2020, only 40 people in Cuba were known to have Covid-19, and they were all hospitalized and treated, whereas people suspected of having contracted the disease were immediately isolated for 14 days and underwent molecular diagnostics. However, by August of that year, Cuba had 2,726 known cases, 88 of which had been fatal, and although this rate of public-health damage was relatively low compared to the rates in richer countries<sup>18</sup>, the pandemic continued to persist and Cuba had, by December, more than eleven thousand cases, 140 of which had proven fatal. Subsequent research suggests that because the Cuban

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government had meanwhile sent a considerable number of doctors on missions abroad, doctors within Cuba who did not have enough specialized training in dealing with the disease were called upon to treat Cubans who needed specialized treatment<sup>19</sup>, and hospitals' facilities became overloaded. Thus, a combination of overly optimistic governmental emphasis on medical diplomacy at the expense of domestic healthcare, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, unexpectedly tight financial restrictions and administrative difficulties with regard to importing medicines and administering the nation's clinics undermined its brave initial pandemic response<sup>20</sup>. The social consequences were aggravated by broader economic factors, i.e., widespread poverty and insufficient opportunities for gainful employment. (The tourism sector in Cuba suffered greatly owing to the pandemic. The economy shrank monetarily by more than ten percent.)

#### **Cuba's Covid-19 Vaccines**

Cuba's prestigious biotech sector has, notwithstanding these precarious socio-economic conditions, devised five kinds of Covid-19 vaccine, three of which ("Soberana 2", "Soberana Plus" and "Abdala") have been authorized by the Cuban authorities for use and export. The other two (one of which is a nasal spray) are still in clinical trials<sup>21</sup>. It has been reported that Cuba has also started vaccinating children as young as two years old against Covid-19, and that in Phase I and Phase II trials of Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus vaccine in 350 children aged between three and 18 years old, no serious adverse effects were found (Augustin, 2022)<sup>22</sup>. Although neither the World Health Organization nor any other major international regulators have authorized the use of these vaccines, the fact remains that Cuba has vaccinated a greater percentage of its population against Covid-19 than the highly developed countries have done, and the government claims that 90% of the citizens who have been given three doses of the government-approved vaccines have been free of symptomatic Covid illness<sup>23</sup>. It is a matter of self-esteem and pride for everyone in Cuba that the nation was, despite all its economic adversities, able to devise, produce and benefit from effective Covid vaccines.

#### **The US Blockade**

Cuba has been under a US embargo for more than 60 years. Relations between the two countries began to be tested in 1959 when Castro overthrew a US-backed puppet regime in Havana and established a socialist state. The US government at that time, under President Eisenhower extended formal recognition to the new Cuban government

and welcomed Castro for a visit to the USA, but then his cultivation of links with the USSR, his nationalization of American-owned properties in Cuba, and his hiking of customs duties on imports from the USA disappointed the government in Washington, and so it began to retaliate with economic penalties (e.g. slashing the rate of imports of Cuban sugar) and to have the CIA plan an invasion of Cuba by Cuban emigrants residing in Florida and equipped with US military gear for the undertaking. As soon as John Kennedy became president (in 1961) this ill-informed plan was implemented and the failed aggression caused further deterioration of relations between the two countries<sup>24</sup> entailing a US embargo on imports from Cuba and travel restrictions rendering it virtually impossible for US citizens to visit Cuba. Years later, in 2014, US President Barack Obama took some extraordinary steps to normalize US relations with Cuba by meeting with the then Cuban President Raul Castro and restoring full diplomatic ties<sup>25</sup>. It is noteworthy that Pope Francis and the Vatican played an instrumental role in US-Cuba negotiations at that time<sup>26</sup>. Some 50% of Cuba's citizens are (according to Pew Research Centre) still today are members of the Roman Catholic Church. This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the Vatican has gradually stepped up its relations with Cuba in the last two decades: Pope John Paul II became the first Pope to visit there, and Pope Benedict XVI visited in 2012 and not only presided at an outdoor mass but also urged Cubans to build an 'open' society reflecting the goodness of God and worthy of Humanity at its best<sup>27</sup>. Pope Francis visited in 2015. But then the Trump administration reclassified Cuba as a 'state sponsor of terrorism' and restored a slew of tough sanctions. The Biden Administration has eased some of them, but the recent anti-regime protests in both countries and the worsening human conditions in the USA will further complicate peace-making between the USA and Cuba as well as elsewhere in the world.

### **The Blockade's Economic Impact**

The economic warfare that the USA has perpetrated against Cuba since the early 1960s has been a major cause of the problems plaguing the country. She survived the Cold-War years with the help of the USSR and its allies in Eastern Europe, but since 1991, she has faced isolation from all frontiers. The blockade has crippled her economy in such a way that ordinary Cubans have suffered from perpetual short-ages of many rudimentary necessities. Not only has the blockade impacted health care by forbidding the import into Cuba of medical technology with US components, but also the USA has banned all dollar remittances to millions of Cuban families that rely on monetary

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assistance from abroad. The United Nations General Assembly has for years called for an end to the indecently inhumane blockade, but only during Obama's presidency did the demand have a palpable impact. The UN estimates that the embargo has cost Cuba an equivalent of more than \$130bn in monetary damages — and those costs to Cuba have been compounded by the penalties imposed by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Cuba's allies and investors<sup>28</sup>. Between April 2019 and March 2020 alone, OFAC penalties amounting to nearly \$2½ billion targeted banks, insurance firms, energy companies, and travel agencies<sup>29</sup>.

### **Can Social Solidarity Economy and Cooperatives Save Cuba Now?**

I am deeply interested in this possibility. The term 'Social Solidarity Economy' (SSE) means production and exchange of goods and services by enterprises and other organizations pursuing beneficial social and environmental objectives. In Cuba, such economic activity has been promoted top-down ever since 1959 when Castro came into power, and the national government has most often sponsored economic undertakings<sup>30</sup>. Although this approach has yielded good results in terms of developing 'human capital', Cuba's dependence on sugar exports for foreign exchange was affected by the collapse in the 1990s of the USSR (which was buying Cuban sugar at a generously high price). This prompted her to try to become self-reliant in overall agricultural production. The effort included experiments with urban organic farming and 'organoponics'<sup>31</sup>. Cuba has, in recent years, tried to develop an altogether more sustainable form of socialism<sup>32</sup>. Experiments in local SSE in the form of strengthening cooperatives have been part of this effort. The agricultural transformations in Cuba in the 1990s can be assessed from an SSE perspective, and some researchers say that SSE in the Cuban context nowadays is bound to be a matter of a "potential union of three spheres – public, enterprise and private – comprised of a variety of economic actors – state, associative and [individually] autonomous – that adopts, as part of their economic process of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, the principles of responsibility towards society and the environment"<sup>33</sup>.

Self-managing cooperatives are now being promoted as instruments for the transition of Cuba towards a sustainable socialism in tune with 21st-century conditions<sup>34</sup>. Co-operatives in Cuba are as old as its socialist system; they were initially limited to the agricultural sector, but later on, non-agricultural sectors were also included, and after Raul Castro became President in 2008, a slew of economic reforms was launched in which the national government also devolved a certain

amount of economic planning and control to municipalities, and the role of local cooperatives in transforming the entire Cuban economy was stressed. “These [reforms] began with the transfer of some state-owned enterprises to workers who were organised into cooperatives basically holding the enterprise and its equipment as usufruct on favourable terms – rent-free and with state subsidies and tax concessions”<sup>35</sup>.

Although there have been criticisms that the Cuban government has been slow and cautious about approving new cooperatives, some 450 flourished between 2008 and 2013. They included restaurants<sup>36</sup>, cafés, construction firms, manufacturers of clothing, furniture, and other goods, bus companies and car washes, recycling operations, body shops, computing and accounting services, beauty salons, and night clubs<sup>37</sup>. It has been noted, however, that “the project of downsizing the state [in Cuba] has its limits in that the state’s role will continue to be critical in providing legal and institutional framework as well as oversight for the new co-ops and other new institutions”.

In my opinion, the urban transport system could be rejuvenated with the help of SSE networks and cooperatives. Poultry farming, piggyery, courtyard farming, and kitchen gardening could be promoted with the help of cooperatives. Cuba could address the consumable-energy crunch by embracing renewable-energy techniques including the production, supply and installation of solar panels in homes, and this could be done in an SSE way; likewise, with regard to the shortage of drinking water, it could be mitigated by desalination units.<sup>38</sup> Cooperatives could serve as a helping hand to many who are in search of decent jobs. It has been observed that communities having strong local social solidarity can overcome or minimise the adverse effects of the pandemic<sup>39</sup>. Cubans should see cooperatives as a form of SSE enabling economic development to remain people-centered.

### **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises**

One way the government strives for national economic self-sufficiency is by encouraging the development of micro, small and medium-sized commercial enterprises (MSMEs). It has been reported that as of September 2021, a total of 35 of them were functioning in Cuba (Molina and Cabrera, 2021)<sup>40</sup>. Among the first businesses to have been promoted as MSMEs in Cuba were (1) SERVIMAV, a Green Areas Maintenance Service in the province of Cienfuegos, and (2) Santa-Clara-based Bromey srl<sup>41</sup>, a business producing more than 30 edible products, including peanut bars and *turrones* (a Spanish kind of almond candy) as well as cereals.



### Scope for Governmental Decentralization

Cuba is comprised of 16 provinces and 168 municipalities<sup>42</sup>. Havana's big capital city has had since 2008 its own kind of local government comprised of 19 mini-municipalities. Literature discussing local government and decentralization in Cuba is rare, and some of it may have been misunderstood due to the widespread perception of the Cuban national government as a hard-line Communist one<sup>43</sup>. Even though the framework for local government in a national Communist regime cannot be the same as under a liberal constitution, there is still a modicum of possibilities for active civic participation in local government in Cuba. The Party certainly influences, and that too with a sometimes-heavy hand, the actions of local governments, and it controls media outlets and the citizens' access to the internet<sup>44</sup>. Yet decentralization and local cooperatives have huge potential to benefit the nation<sup>45</sup>.

### Digitalization

Cuba is normally portrayed as being struck in 'digital dark ages' with limited access to computers, smart-phones, and the internet, and with internet censorship imposed by the government. This is ironic since architects of the Cuban revolution had entertained positive feelings about electronic technologies. In 1963, Commander Ernesto Che Guevara, who was at that time the Minister of Industries, declared "computing and electronics [to be] strategical for the development of the country"<sup>46</sup>; Fidel Castro founded in 1969 a Digital Research Centre for creating the first Cuban computer, and a year later the first Cuban mini-computer (CID-201) was created<sup>47</sup>. It was not until the 21st century, however, that the Cuban government launched a "Program for the Computerisation of Cuban Society". It envisaged an intensive and orderly use of ICTs and an integration of several Cuban computer networks. It was mostly a matter of private networks overseen at the ministerial level and of a broad 'Cuba Network' facilitating secure, massive, and organized access to information at the national level<sup>48</sup>. According to the 2007 National Statistics Office report, Cuba had nearly 1.25 million telephone lines in the country (there are 11.2 million citizens), of which more than 900,000 were residential and the rest were in state hands; some 330,000 mobile phones were found to be in use; but the number of personal computers amounted to hardly one half of one percent of the number of citizens, and those computers were mostly in government offices, schools or health facilities. According to reports in Western media publications, Cuba was "basically offline" until 2008. After Raul Castro became in that year

the nation's president, the sale of computers and cell phones was legalized, and Cuba began to embark on a digital revolution<sup>49</sup>. By 2014, it was reported that some 27% of citizens had access to the Web, albeit mainly through a government-controlled internet at their workplaces. In 2018, Cubans got access to mobile internet for the first time via data plans. As per various reports that have appeared in the media, more than seven million Cubans (i.e. nearly two-thirds of the citizens) had access to the internet by the end of 2019, nearly half of them were mobile-data customers, and more than 650,000 of them had 4G service of some kind<sup>50</sup>. Electronic technology has thus started to reach all walks of life in Cuba<sup>51</sup>. Two examples of museums making use of it to narrate history to their visitors are the 'Ernesto Che Guevara Sculpture Complex' in Santa Clara (which houses also his mausoleum)<sup>52</sup> and the Fidel Castro Ruz Study Center<sup>53</sup>, an institution dedicated to the study and dissemination of his thought and work.

### **Conclusions**

The time is ripe for Cuba to embrace, full-scale, an innovative 21st-century kind of 'sustainable socialism' with gradually more and more local cooperatives. The regime has already understood the relevance of 'sustainable socialism', and its experiments in co-operativism and localized SSE are evidence of a latent readiness to proceed further in this direction. The national government has been making serious attempts ever since 2008 to re-structure the old Cuban economic model by strengthening state-owned enterprises in certain key sectors and by probing decentralization and transferring a hefty number of formerly public-sector jobs to the private sector<sup>54</sup>. Cooperatives and other kinds of SSE enterprises have become such an integral part of the Cuban socialist model that the extent to which they ought to be free of control by the central government warrants discussion as there are some worries that the nation is evolving toward "deconstruction of its social and solidarity economy"<sup>55</sup>. Cuba's institutions of higher learning and socio-economic research should carefully examine various experiments and models of SSE across the world and come up with recommendations for putting them into practice under 21st-century conditions. With the help of cooperatives and solidarity economy framework, Cuba could, I believe, address effectively a broad range of forthcoming economic, social, demographic, and environmental problems. Vibrant local government can be superbly beneficial, and local cooperatives can harbour social equality by complementing the redistributive policies of the state. It has been observed that co-operatives do generally play a significant role in maximising welfare<sup>56</sup>. For instance, AMUL in India and Desjardins in Canada are successful

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cooperative organizations in their respective countries, and “social solidarity enterprises make up a significant part of the plural economies in places such as Quebec in Canada and Kerala, a state in India”<sup>57</sup>.

In addressing her persistent problem of insufficient gainful-employment opportunities, Cuba should develop decentralized economic ‘niche structures’ conceived in a framework of comprehensive cooperation with collective self-organization and ownership whereby capital (in moderate amounts) and labour can function harmoniously together. “Construction of niche structures is development of collective enterprises at the decentralised level with small capital base in all fields of activities including manufacturing, repairing, processing, trading, marketing, services including education, health and others”<sup>58</sup>. Though some amount of monetary capital may be required at each stage of development of the niche, the workers would bear the primary responsibility to create and manage the co-operative and thereby gain a modicum of socio-economic empowerment<sup>59</sup>.

Cubans should also deliberately retain a wise degree of economic austerity in their culture. Certain aspects of Gandhian- style *swaraj* (self-discipline) could be adapted. Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that the planet “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”<sup>60</sup> According to J C Kumarappa, a highly trained economist who was a close associate of the Mahatma, “What the Gandhian Economy aims at is to furnish all our people with their full requirement of food, clothing, hygiene, etc. These are our primary needs and it is not beyond our capacity to meet them if we will only concentrate our efforts in this direction. Over and above these, if we aspire for luxuries and indulgences, man’s life becomes wasted in the effort to acquire such things”<sup>61</sup>. Gandhi and Kumarappa envisaged a non-violent socio-economic order promoting equity and ecological balance, and they said that “the only path to true democracy in political life, and to peace among nations” would be a decentralised economic and political system whereby economic “rewards” would be “moderate”. The theoretical Gandhi- Kumarappa economic framework was devised for the sake of a long- term-sustainable economy in the Republic of India, based on values of cooperation, democratic participation, mutual aid, and social inclusion. Various details of the scheme would be inapplicable in Cuba, but the wise precept of decent voluntary austerity could be cherished in Cuba even though Emile Durkheim’s concept of a sociological order arising from the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices of a given group of people<sup>62</sup> differs saliently from the Marxist theory of social order based

on economic structure and class relations involved in the production of goods. The Cuba Family Code 2022 has the potential to usher in a democracy within Cuban families and this spirit of democracy will eventually have a considerable impact on the political dynamics and power structures within the country<sup>63</sup>. From now on the Family Code in Cuba and its functioning should be clearly studied and documented to formulate new indicators that determine the level of democracy and freedom even in Communist/Socialist regimes<sup>64</sup>.

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### Notes and References

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3. Jules R Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of Cuban Revolution*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
4. According to Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Cuba has been a communist regime for more than six decades. As on 2020, it has a population of about 11 million (11,305,532) people who primarily speak Spanish. Cuba has an area of 110,860 square kilometres and is about the size of Pennsylvania state in USA. Cuba has a GDP of \$100 billion. Its per capita GDP is roughly \$8,000 (CFR, 2020). Despite the fragile and fractured economy, Cuba's remarkable achievements in Human Development (HDI) needs to be appreciated. Cuba's HDI value for 2021 is 0.764— which put the country in the high human development category— positioning it at 83 out of 191 countries and territories. Also see United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021). *The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. UNDP. On the other hand, Cuba is classified as an authoritarian regime in the 2021 Democracy Index with a dismal score of 2.65. However, Cuba's score of 2.65 is better than that of China, also classified as an authoritarian regime with a score of 1.94. See, 2022 Democracy Index. *Democracy Index 2022: The China Challenge*. Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU).
5. A Cuban revolutionary and politician who was the leader of Cuba from 1959 to 2008, serving as the prime minister of Cuba from 1959 to 1976 and president from 1976 to 2008. Ideologically a Marxist–Leninist and Cuban nationalist, he also served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba from 1961 until 2011.
6. Although the attacks were unsuccessful, the rebellion marked the

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beginning of the Cuban revolution and laid the foundation for the anti-imperialist movement that eventually defeated Batista's military dictatorship on January 1, 1959. On December 2, 1956, another attempt led by Castro and an Argentinian Marxist Revolutionary Che Guevara took place. Though it failed, Guevara won Castro's confidence and was given the rank of comandante. In the late 1958, Guevara's column derailed an armoured train filled with Batista's troops and took over the city and it played a crucial role in the ultimate victory of Cuban Revolution in 1959. On January 1959, Guevara, along with the Castro brothers, were recognized as one of the three most powerful leaders of the Cuban revolution.

7. Batista seized power in Cuba in 1952 and ran the country for seven years. See, Carothers, 1994, Thomas Carothers, "U.S. shouldn't repeat Haiti errors in Cuba", South Florida Sun-Sentinel September 4, 1994.
8. Helen Yaffee, "July 11 Protests in Cuba: A Personal Narrative of Events", Centre for Latin American and Latino Studies, American University, Washington DC, November 2, 2021.
9. BBC, "Cuba protesters jailed for up to 25 years", *BBC News*, June 14, 2022.
10. BBC, "Cuba anti-government protesters jailed for up to 30 years", *BBC News*, March 17, 2022.
11. On June 22, 2022, the author met a Cuban artist named Saulo Serrano, who is a member of the National Union of the Writers and Artists of Cuba also known as *Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*, (UNEAC). Though Serrano's canvases are filled with socio-economic problems plaguing Cuba, the artist said that he has not faced any government action in the name of his paintings and pictures so far. He also stated that he has full professional freedom in his artistic business.
12. The author met a few college students who participated in the protest and during the conversation they said that some positive changes have been observed in the attitude of the government. The name of the students has been kept anonymous for their privacy. Also see Kirby, 2021. Jen Kirby, "Artists laid the foundation for Cuba's protests. An economy in free fall and the pandemic ignited it". *Vox*, July 15, 2021.
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14. Vegard Bye, *The End of an Era – or a New Start? Economic Reforms with Potential for Political Transformation in Cuba on Raúl Castro's Watch (2008-2018)*, Dr. philos. Dissertation, Series of dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo No. 726, 2019.
15. John Lee Anderson, "Is Cuba's Communist Party Finally Losing Its Hold on the Country?", *The New Yorker*, July 22, 2021.
16. For instance, the Great Purge (the purges of 1936-1938) in the Soviet

Union, a state -organized bloodshed that took place under the Stalin regime. The 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, in which the Communist Regime in China mercilessly killed student protestors, who were demanding democracy, free speech and free press in China, is another example of the crimes committed against humanity by authoritarian regimes.

17. Iyanu Osunmo, *The Impact of Covid-19 on Cuba in 2020*. Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 2020.
18. On June 22, 2022, the author visited a Family Medical Office in a community in Cuba and had a discussion with the doctors and staff at this health facility regarding how Cuba was successfully able to mitigate the pandemic in the initial phase and the reasons for the sharp rise in Covid cases afterwards. The staff said that the initial success in flattening the Covid -19 infection curve led to premature celebrations and this led to relaxation of stringent preventive measures and it instilled a false sense of security. The author replied that Kerala, a state in India also had a similar experience. Kerala incorporated the test, trace and isolate strategy and flattened the infection curve during the first wave of the pandemic and it led to premature celebrations of Kerala model of Covid-19 management. It instilled a false sense of security in the minds of people and the government and eventually Kerala became a victim of its own success as it failed to contain the spurt of Covid 19 infections after the first half of May 2020. (Chathukulam & Tharamangalam, 2020 and Chathukulam & Joseph, 2022). Jos Chathukulam, and Manasi Joseph, *Management of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Kerala Through the Lens of State Capacity and Clientelism*, WIDER Working Paper 2022/60 Helsinki: UNU-WIDER, 2022. Jos Chathukulam, and Joseph Tharamangalam, "The Kerala model in the time of COVID-19: Rethinking state, society and democracy", *World Development*, 137:105207. (2020). DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105207. On June 25, 2022, the author also met with some students at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences and discussed about the Cuban healthcare system and its efficacy in handling the pandemic. They told that polyclinics in Cuba were very much in the forefront to contain the spread of the pandemic at the local level. The names of the persons have been kept anonymous to protect their privacy.
19. Gamez Nora Torres, "Cuban Doctors Fight Covid-19 Abroad, but on the Island Healthcare Cuts Worry Experts", *Miami Herald*. May 26, 2020
20. Carmelo Mesa Lago, Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva, Elías Amor Bravo, Jorge Ignacio Guillén Martínez, Elaine Acosta González, Rafael Sánchez, Dimas Castellanos Martí, Yoandy Izquierdo Toledo, Dagoberto Valdés Hernández, "La COVID-19 En Cuba Y Sus Consecuencias En La Etapa De Post-Pandemia: Visión Y Propuestas", *Centro de Estudios Convivencia(CEC), en Cuba, Isla y Diáspora*

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21. Jason Beaubin, "A small island nation has cooked up not 1, not 2 but 5 COVID vaccines: It's Cuba!", *NPR*, February 1, 2022.
22. Ed Augustin, "Cuba leads the world in vaccinating children as young as two against Covid", *The Guardian*, February 1, 2022.
23. Sam Meredith, "Why Cuba's extraordinary Covid vaccine success could provide the best hope for low-income countries", *CNBC*, January 13, 2022.
24. Jim Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro, and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs*, (New York: Scribner, 2011). Also see Lindley, Mark. (2020). An Instructive Glimpse into Relations Between Some 20th-century US Journalists and Presidents, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace Studies, Jindal Global University
25. On June 21, 2022, the author, a faculty member the Institute of Philosophy, Havana, Cuba. During the interaction, the author learned that that though Obama tried to restore ties with Cuba, in one or other way the former US President was trying to Americanise Cuba. The name of the faculty member is withheld to protect their privacy.
26. Zeke J Miller, and Elizabeth Dias, "How Pope Francis Helped Broker Cuba Deal", *Time*, December 3, 2014.
27. Ibid.
28. David Adler, "Cuba has been under US embargo for 60 years. It's time for that to end", *The Guardian*. February 3, 2022.
29. Ibid
30. R Betancourt, "Social and Solidarity Economy and the Transformation of the Cuban Economic Model", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 10, 2, (2018), p.209–229.
31. Ed Ewing, "Cuba's Organic Revolution", *The Guardian*, April 4, 2008
32. Joseph Tharamangalom "Cuba's Experiments with Co-operativism and Solidarity Economies: A Move towards 21<sup>st</sup>-Centuray Socialism", in Joseph Tharamangalom and Jos Chathukulam (Eds), *Deepening Democracy: Comparative Persepectives on Decentralisation, Co-operativism and Self-Managed Development*. Routlege Publishers, pp. 220-234. (2023).
33. R Betancourt, "Social and Solidarity Economy and the Transformation of the Cuban Economic Model", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 10, 2, (2018), p.209–229.
34. Joseph Tharamangalom "Cuba's Experiments with Co-operativism and Solidarity Economies: A Move towards 21<sup>st</sup>-Centuray Socialism", in Joseph Tharamangalom and Jos Chathukulam (Eds), *Deepening Democracy: Comparative Persepectives on Decentralisation, Co-operativism and Self-Managed Development*. Routlege Publishers, pp. 220-234. (2023)
35. Ibid
36. On June 23, 2022, the author went to a Cuban restaurant named *El Biky*. The *El Biky* is a successful cooperative restaurant in Cuba that started functioning in 2013. It is a non-agricultural cooperative. The

author interacted with the staff working at the *El Biky* and they said that the cooperative venture is hugely popular among the Cubans and the author saw a large number of people coming in groups to the *El Biky* Restaurant (which houses a Cafeteria, Sweet Shop / Candy Store and a Bar) itself is an evidence for this. One of the faculty members of an academic institution affiliated to a Cuban university said that even academic community working in universities now prefer to work in restaurants like *El Biky*, as restaurant jobs pay well. The author also met an Interpreter, who is also a retired University professor. He opined that restaurant jobs offer good salaries and that's why many prefer a job in this sector even as part-time. All these gives an impression regarding the potential and success of cooperatives in Cuba. The author also got a chance to stay at a Santa Clara based Homestay named *Hotel Casita B & B* and during the stay over there the author felt that Cuba should promote more Homestays in all its provinces and it would give a big boost to tourism industry in the island nation. The author also felt that restaurants like '*El Biky*' is also turning into a 'public sphere' where locals discuss about various issues and share ideas and solutions. The situation is similar to the public sphere that evolved in *Indian Coffee Houses* in India.

37. Marc Frank, and Rosa Tania Valdés, "Cuba looks to cooperatives to slow rise of capitalism", *Reuters*, April 13, 2014.
38. The author met a Cuban Chauffeur working with an institute in Cuba. He has a professional degree in Aviation Security Systems from a Russian University. When he returned to Cuba after completing his studies from Russia, he found it very difficult to find a job that meets both his professional and salary expectations. As a result, he was forced to take up the present job to make ends meet.
39. A M Jose, and Jos Chathukulam, "New Cooperative Ministry in India: An Analysis of the Implied Strategy of Development for the Consideration of Policy Makers in India". *Mainstream Weekly*, LX 30, (2022).
40. Julio Martínez Molina, and Ángel Freddy Pérez Cabrera, "Bormey srl among the first 35 newly constituted Medium Size Enterprises in Cuba, Exported 5,000 Peanut Bars to Italy", *Granma*, October 25, 2021.
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42. United Cities and Local Governments. (2008). Decentralization and



- Local Democracy in the World, Washington, DC: United Cities and Local Government and the World Bank.
43. John Greenwood, and George Lambie, "Local government in Cuba: Democracy through participation?", *Local Government Studies*, 25,1, (1999), p.55-74, DOI: 10.1080/03003939908433937.
  44. 2012 Human Rights Watch World Report 2012: Cuba. Human Rights Watch, New York, United States.
  45. On June 25, 2022, the author met a Professor at University of Havana. He said that cooperatives and decentralization still hold great potential in Cuba and can play a catalytic role in reviving the Cuban economy and in reshaping its growth trajectory. The author also got the opportunity to interact with another Professor at Latin American School of Social Sciences affiliated to University of Havana. The Professor said that Universities and Municipalities in Cuba are coming up with joint collaborative initiatives to foster decentralization and strengthen local governments in Cuba. The Professor added that though the Central government gave some funds to municipalities, only 14 per cent of the funds were utilized by them. The local governments in Cuba lack autonomy and freedom to function as they are still under the control of the Central Government in Cuba. The name of Professors has been kept anonymous to protect their privacy.
  46. The author visited the memorial and mausoleum on June 19, 2022 and saw the revolutionary life and times of Che and other martyrs.
  47. Hamlet López García, "Cuban Society on the Horizon of Digital Transformation: A View from Mediations to the Social Appropriation of Technology", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 12, 1, (2020). 119-134.
  48. L T. Jiménez, G F M Morell, and E A Negrin, Cuban experiences on computing and education. In John, Impagliazzo (ed), *History of Computing and Education 3* (HCE3) (pp. 55–77). (Boston: Springer, 2008).
  49. Hamlet López García, "Cuban Society on the Horizon of Digital Transformation: A View from Mediations to the Social Appropriation of Technology", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 12, 1, (2020). 119-134.
  50. Barbara Ortutay, Frank Bajak, and Tali Arbel, "Cuba's Internet cut off: A go-to tactic to suppress dissent", *Associated Press*. July 12, 2021.
  51. On Cuba Staff "63% of Cubans have access to Internet according to government". *On Cuba*. February 28, 2020.
  52. The author visited the memorial and mausoleum on June 19, 2022 and saw the revolutionary life and times of Che and other martyrs.
  53. On June 21, 2022, the author visited the Fidel Castro Ruz Study Center. The Institute was created as a result of Law 123 approved by the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, on December 27, 2016. By law, it is prohibited to use Fidel Castro's name in squares, streets and other monuments. It was created under a provision, on

an exceptional basis, to create a place for the study of his life's work and thought, that would bear his name.

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56. A M Jose, and Jos Chathukulam, "New Cooperative Ministry in India: An Analysis of the Implied Strategy of Development for the Consideration of Policy Makers in India". *Mainstream Weekly*, LX 30, (2022).
57. Peter Utting, 'Introduction: The Challenge of Scaling Up Social and Solidarity Economy', in Peter Utting (ed.), *Social and Solidarity Economy: Beyond the Fringe*. London: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development/ZedBooks, pp. 1–40. (2015).
58. Sunil Ray, 'Employment Creation at Decentralized Level through Construction of Niche Structure and Promotion of Self-Organization', in Joseph Tharamangalam and Jos Chathukulam (Eds), *Deepening Democracy: Comparative Perspectives on Decentralisation, Co-operativism and Self-Managed Development*. Routledge Publishers, pp. 179-194. (2023).
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60. Mahatma Gandhi, quoted by E. F. Schumacher in *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. E F Schumacher, Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered. (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973).
61. J C Kumarappa, *The Economy of Permanence*, (Wardha, C.P: All India Village Industries Association, 1946). Also see, Nisha Velappan Nair, "Solidarity Economics and Gandhian Economics: Can They Supplement Each Other", *Gandhi Marg Quarterly*, 42(1&2): (2020). P.83–106.
62. T Bottomore, "A Marxist Consideration of Durkheim", *Social Forces*, 59, 4, (1981), p.902–917.
63. Jos Chathukulam, and Manasi Joseph, "Cuba Family Code Towards the Democratisation of Family and Society". *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, Volume LVII No. 49, (December 3, 2022),
64. Jos Chathukulam, and Yoan Karell Acosta Gonzalez , "Is Cuban Family Code a Trendsetter?", *Mainstream Weekly*, VOL LXI No 1-2, (December 24, 2022).

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# Relief, Reform, and Politics: Understanding Gandhi's Tour to Bihar after Earthquake in 1934

*Sudhanshu Kumar Jha*

## ABSTRACT

*Bihar witnessed a catastrophic earthquake on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1934 that caused massive and unprecedented destruction in the form of loss of property and human beings. At this time, Gandhi also, who was on a tour to South India in the context of the Harijan uplift Movement, came to Bihar and visited almost every affected area for the next two months. During his tour, he tried to heal the sufferings of the victims, made individual efforts for the relief fund, and stressed constructive cooperation with the government in the context of relief works. Overall, during this tour, his best human side came to the fore, which needs to be understood in the context of his political journey. This paper attempts to analyze and understand the various aspects of Gandhi's tour, especially in the context of social reform, relief, and his convictions.*

**Key words:** *Earthquake Relief, Bihar, congress, Gandhi*

ON 15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1934, Bihar witnessed a catastrophic earthquake that caused spectacular devastation and left many people stunned and dazed. The main shock came at 2.13 pm.<sup>1</sup> A few seconds before this, a loud sound was heard as if hundreds of heavy vehicles were running simultaneously. Although the whole of North Bihar and the area of South Bihar adjoining the Ganges were badly damaged, the maximum destruction was seen in the Munger and Muzaffarpur towns. The total number of deaths caused by this earthquake was reported as 7,252 calculated on the reports received through the agency of the police and the village watchman.<sup>2</sup> The actual number of deaths must

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have been larger than the number recorded. Besides the loss of human beings, there was a huge loss of properties in some way or another. Buildings collapsed or were badly damaged, bridges were destroyed, railway embankments sank, and roads caved in. The wells, tanks, and cultivable lands were filled with sand. The earthquake was so strong that, as reported by the Bhagalpur collector, the Balan river dried up for a few seconds due to the uplift of its riverbed.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the famines and floods, this earthquake affected the rich and the poor.<sup>4</sup>

This destruction caught the attention of the government, many philanthropic bodies, and individuals. A great need was felt to provide immediate relief to the sufferers and plan long-term rehabilitation. The Viceroy announced opening of the Viceroy's Earthquake Relief Fund.<sup>5</sup> Many other non-governmental organizations, such as the Ram Krishna Mission, the Calcutta Marwari Relief Society, and the group of Baba Guru Dutta Singh came forward for immediate relief.<sup>6</sup> The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee also girded up its loins under the leadership of Rajendra Prasad by forming the Bihar Central Relief Committee (BCRC). Shocked by the devastation and at the request of the BCRC, Gandhi, a supreme human being of his time, came to Bihar and stayed for two months. He visited every nook and corner of the state, supervised the relief works initiated by the BCRC, and offered his valuable suggestions regarding the relief works. He stressed the need to maintain a cooperative relationship with the government and did not give any political color to the relief work. It is also important to note that he was opposed in several places and even attacked. But he continued to build dialogue with his opponents and tried to convince his opponents by explaining religion and humanity from a broader perspective. Overall, the supreme human side of the politician Gandhi comes to the fore, which shows a beautiful blend of human sensitivity, pragmatism, supreme human social standards, farsightedness, and a larger social goal. But not much has been written on this aspect of Gandhi, particularly in the context of his visit to Bihar after the earthquake. Though this earthquake has been much written about and studied, Gandhi's concern, focus, and broader human perspective reflected in his tour in the wake of the earthquake are still missing. It will be of greater historical significance to concern oneself with the broader aspects of Gandhi's politics, which emerged in the context of his tour to Bihar after the earthquake.

It is noteworthy that at this time, the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement was over, and in 1932 its second phase was violently suppressed by the government. People's interest in the mass movement was waning, and Gandhi had just shifted his focus to the Harijan uplift movement under his broader political and social

philosophy of constructive programmes. Gandhi's Harijan movement had important and profound social and political implications. Subdued by his human sensibilities, Gandhi was trying to empower the social group that had been deprived and exploited for centuries. On the other hand, Gandhi was also trying to strengthen and broaden the base of the national movement by including these marginalized groups in the mainstream. It is in connection with his Harijan uplift program Gandhi was on tour to South India when the horrific tragedy of the earthquake struck Bihar on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1934. Gandhi learned about the tragedy through the most heart-rending telegram from Babu Rajendra Prasad.<sup>7</sup> Despite being so far from Bihar, the mere information in this regard gave Gandhi an idea of the devastation of the earthquake and he was moved and did not delay in coming into action. At a public meeting at Tuticorin on 24 January 1934, he said that Bihar was the province where Sita grew up and Gautam found divine knowledge. He called Bihar a 'fair land' and, expressing his pain, said that this fair land has become desolate through earthquakes.<sup>8</sup> In another speech at Tinnevely on the same day, he appealed to a much larger audience than those to whom the Harijan appeal was addressed for donation to the relief fund. He explicitly conveyed that those who had reservations about donating to the Harijan fund might contribute to the relief fund.<sup>9</sup> On 27 January 1934, at a public meeting at Devacottah, he appealed to the people to observe All-India Bihar Day on 28 January, when liberal contributions should be made to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted people in Bihar.<sup>10</sup>

Although Gandhi was showing his deep concern towards the earthquake victims of Bihar and was trying his best to ensure all-round support for them during his Harijan tour in south India, now visiting Bihar to have a first-hand glimpse of this tragedy, raising the morale of the people, and supervising the relief work became his priority. Gandhi's deep concern for the earthquake victims can be gauged from his intensive tour of Bihar, public meetings, and the supervision of the relief works. Before knowing how his tour helped the earthquake victims and the essence of his public addresses, it is proper to know how Gandhi managed to visit almost all affected regions in Bihar during his sojourn in Bihar for about two months.

The Mahatma reached Patna on 11 March 1934 accompanied by Mira Ben, Kishan Ben, Ombaji Valaji Desai, P.L. Asher, Hematlal Khira, and Devaranjan. Rajendra Prasad met Gandhi at Dinapur station and took him to Patna junction, where he was received by several Congress leaders and a crowd of 1000 people.<sup>11</sup> Jnan Shah, with some 300 volunteers, brought him out of the station.<sup>12</sup> Gandhi proceeded to the Guest House of the Bihar Central Relief Committee on Exhibition

Road. On 12 March, it was Silence Day, and Gandhi issued an Earthquake Bulletin in which he said that he has reported himself to the people of Bihar and placed himself at the disposal of Rajendra Babu.<sup>13</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, as reported by the Patna Collector, he took a round of Patna city accompanied by Rajendra Babu, Murlimanohar, and Sheth Kishun Chand.<sup>14</sup> At Purab Darwaza, a big crowd got together to see him.<sup>15</sup> On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, Gandhi, accompanied by Rajendra Babu, Miss Slade, Miss Lester, and Miss Hogg, left Patna for Hajipur. Several local leaders, such as Ram Dayalu Singh, Dip Narayan Singh, and Satyanarayana Singh, received Gandhi and his party at Hajipur.<sup>16</sup> He then went to Lalgang through Village Ghatar, where Ramakant Sukul and Mathura Prasad Sukul of Jalalpur received him.<sup>17</sup> In the evening, he left for Motihari through, Sahebganj, Kesaria, Rajpur, and Pipra. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, Gandhi made a short speech at Motihari.<sup>18</sup> He then visited Muzaffarpur on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, stayed with Mahesh Babu, and returned to Patna the same day.<sup>19</sup>

On 18 March, an All India meeting of the Bihar Central Relief Committee was held at Sinha library hall, attended by 200 persons from all over India.<sup>20</sup> The agenda of the meeting was to discuss the ways and means of the relief works, organize them, and frame the laws and regulations regarding relief works. Gandhi presided over this meeting and contributed significantly to passing several resolutions regarding relief works. On 20 March, he addressed a large gathering of about 25,000 people, including 5000 women, at the Mangal tank in the evening.<sup>21</sup> Madan Mohan Malviya and Abul Kalam Azad also addressed the gathering. On 21 March, Gandhi held a meeting of the representatives of the various relief organisations working in Bihar.<sup>22</sup> Gandhi took part in another meeting in Patna at Dinapur on 25 March and addressed a large audience. In his speech, he called for more cooperation from the Bihari students as he was concerned that more Bihari students had not taken relief work.<sup>23</sup> On 27 March, Gandhi visited Sonapur where Dr. Mahmud and others received him. At Panapur, Gandhi took a rest and then addressed a gathering of about 2000 people.<sup>24</sup> Gandhi's next stop was Chapra. On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, Gandhi and his party went around Chapra town in the car of the Zamindar of Chapra and later addressed a meeting held in the compound of the Rajput school.<sup>25</sup> In the afternoon, he left Chapra for Muzaffarpur by train. On the way to Muzaffarpur, he was greeted by large crowds at Dighwara, Sitalpur, and Nayagaon. At Hazipur and Sonapur, he addressed crowds.<sup>26</sup> After arrival at Muzaffarpur, he addressed the crowds here as well. On the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, he and his party made a tour of the district and visited Bedaul

village and Bharthua chaur, a badly flooded area in Katra police station.<sup>27</sup> It is reported that Mr. Grant, an American millionaire met Gandhi at Muzaffarpur.<sup>28</sup> He left Muzaffarpur for Sitamarhi through Belsand and addressed the meeting at both places.<sup>29</sup> The next day Gandhi proceeded to Darbhanga through Kamtaul. In the evening, he addressed a large crowd at the football ground in Darbhanga.<sup>30</sup> On 31 March, he arrived at Madhubani through Rajnagar in the evening and addressed a meeting.<sup>31</sup> On the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> April, he left Madhubani, and he made a short speech and met people at Nirmali, Bhaptiani, Supaul, and Saharsa.<sup>32</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, Gandhi reached Bihpur and addressed a meeting here, and then left for Bhagalpur by a steamer provided by Dip Narayan Singh.<sup>33</sup> He held a public meeting at Lajpat Park and left for Munger the same day. Here he was received by Nirapada Mukherjee, Mr. Rizwi, Sri Krishna Singh, Rajniti Prasad Singh, Sri Krishna Sahay, and others. Gandhi made a speech in the evening.<sup>34</sup> On the next morning, he visited Jamalpur and then left for Patna. On the way to Patna, he made a short speech at Barahiya and reached Patna on the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>35</sup> From 4<sup>th</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> April, he stayed in Patna, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, he issued a statement suspending the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>36</sup> On the same day, he opened a training class in First Aid for about 50 volunteers and left for Purnea the same evening.<sup>37</sup> Gandhi arrived by train at Katihar on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> of April where about 10000 people were waiting for him. Gandhi stayed here for a brief time and went to Farbesganj by train, addressing a large crowd of about 300000 people.<sup>38</sup> He also visited a place called Fulkana. In the evening, he arrived at Arariya and stayed with Tara Prasanna das Gupta.<sup>39</sup> On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, he came to Purnea and addressed a meeting in the evening.<sup>40</sup> On the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, he first went to Tikapatti and then took the train for Assam at Karagola Road station.<sup>41</sup>

After a short stay in Assam, Gandhi re-entered Bihar on 22 April, and on his way to Patna, he visited Samastipur on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April and reached Patna the next day.<sup>42</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, he left Patna for Arrah and Buxar.<sup>43</sup> He reached Arrah through Kulharia and Jamaira and made public speeches at the Nagri Pracharini Sabha ground.<sup>44</sup> After a short stay at Arrah, he reached Buxar the same day. He stayed at the house of Jagdeva Rai, a local leader and municipal commissioner.<sup>45</sup> Later in the evening, he addressed a public meeting and left Buxar by evening train for Jasidih, which he reached at 2 a.m. He reached Deogarh in the early morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, met different groups of people, addressed a ladies' meeting and then a public meeting, and left Deogarh on the same date.<sup>46</sup> He arrived at Gaya by the night train on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April where about 5000 people



received him at the station. He stayed for some time at the Ganga Mahal. On the next morning, he addressed a ladies' meeting at Mnnulal library, and then he addressed a public meeting and left Gaya the same day.<sup>47</sup> He further visited Chatra on the same date, where he addressed a public meeting.<sup>48</sup> In the evening, he proceeded to Hazaribagh where he first addressed a ladies' meeting and then a public meeting. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, he addressed a public meeting first at Gomio, Bermo, and Dhanbad.<sup>49</sup> He reached Ranchi on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> April, and on his way to Ranchi, he addressed a public meeting at Bhaga football ground and Purulia. He stayed at Ranchi for the next four days and addressed several meetings, including a special meeting of Tana Bhagats. He also opened Harijan industrial school at Doranda on the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> May.<sup>50</sup> Gandhi left for Chakradharpur in the early morning of 4<sup>th</sup> May. After addressing a meeting at Chakradharpur, he reached Jamshedpur on the same date. At Jamshedpur, he went to see the sweepers' quarters in Dhadkidih and to the quarters of the other depressed classes in Sonari basti.<sup>51</sup> In the evening, he addressed a public meeting attended by 20 to 25 thousand people of all classes and left for Jharsuguda at midnight. On the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, he addressed a public meeting at Jharsuguda and left for his tour to Orissa.<sup>52</sup>

During his tour and public speeches in Bihar, Gandhi emphasized many other things besides increasing the self-confidence of the victims, which included cooperation with the government, mobilizing maximum donations for the relief fund, coordination of the relief works, emphasizing the dignity of human labour, and a comprehensive explanation of religion linking untouchability and earthquakes. The way Gandhi toured extensively in Bihar, met the victims, raised issues, and took Gandhi's politics and way of politics to a different level, which is incomparable. The most important objective of Gandhi's Bihar tour was to collect maximum donations for the Bihar Central Relief Fund so that more and more victims could be helped. Gandhi had taken initiatives in this direction during his stay in South India, even before coming to Bihar. Gandhi had already been collecting money for the Harijan fund for the welfare of untouchables during his tour of the South. Now he widened his appeal on behalf of the quake victims.<sup>53</sup> As soon as he came to Bihar, he focused on fundraising, and for this, he appealed to the people in every meeting and adopted several other methods, including the auction of addresses presented to him, auction of his gifts, and spot collection. It is also reported that he was not ready to go to the meetings at Patna city and Dinapur unless one thousand rupees was guaranteed.<sup>54</sup> He put up for auction a pair of sunglasses that had been presented to him at Sonepur. This

was knocked down for ten rupees to the local board's vice-chairman.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in the meeting at Purnea, an illuminated copy of the address was presented to Gandhi, which was auctioned and sold for Rs 250/ to the wife of Babu Beer Narayan Chand of Bishunpur of this district.<sup>56</sup> Gandhi thus made personal efforts to collect money for the earthquake victims' cause, which shows his commitment to the social cause. The *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, a reputed paper of this time, called him a successful beggar and reported that in course of his tour in the affected area from March 27 to April 4, Gandhi had collected Rs. 6833/9/1, out of which Rs. 2833/9/1 had been allotted for relief work and the rest for Harijan work.<sup>57</sup> It is important to mention that there was clarity, honesty, and transparency in the approach of Gandhi toward collecting money. Gandhi had already been collecting money for the Harijan fund for the welfare of untouchables during his tour of the South. Now he widened his appeal on behalf of the quake victims. He reiterated in several meetings that all the money collected would be divided equally between the earthquake relief fund and the Harijan cause.<sup>58</sup> It also shows his unique leadership quality that addresses multiple important issues at once.

The most prominent feature of Gandhi's politics was that it had larger objectives of human welfare beyond mere political goals. After having seen the devastations caused by the earthquakes, it became clear to him that Bihar could not be rebuilt with the help of only a few people or the government. So, he emphasized coordination with other relief agencies. In an interview with the *Searchlight* on 16 March 1934 at Patna, he expressed his pleasure in meeting representatives of different relief societies, including those representing the Government Relief Department, and finding that they were working more or less in consultation with one another.<sup>59</sup> He also stressed on cooperation with the government and did not try to take political advantage by criticizing the government or putting the government in the dock. He never tried to mobilize the people against the government. Instead, he firmly believed that without the government's cooperation, this tragedy could not be fought, and he conveyed this message repeatedly. He did not make cooperation with the government a question of prestige. Speaking at the meeting of the Bihar Central Relief Committee on 18 March 1934, he said that we must cooperate with the government. He further said that we would work not as Congressmen but as humanitarians.<sup>60</sup> In another speech at the meeting of the Relief Workers at Chapra, he said that the issue before them was not of cooperation versus non-co-operation or Congress versus government, but simply of how best to serve the suffering masses in the face of the unparalleled calamity.<sup>61</sup> He further said that we ought not to forget that the extent



of the calamity was so great that government or any other agency, however well inclined, could not afford complete relief. In his opinion, it was the tremendous responsibility of the government and the non-official agency regarding how reconstruction was to be undertaken.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the shift in Gandhi's approach from non-co-operation to cooperation with the government shows that the service to the people was the only driving force of his politics.

Not only did Gandhi present cooperation with the government in the form of an idea, but throughout his tour, he encouraged cooperation with the government and exchanged a range of ideas with them. In the meeting of the representatives of the various relief organizations working in Bihar held on 21 March 1934, several resolutions were passed under the chairmanship of Gandhi. To organize the relief works on the suggestion of Gandhi, it was resolved that the Bihar Central Relief Committee be registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. Further, Anugrah Narayan Singh, Baldeo Sahay, and M.S.M. Hafeez were elected as the general secretaries of the B.C.R.C with Rajendra Babu as elected Chairman.<sup>63</sup> The most important was Resolution No. 10, which said that the Bihar Central Relief Committee tendered its respectful cooperation to the government in the prosecution of the common object of relieving the unparalleled distress that had overtaken Bihar. Gandhi himself moved this Resolution, and, despite his explanation that the prestige of the Congress will not suffer if they cooperated in this particular work with the government, it evoked a good deal of opposition which was overcome by Gandhi.<sup>64</sup> The representative of the government relief department was also invited by the B.C.R.C. to attend this meeting. At the committee's request, Babu Atul Chandra Some, Deputy Collector, was sent to attend the meeting. Gandhi started the conversation with the Deputy Collector by saying that so that there might be no overlapping, there should be cooperation in giving relief. He desired to know on what lines the government's relief was administered. He also wanted to know who was being provided the relief and how the list was prepared. Gandhi was satisfied with the responses of the representative of the government and wished for further cooperation.<sup>65</sup> Later, during his visit to several other places, he tried to meet the government officials to know the status of relief works being administered on the part of the government without the relief strategy of the B.C.R.C. to ensure maximum relief for the maximum number of people. During his tour to Chapra, he visited the District Magistrate at his house and was present at a meeting of relief workers there. Gandhi expressed satisfaction with the scheme outlined by the District Magistrate.<sup>66</sup> During his tour, he further met

and talked to Madhubani's S.D.O and A.S.P.<sup>67</sup> He also had an interview with the S.D.O, Madhepura.<sup>68</sup> When he visited Bharthua chaur, a badly flooded area in the Muzaffarpur district, he requested the district administration to pay attention to this area. At his request, the government soon appointed an expert to examine the flooded area.<sup>69</sup> In Munger, he met with the special officer in charge of the municipality, Babu Ramanugrah Jha, and the secretary of the Housing subcommittee, Babu Hardip Singh. These officials were sent to interview Gandhi with the permission of the District Collector.<sup>70</sup> Gandhi asked these officials several questions about town-planning schemes and arrangements for temporary housing. With the conversations with the government officials, Gandhi was convinced that the house-building and removal of sand were beyond the ability of the B.C.R.C. So, Gandhi suggested the committee adopt the programme providing expenditure on the clearing of wells and tanks, sinking new wells, draining water-logged areas, relief to the indigent, medical aid and sanitation, provision against flood and famine, and other general relief.<sup>71</sup> Thus, having avoided any clash with the government, Gandhi chalked out a pragmatic approach toward relief works and gave a definite direction to them.

It is also important to note that Gandhi took full care of his relationships even in his busyness and tried to make this also an effective instrument of relief works. He wrote a letter to Prabhavati when he was in South India, expressed his concern over the devastation caused by the earthquake, and enquired about Jay Prakash.<sup>72</sup> Further, writing a letter to Jay Prakash before coming to Bihar, he expressed the hope that he would be involved in relief works along with his wife.<sup>73</sup> His deep concern for personal relationships is reflected in the letter of condolence that he wrote to Lakshmi Narayan Agrawal on 26 January 1934.<sup>74</sup> Agrawal was associated with the Khadi Movement and was the secretary of the All-Indian Spinners Association. He was hit hard by this earthquake which took away everything from him. His house in the district of Muzaffarpur had collapsed, and all his family members had lost their lives. It was the height of human suffering, and Gandhi was moved when he received this information from Rajendra Babu. Writing a letter to Agrawal, he expressed his grief and said that this was such a difficult time that any condolence hardly mattered. Gandhi's spirituality of a high order was revealed by what he said further in his letter while raising Agrawal's spirit. He said that in this time of sorrow, we must all tell ourselves that everyone is our relative, and if we think so, death itself is abolished. He further said that death and birth are an illusion and suggested them stick to his duty to overcome the grief. Gandhi's

words remind us of the essence of the teachings of the Geeta.

During his tour, Gandhi repeatedly talked about the dignity of human labour and reminded the people of the boundless capacities of human beings. He appealed to all able people to make a living through their hard work. He said that each suffering individual should earn his relief by working for it. He urged the people they should not survive on freebies but should help provide relief to those who are not capable. It was a clear effort of Gandhi that the relief should reach more and more needy people and able people do not get into the habit of swindling. At the same time, Gandhi's message was clear that it was the equal responsibility of all to fight this tragedy, and one cannot leave this responsibility to the government or any agency. Therefore, he urged the people to vindicate the dignity of human labour and enhance their reputation in the eyes of the country and the world.<sup>75</sup>

The biggest point of Gandhi's Bihar visit and his public speeches after the earthquake was the statement linking untouchability and the earthquake, which created a big controversy on a wide scale. Even before coming to Bihar, addressing a public meeting at Tuticorin, Gandhi said that this earthquake was a divine chastisement for the great sin we committed against the untouchables.<sup>76</sup> This statement sparked controversy so much that even Rabindra Nath Tagore became uncomfortable and sought an explanation on this issue from Gandhi. In his letter dated 28 January 1934, he asked Gandhi if he had spoken like this.<sup>77</sup> Gandhi responded in affirmative and categorically explained his point of view. But the controversy did not stop there and accompanied Gandhi throughout his Bihar tour. Gandhi remained firm on his stand and reiterated this argument throughout his tour in Bihar. Many people and organizations, especially the Sanatanists, opposed the statement, and demonstrations were held against Gandhi at several places during his tour of Bihar. The protest started as soon as he reached Patna when a man carrying a black flag followed Gandhi's car outside the station yard.<sup>78</sup> Later, at his public meeting at Dinapur on 25 March, orthodox Marwaris contemplated a black flag demonstration and prepared leaflets protesting against Gandhi's Harijan campaign.<sup>79</sup> However, they were dissuaded by the district administration from making such a demonstration. Further, black flags were shown by two small boys at Baraiha when he was returning from Munger to Patna.<sup>80</sup> It is also reported that at a meeting at Madhubani, there were interruptions by some Sanatanists who were carrying black flags.<sup>81</sup> At Sitamarhi, some members of the Hindu Mission, led by Basantanand Giri, lay down on the road to draw Gandhi's attention to the S.D.O's action in demolishing some huts for the untouchables which Giri had recently erected.<sup>82</sup> On the way from

Jamira to Arrah, Sanatanists lay across the road at the Dharhara bridge and stopped the car.<sup>83</sup> Black flag demonstration was also held by the Sanatanists when Gandhi reached the Buxar station by train. Later, when he was on his way to the house of his local host, his car was hit by a lathi.<sup>84</sup> The most violent protest was seen during his visit to Deogarh. It is reported that some members threw stones at Gandhi's car and struck it with lathis while it was proceeding from the Jasidih railway station towards Deogarh.<sup>85</sup> Gandhi somehow escaped, but the rear glass window-pane of the car was smashed. Later, Sanatanists appeared with black flags in his public meeting and shouted anti-Gandhi slogans. In this way, Gandhi's statement was strongly opposed, and its voice was also heard in the Central Assembly. Raja Bahadur G. Krishnamacharya drew the government's attention to the statement Gandhi made and asked the government about the measure it proposed to take to stop such propaganda.<sup>86</sup> He further said that it was the government's policy to allow Gandhi to break the law and commit offenses without any safeguards for the people. Other members, such as Gaya Prasad Singh and Pt. Satyendra Nath Sen also joined with Raja Bahadur to oppose the statement made by Gandhi.<sup>87</sup>

But Gandhi remained firm on his stand and reiterated his statement linking earthquakes with untouchability. He tried to convince his opponents in his way. When some Sanatanists were injured in the clash that followed an attack on his car at Buxar, he went to see them in the hospital and told them he would penance for the injuries which the volunteers had caused.<sup>88</sup> At the public meeting at Deogarh, Gandhi said that he did not mind the opposition, but the way of opposition was very painful to him. Addressing the Sanatanists, he said that he was equally a Sanatanist, protector of the cows, and a believer in the caste-system according to the Hindu religious books, but it was a sin to observe distinction and to treat human beings as untouchables. He further said that the temples were meant for the untouchables and not for the touchable because touchables could make their temple in their hearts. According to him, by applying violence, the demonstrators had lowered the dignity of the Hindu religion at a sacred place like Vaidyanath Dham.<sup>89</sup> Gandhi, in opposition to the Sanatanists, declined to go to the temple unless the Harijans were allowed to enter therein.<sup>90</sup> Thus, Gandhi tried to convince his opponents through dialogue in a non-violent manner, showing his anguish against untouchability and, on the other, his unshakable intention for human service and social transformation.

It would be appropriate to mention here that earthquakes are caused by scientific reason and can be better understood under the scientific process. It would not be proper to interpret any worldly

events in the context of their divine origin in this scientific age. There is no doubt that Gandhi must have been aware of this fact as Gandhi is a conscious religious person. But Gandhi is a supreme human being and a humanitarian whose spectrum of sensibilities is much wider. He feels with heart the sorrows of every group in society.

If the suffering of the earthquake-affected people is bothering him, then he is also touched by the historical pain of untouchability, on the other hand. It is a coincidence that Gandhi is currently on a Harijan tour and is making the whole country aware of this problem and is looking for its solution. In such a situation, when the earthquake happened, he quickly became active in helping the victims, but at the same time, he also understood that by linking it to untouchability, people can be made more sensitive about it. So, on this occasion, he came forward to help the earthquake victims and tried to provide a comprehensive platform for the issue of untouchability also. Here Gandhi is not giving any scientific explanation, but Gandhi, with social and political consciousness, is simultaneously bringing out another subject of historical sufferings experienced by a certain section of society. Gandhi's stand on untouchability and earthquake should be understood in this context.

Thus, amid such a horrific human tragedy, a sublime side of Gandhi's politics comes to the fore. Gandhi defined the purpose of politics in a new way. Gandhi himself went among the victims to help the victims. He traveled to many places and met many people, including the victims, local leaders, relief workers, and government officials. He made a pragmatic and planned strategy to provide relief to as many people as possible with the least resources. For this, bypassing day-to-day politics, he emphasized cooperating with the government and preparing people for it. Gandhi talked about the dignity of human labor even amid relief works. He appealed to the people not to give up their valour and self-confidence amid this tragedy. The most important fact is that Gandhi presented a humanistic interpretation of religion during his tour and put forward the Sanatan Dharma's exclusive characteristics. He tried to convince his opponents from his side, emphasizing dialogue and cooperation with them. He did not discriminate between the victims, whether they were sufferers of natural calamities or man-made disasters. He considered it his basic duty to serve all kinds of victims. Thus, during the tour of Bihar in the wake of the earthquakes, different aspects of Gandhi's politics, such as human service, the dignity of human labour, the essence of religion, spirituality, commitment, cooperation, and pragmatism, came to the fore which makes his politics unique, incomparable, and exemplary.

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# The Role of People's Movements in making Parliament 'for the people': Recent Experiments in India

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## ABSTRACT

*People's movements and social activists associated with them have actively participated in the debates and discussions on the role of representative institutions. The people's movement's opposition to policy measures that are anti-people in nature has paved the way for new thinking on democracy. There has been both, sometimes, convergence and divergence between parliament and people's movements on the question of governance and welfare from the beginning of new economic policy in India. This paper summarises the trajectory of convergence and divergence between parliament and people's movements on certain issues in the last two decades. Also, it looks at why the role of people's movements should be taken into consideration in the process of developmental efforts to be made by the parliament. The prime objective of this paper is to explore the efforts of people's movements in democratising the process of policymaking.*

**Key words:** Democracy, Elections, Governance, Parliament, People's Movements, Protest.

THE ARCHITECTS OF the Indian constitution had deep faith in representative institutions for the country's democratic governance. To a certain extent, faith in these institutions was realised in the early years of nationhood because the people at the helm of affairs were leaders who had participated in the nation's struggle for independence.

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Mention must be made about the role played by leaders like Nehru, Patel, Azad, and others. This kind of leadership started waning within two decades of country's independence. People started losing hope in elected representatives and representative institutions. It has been aptly analysed that the political scenario after the first two decades of independence was characterised by changes such as the waning of the ideology of nationalism and the erosion of the political consensus. The ideology of nationalism waned probably because a new generation came to the fore in the Congress party, and the regionalisation of polity gained momentum because of the leadership at the centre after Nehru. Within two decades of independence, the nation witnessed young people's revolts in the form of the Naxalite movement and resentment among the marginalized. Compulsions of political democracy made the ruling class forget the heritage of nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

The opposition that emerged in the 1970s against the ruling establishment made the ruling leadership further autocratic. The decade of the seventies was known for the emergence of both political and non-political organisations which opposed deviant acts regarding the philosophy of representative institutions in which constitutional architects had deep faith. Issues such as development, freedom, and basic rights of common people, especially the marginalised sections of society, made these organisations come to the fore. The non-responsive attitude of parliament regarding some imminent issues continued in the 80s, and when the country was still hopeful of good governance within the prevailing governance model, the Indian government introduced New Economic Policy (NEP) at the beginning of the 1990s for the betterment of the country. By the 1990s, the planned development model 'was being depicted as an unfortunate relic of the past which needed to be replaced by a more market-friendly and growth-oriented approach'<sup>2</sup>. The introduction of the New Economic Policy happened without much debate among the common people, and this new economic regime became some kind of imposition on the common people by the Indian parliament in general and by the ruling parties in particular. Major economic policy changes during this time happened in India with just a narrow support base<sup>3</sup>.

In the last two decades, the nation witnessed a number of debates and discussions on the question of governance and the role of representative institutions, especially the parliament. As a representative institution, the parliament consists of political representatives who are supposed to articulate the people's aspirations. The trust restored in the initial years of independence in the parliament and political parties is declining as the party interest dominates over peoples' interest. Candidates and political parties compromised their

ideologies, policies, and principles to gain power. It is pointed out that the 'voters feel that parties are essential for the functioning of democracy, but do not seem to trust them to make democracy work'<sup>4</sup>.

The decline in the trust and functioning of representative democracy in the world's largest democracy raises questions over the role of political representatives in a democracy. People's movements and social activists associated with them have actively participated in the debates and discussions on the role of representative institutions in India. The people's movement's opposition to policy measures that are anti-people in nature has paved the way for new thinking on democracy. These 'movements have begun to raise a new discourse on democracy and invent political practices, expanding the arena of politics beyond the representational institutions of elections and political parties'<sup>5</sup>.

There has sometimes been convergence and divergence between parliament and people's movements on the questions of governance and welfare from the beginning of the new economic policy. This paper summarises the trajectory of convergence and divergence between parliament and people's movements on certain issues in the last two decades. Also, it looks at why the role of people's movements should be taken into consideration in the process of developmental effort to be made by the parliament. The prime objective of this paper is to explore the efforts of people's movements in the process of policymaking.

**A) Change in the quality of Functioning of the Parliament:**

There has been a decline and rise in the quality of functioning of the parliament in India. One cannot observe the functioning of today's parliament the way it functioned in the first two decades of independence. In the 1950s, Congress was in the dominant position in the parliament. But, on the question of debates a faction within the Congress 'would join hands with the opposition and prevent the government from stonewalling the Parliament'<sup>6</sup>. This happened due to the fact that many members of that 'period had direct experience with the national movement and they strongly identified with a shared understanding of the nation in spite of their differing visions and perspectives'<sup>7</sup>. Leaders of the Congress 'were committed to the goals of rapid social and economic change and democratization of the society'<sup>8</sup>. Nehru's commitment to these values are well known, and 'in fact, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C.Rajagopalachari were equally committed to the values of democracy, civil liberties, secularism, independent economic development, anti-imperialism and social reforms and had a pro-poor orientation'<sup>9</sup>.

In the late 1960s and the middle of 1970s, things started changing in the functioning of the parliament. During this period, Congress

played a hegemonic role in the parliament. Its method and approach had to be protested by socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan. The movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in the decade of 1970s made a huge contribution as far as the status of democracy in India is concerned. Some of the arguments made by Jayaprakash Narayan regarding the status of Indian democracy are 'the necessity of civic responsibility, responsive citizenship, and representation conducive to peoples' power'<sup>10</sup>. The movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan had a major influence on the next government which came into existence following the Emergency. The Janata Party-led coalition in power at the centre gave importance to issues like popular accountability and sovereignty. Issues such as opposition to centralisation, favoured citizen participation, faith in Fundamental Rights and civil responsibility were reflected in the Janata Party's political tendencies following the Emergency<sup>11</sup>. Janata Party experiment was short-lived and did not make any major impact on the functioning of parliament and governance due to its internal bickering<sup>12</sup>.

The 1970s and 80s is also known for the emergence of people's movements which were not satisfied with the way the policies and programmes were implemented for the nation's development. These groups started questioning the establishment regarding developmental activities in the country. This phase did not see any significant change in the parliament's response to the common people's expectations. The people's movements 'took up issues and constituencies abandoned by political parties and trade unions and those ill-served by the bureaucracy. The organisational form they evolved for themselves was not of a political party or a pressure group. It was that of a civil-associational group, leading political struggles on issues articulated to them by the people themselves. The key concept they worked with was democratising development through the empowerment of the people'<sup>13</sup>. People's movements which came to the fore in 1980s 'resisted increasing commodification and monopolisation of natural resources like land, water and forest, their unsustainable use and unequal distribution, exploitative power relations, the centralisation of decision-making and disempowerment of communities caused by the development process. They asserted people's rights over natural resources and decision-making processes'<sup>14</sup>.

The new economic policy regime's first decade focused on liberalisation and privatisation. Economic growth became a major discourse within and outside the parliament. This 'discourse of liberalization came to monopolize economic discussion, just as planning had done in the 1950s and 60s'<sup>15</sup>. With a few exceptions, most of the political parties represented in the parliament had a consensus on

liberalisation and privatisation of the economy. There were no serious discussions and commitments on the question of the impact of new economic policy measures on the vast number of people in the country. This callous response on the part of the representatives in the parliament made civil society associations or people's movements rise actively. As far as the method and approach in raising the socio-economic issues is concerned, there has been no uniformity among the people's movements which have been working long before the introduction of New Economic Policy and even among those that have come to the fore later on. Some movements like the Naxalite movement use violence to achieve their goals, whereas movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) employ methods of civil disobedience<sup>16</sup>. But, one could find some sort of consensus in thinking among them in the sense that they 'explicitly identify the state as a dominant agent of oppression and oppressive policies'<sup>17</sup>. It is true that most of the people's movements 'are not aiming to capture the national parliament in New Delhi or initiate a total revolution'<sup>18</sup> but have become kind of a counterbalancing power to the state's authority<sup>19</sup>.

In the last few years, there has been a deterioration in the parliamentary deliberations, which has further widened the gap between the Parliamentarians and people's aspirations. Loss of time due to interruptions, forced adjournments, and lack of healthy discussions, has impacted the functioning of the parliament both in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The PRS report on 'Performance of Parliament during 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha', brings out the data showing that during the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, the productive time of the Lok Sabha was just 61 percent which is the worst performance of the Lok Sabha compared to the last fifty years<sup>20</sup>. Between 2000 to 2018, on average, 53 hours were spent discussing the budget, while in the budget session of 2018, just 1 percent of the Lok Sabha time was spent on legislative business<sup>21</sup>. 'In the budget session of 2018-19, 100% of demands were passed without discussion'<sup>22</sup>. The situation in parliament has been deteriorating year after year. The parties in the opposition a few years back and were responsible for disrupting the Parliamentary proceedings are now in power, while the party in power is in the opposition continuing with the same disruptive behaviour of the past opposition parties.

**B) Convergence between the Parliament and Peoples' Movements:** The second decade of the new economic regime saw certain changes in the relationship between parliament and people's movements or civil society in the sense that parliament started paying attention to questions raised by them on various issues. This could be



described as a convergence between parliament, people's movements, or civil society. A few issues could be explained as examples of convergence between the civil society and the parliament.

**a) Right to Information:** The demand for the Right to Information was pressed by a large section of people and concerned organisations representing them<sup>23</sup>. The Right to Information (RTI) movement began in 1990. This movement was led by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), 'the jan sangathan (the people's organisation) in rural Rajasthan which had, for two decades, fought corruption in village development works'<sup>24</sup>. The movement led by MKSS used 'jan sunvai or public hearings as a technique to empower villagers to 'speak truth to power', challenging an opaque, oppressive, and corrupt governance system<sup>25</sup>. This movement further expanded its base to the district and state levels. Its determination in its mission attracted many people to its fold and paved the way for a national campaign for the right to information. The network of the right-to-information campaign 'included not only jan sangathans like the MKSS, but also individual anti-corruption activists like Anna Hazare and Shailesh Gandhi. Notably, the RTI campaign aligned itself with the National Alliance of Peoples Movements, sangathans of the rural and urban poor fighting against dispossession. This organisational base gave the RTI campaign a solid political credibility'<sup>26</sup>.

Over a decade of consistent struggle by the organisations and activists resulted in the enactment of the Right to Information Act by the parliament in 2005. From the beginning of enactment of the act, it has proved to be a good tool for seeking information on governance<sup>27</sup> and holding the government or government officials accountable for their decisions and acts. Many concerned citizens and nongovernmental organisations have effectively utilised this act. To give an example, a high profile and popular nongovernmental organisation, 'Parivartan (or, transformation), effectively deployed the RTI to find substantial leakage in the public-distribution system governing the delivery of subsidised food for the poor in Delhi'<sup>28</sup>.

**b) Right to work:** Much criticism and widespread protests against government's economic policies made political parties in power come up with an idea of liberalisation with a humane face<sup>29</sup>. In this direction, the Government of India, led by United Progressive Alliance (UPA) first came up with a number of corrective measures. One such measure was the enactment of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in the parliament. This act was renamed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2009<sup>30</sup>. It must be mentioned here that the National Advisory Council (NAC) played a seminal role in passing legislation related to the right



to information and work<sup>31</sup>. The draft of NREGA prepared by the NAC was based on an earlier draft prepared by concerned citizens on the issue of the right to work<sup>32</sup>. Thus, NAC became an executive forum for social activists to articulate their views which they represent on behalf of common people in the country. It was witnessed that both governments at the centre and states took the assistance of voluntary organisations in policymaking and delivery of services<sup>33</sup>. NAC formalised the integration of voluntary organizations within the state process 'a phenomenon promoted by the forces of globalisation and liberalisation'<sup>34</sup>.

c) **Right to Food:** The National Food Security Act was passed in 2013, and it aims 'to provide for food and nutritional security in human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people to live a life with dignity and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto'<sup>35</sup>. This act empowers beneficiaries to get subsidised grains under the Targeted Public Distribution System. Many organizations played an important role in campaigning for the right to food<sup>36</sup>. They emphasized 'freedom from both hunger and undernutrition as a fundamental human right'<sup>37</sup>. Their consistent work resulted in the passing of the bill on food security 2013. Eminent economists like Jean Dreze actively popularised the idea of the right to food<sup>38</sup> and coordinated with the government on the issue of food security for common people. Dreze considers that providing food security is like a form of investment in human capital and it is sound economics<sup>39</sup>.

There are some issues on which there is no convergence between the parliament and people's movements or civil society. Corruption is one such issue on which there has not been any unanimity on legislation by most of the Indian political parties. Political parties cleverly used the parliamentary forum to prevent legislation on corruption. There was a great tussle between the parliament and the civil society movement on the question of corruption and its prevention in public life. Anna Hazare, a prominent social activist, and his core group of supporters demanded a strong institutional solution for the prevention of corruption in public life. They employed the strategy of hunger strike to fulfil their demand. This movement got a huge response from the common people. It had almost become like a great upheaval against apathy of the parliament and the concerned government at the centre. Had the elected representatives in the parliament taken interest in passing the law when the issue was raised, the outrage of the public and civil society could have been prevented, and the whole system could have retained faith in it. At the beginning of this civil society movement against corruption, the ruling party and most of

the members of parliament were unanimous in opposing the demands of the civil society, but as time passed and as elected representatives sensed the public mood, they began to respond to some of the demands of the civil society. Elected representatives' efforts in wooing civil society activists to come to terms with certain conditions indirectly showed that people's consistent and committed protest and resistance could make the elected representatives come out of their citadels. Finally, parliament's unanimous adoption of a resolution agreeing in principle with team Anna's position on some points was a victory for the civil society in making parliament listen to the public mood and be responsive to issues of vital concern to the people<sup>40</sup>. However, the opportunity created to pass the anti-corruption bill was not taken further by both the parliament and civil society in a concrete manner. Both the civil society and the parliament did not show any meaningful effort in making the bill to be passed as an act <sup>41</sup>. Another critical reason for the failure of this experiment was non-cooperation from the majority of other voluntary organisations and people's movements.

Centralisation of power in the name of representative democracy sometimes does not ensure accountability which is another important component/ challenge of democracy. Such a tendency is reflected in many democracies, especially from the developing world. Ruling establishment and ruling elites have used the centralising legislative method to enact a law or policy without giving substantial importance to common people who have voted them to power. Major policies and legislations have been passed without making common people aware of the intricacies of those laws and policies. Suppose the literacy rate and participation in public discussions are poor on the part of common people. In that case, it could be disastrous in the sense that the ruling establishment might become dictatorial and run the system according to their whims and fancies. The tendency of centralisation can be effectively curbed by the people's movements or civil society associations and their democratic methods of protests and resistance.

The three farm bills passed in the Lok Sabha in the year 2020 without taking into confidence the farmers are an example of the parliamentarians' centralized tendency. The three farm bills were – the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill. The President gave assent to these bills. According to the government, the Farm Acts give freedom to the farmer to sell their produce anywhere; they provide for a contract between farmers and corporate investors as per which farmers will produce crops as per the contract as per the mutually agreed

remuneration<sup>42</sup>. While the government applauded the bills being in the interest of farmers, the farmers termed them anti-farmers bills. Farmers of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and later supported by the farmers of other states, protested against these laws and demanded these bills be withdrawn in the larger interest of the farmers. They expressed concern over dismantling the minimum support system available to farmers and in the new system created by these bills the big corporate houses may dictate their terms<sup>43</sup>. P. Sainath, while pointing at Section 13 of The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 which prohibits any legal proceedings against central and state governments, mentions that the movement is not just to repeal the three farm laws but about citizens' right to legal recourse, which can, in turn, be seen as a defence of democracy<sup>44</sup>. There were many rounds of discussions between the government and farmers, which exposed the pro-corporate bias of the government while the farmers were firm in their demand to repeal all three laws. The protest received support from society at large, including the urban middle classes<sup>45</sup>. After one year of protest in which some farmers lost their lives and experienced hardship, the Indian parliament decided to repeal the three farm Acts.

The success of the farmer's protest is an example, which shows that effective and impactful participation and a strong means to hold the representatives accountable to the people is possible through strong and vibrant peoples' movements which take up and fight for the cause of people which otherwise may be neglected by peoples' representatives.

People's movements sometimes take to the streets certain burning issues or try to influence public policies from outside and prove to be more powerful. One such movement was the protest movement which followed hours after the nation woke up to the horrifying news of the Nirbhaya rape. This movement aimed to bring stringent laws related to rape. The continued protest by the civil society pressurised the parliament. 'On March 21, 2013, the rape law in the country was amended. The new tougher anti-rape law — Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013- to punish sex crimes redefined rape and made punishments more stringent-including death for repeat rape offenders'<sup>46</sup>.

In December 2019, the Indian government passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which led to protests across the country, some of which turned violent. One of the reasons for the protest was the exclusion of Muslims which was seen as an act against the ethos of the Indian Constitution<sup>47</sup> as the Act allowed citizenship to the non-Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Secondly, in

the Northeastern states, the protest was due to the fear that if the CAA gets implemented, it 'will cause a rush of immigrants that may alter their demographic and linguistic and cultural uniqueness'<sup>48</sup>. The anti-CAA protest started by the students of Jamia Millia University and by Jawaharlal Nehru University was soon joined by the opposition parties, eminent personalities, and activists. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a nationwide lockdown, the protest did not last long.

With the success of the farmers' movement, the anti-CAA movement once again came to the fore in Assam. While comparing the anti-CAA and farmers' movements, Ajay Gudavarthy <sup>49</sup> writes that the anti-CAA movement did not receive the social support received by the farmers' movement, for the anti-CAA movement was reduced to the issue of Muslim citizenship and did not evoke sympathy and trust from non-Muslim population. He further writes that the reignited anti-CAA protests inspired by the success of the farmers' movement needed to be different and avoid isolation. Thus, the two examples of anti-CAA and farmers' movements indicate that the protests to succeed need to have a discourse that has a larger appeal<sup>50</sup>.

The above instances indicate that protest movements are seen as means to exert influence on the policymakers on different issues when the government is reluctant to involve people in the decision-making process. Although people's movements can influence their representatives' decisions, they require larger support from society.

**C) Why should the role of people's movements be considered?**  
The Philosophy and objective behind the establishment of representative institutions are to ensure that the demands and aspirations of each citizen of the country are sufficiently represented, articulated, and met through their elected members. Elected members are mandated to work for the people. If there is any deviation in this philosophy the way out should be very much democratic and would be acceptable to the people. Common people in India have had enough reasons to be cynical about political parties because, for political parties, attaining power by any means has become a priority over the nation and its people. The tendency to attain power at any cost has resulted in 'the culture of corruption, inefficiency, selfishness and unprincipled behaviour'<sup>51</sup>. Regarding democratic mobilization, it is stated that 'while it has produced an intense struggle for power, has not delivered millions of citizens from the abject dictates of poverty. Yes, the broad framework within which practices of popular authorization can be carried out remain intact, but politics itself has become an area where norms exist only in their breach'<sup>52</sup>.

Election as one of the core methods of ensuring representation

has been successful to a certain extent in maintaining mere survival of electoral/procedural democracy but has not been able to enhance the quality of substantive democracy. In many developing and developed countries wherein political systems are democratic, elections have not ensured connectivity between common people and political actors such as political parties and politicians. Elections have become tools for many to authenticate their political systems rather than to mirror the political system's mistakes. It is observed that elections in democracies 'are now often less a choice between alternative political programmes and a means of enforcing political accountability on the government. They are increasingly taking on the character of referenda on personalities and slogans with professional fund-raisers and public relations consultants sometimes playing a greater role than citizens in selecting the issues used for mobilising voters'<sup>53</sup>.

The citizens no longer view elections as the mechanism through which they are able to hold their representatives accountable. A collective tool was felt necessary to pressure the parliamentarians to make them listen to the people's demands. When elections have become a farce in the country, the option left to common people is that of civil resistance and protest by organising around civil society associations. Civil resistance and civic engagement with the ruling establishment by civil society cannot always be understood as a kind of anarchy. Civil resistance cannot be against a system that runs properly according to democratic principles. It would not necessarily be in favour of any sort of chaos and violent activity against the establishment for fulfilment of projected demands or aspirations of people. In any political system, which claims that it is liberal democracy, 'when the governing parties refuse to formulate an effective law, any citizen, any group has a right to mobilise public opinion and try to put its proposal before government'<sup>54</sup>.

In representative democracy, both opposition and ruling parties have got equal importance in ensuring good governance for the people. They have a greater role in the smooth functioning of representative institutions. In recent years, parliament's functioning is marked by disruptions, bills being passed without much discussion, and walk-outs, resulting in the loss of valuable time and peoples' money. Disruption of Parliament due to walk-out by opposition parties was noticed during the UPA government as well as the NDA government. If representative institutions do not function smoothly, there will be severe consequences in the country's governance. If political parties in opposition do not function as effective agencies of making ruling parties work for the people, the option left to common people is organised people's movements. The very mechanism of representative

democracy is 'designed to secure the liberty, well-being and dignity of citizens'<sup>55</sup> but this mechanism 'is routinely throwing up forces that threaten to undermine it; the very laws that are supposed to enshrine republican aspirations are incapable of commanding minimal respect, and their inaction subjects the entire political process to ridicule. The corruption, mediocrity, indiscipline, venality and lack of moral imagination of the political class, those essential agents of representation in any democracy, makes them incapable of attending to the well-being of citizens. The capture of the political process, by the meanest of interests, intermittently violent, occasionally unleashing uncontrollable passions, the lack of any ideological coherence, all suggest democracy has become a hollow shell' <sup>56</sup>.

Recently there has been a supportive argument among some intellectuals and politicians that parliament is supreme in the legislation process. Parliamentary supremacy can be asserted if parliament or any representative institution has remained up to the expectations of the common people. Institutional credibility depends upon its representatives. Without having quality representatives and representatives without respect towards democracy and its core concern, namely the common people, the assertion of institutional supremacy becomes absurd and baseless. It is rightly stated that the 'blossoming of a democratic structure, particularly in a developing country set-up, is critically dependent upon popular participation not only in electing the government but also in formulating and executing development policies' <sup>57</sup>.

Participation of people beyond the fixed process of elections will sustain democracy. Democracy can be achieved in a real sense when people actively participate not only in elections but holding their representatives answerable to the people's interest and demands and, above all, asserting their right over the decisions pertaining to public policies. Public debates by civil society associations involving common people on any policy legislation should precede the legislative enactments rather than following them. Such debates by the people may strengthen the state's capacity in terms of meaningfully connecting with the people by involving them in the deliberative process. For the policies to be impactful and yield desired results, they needed to be based on the ground realities gained through meaningful public debates and learning from the experiences of citizens of the country connected with local realities. Ultimately, such debates help in moving in the direction of robust deliberative democracy <sup>58</sup>.

**D) Conclusion:** There is no doubt about the efficacy of representative institutions in larger democratic countries. Representative institutions are meant to represent the aspirations of



the citizens of the country. Representative institutions in India' not only legitimize a government, but they are also the supreme organs for the formulation of policies, overseeing their implementation, and in general acting as 'watchdogs' over the functioning of the government. Unfortunately, over the years, there has been a general downside in its performance, and signs of decay in the institution have set in' <sup>59</sup>. If representative institutions do not work, concerned citizens have to find creative ways and methods in the form of people's movements or civil society to make representative institutions work for the people. Indian civil society may not be so successful in its record of making parliament work for the people but it has to certain extent created an imprint among the public that unity and common resistance against anti-people actions by the ruling power structure, including parliament, can bring changes that people wish to see in the system. People's movements or civil society associations have been able to mobilize the common mass at grass root level and such mobilization' efforts are led by dedicated activists' <sup>60</sup> and they 'are based on a cause, vocation, or identity; and are located in an alternative political space outside the conventional structures of party and government' <sup>61</sup>. To a certain extent the effort of people's movements or activism of civil society associations is facilitating to bring changes in the political system <sup>62</sup>.

It is desired that social action groups, maybe worker's movements, women's movements, environmental movements, or any movement, have to come together on key issues that would help facilitate governance. It is rightly said that protest movements 'can be complementary in a democracy and, like other forms of popular participation, protest movements may contribute to the legitimacy of democratic governance'<sup>63</sup>

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# Views of Mahatma Gandhi on Caste, Untouchability and Hinduism: Their validation and criticism

Anette Gomes

## ABSTRACT

*It is quite clear that Mahatma Gandhi was more vocal against the practice of untouchability than against caste. In the initial years of his career, he defended the caste system as a division of society into different occupational groups for its smooth functioning. However, he did change his views in this regard, probably owing to the criticism and strong arguments of B.R. Ambedkar. However, he was firm in his belief in Hinduism and its noble character as a religion. He was not ready to accept that the inhumane practice of untouchability could have its sanction in Hinduism. In this context, this paper attempts to ascertain how far his views are acceptable and can be imbibed. Similarly, the paper also considers the criticism that can be leveled against him.*

**Key words:** Caste, Untouchability, Hinduism, Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar

## Introduction

THE UNTOUCHABILITY ISSUE was very dear to Mahatma Gandhi, and he denounced it completely. According to him, untouchability and the caste system were two separate aspects; hence the removal of the former was paramount to his campaign rather than an attack on the caste system. In fact, he did come up with many positive aspects relating to caste during the initial years of his career. This stand of his becomes quite clear from his works.<sup>1</sup> Even when faced with criticism

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from his contemporary, B.R Ambedkar, that caste and untouchability were avowed avenues of inequality, and both had religious sanction, he refused to go by his argument. For Gandhi, the role of religion was moral and spiritual advancement, and it did not find any resonance with the practice of untouchability.

The major works produced on Mahatma Gandhi's career by B.R Nanda<sup>2</sup> and Ramachandra Guha<sup>3</sup> acknowledge his efforts towards uplifting untouchables as sincere and not a sideshow as was depicted by B.R Ambedkar. One more important work in this regard is produced by Nishikant Kholge<sup>4</sup>, who juxtaposes the views of Mahatma Gandhi on caste with that of his personal conduct and tries to study them in a historical context. D.R. Nagaraj<sup>5</sup> analyses the approach taken by Mahatma Gandhi towards the untouchability issue by emphasizing on self-purification of caste Hindus against the non-religious approach adopted by B.R. Ambedkar to tackle the same. The article brings out the flaws ingrained in the approach of Mahatma Gandhi. For more criticism of Gandhi's views, this paper has relied heavily on the works of B.R Ambedkar.<sup>6</sup> Other recent papers on this subject mainly confine themselves to his understanding of caste in contrast to B.R Ambedkar or different scholars arguments regarding Gandhi's take on caste and how it evolved over time.<sup>7</sup> Against this background, the present paper attempts to situate his views not just on caste and untouchability but also on religion, in addition to steps taken to improve the lot of untouchables. It also tries to evaluate how far his views are acceptable in the present context.

### **Mahatma Gandhi on Caste and Untouchability**

Mahatma Gandhi used the term '*Harijan*' (man of God) to address the untouchables since he felt that the terms used to refer to them were derogatory.<sup>8</sup> He was quite vocal against the practice of untouchability and denounced it in unequivocal terms. He felt that the presence of untouchability in Hinduism was harmful to its survival, as can be gathered from his own words Untouchability is the greatest blot on Hinduism. Untouchability, as it is practiced in Hinduism today, is, in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism".<sup>9</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi was more active in his quest for political freedom, but that doesn't mean he was not concerned with untouchability. In fact, for him, '*swaraj*' did not mean only political freedom from the British yoke but also freedom of all kinds, and that included better treatment of untouchables. He believed "So long as the Hindus willfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of



their brethren, *swaraj* is impossible of attainment".<sup>10</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi felt that *swaraj* is impossible as long as we ill-treat the weak and meek persons with impunity.<sup>11</sup> He was of the opinion that we are taken aback at the plight of Indians in South Africa at the hands of the British, but we are doing the same to the untouchables in our own home country. We have no right to ask for *swaraj* from British on grounds of inequality when we are doing the same to our own brethren.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Mahatma Gandhi opposed untouchability, he did not fully oppose the caste system. He adopted quite different stand on the caste system and measures to improve the lot of untouchables compared to B.R Ambedkar.

#### **Caste reform from within and change in the mindset of *Savarna* (caste) Hindus**

"Untouchability is not the product of caste system but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it".<sup>13</sup> Since Gandhi did not consider untouchability as part of the caste system, he openly supported the four-fold divisions of society into four *varnas* (any of the four Hindu castes). For him, caste system was a division of labour, but presently *Varna dharma* (duty according to ones caste) was not in its original essence. Hence he felt that if we cannot revive the original caste system, it is a calamity.<sup>14</sup> While castes were many, *varnas* have always been four in number.

He viewed the caste system or *Varna dharma* as the division of society into different occupational groups to maintain order. Each *varna* had a duty to perform, not superior rights and status to belittle others. The task of a scavenger was no less than that of a Brahmin. Both are doing certain things for their livelihood. <sup>15</sup> To him, *varnas* were not a vertical section but a horizontal plane on which all stand equally. There should be no question of superiority and inferiority attached to one's *varna*.<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi stood for the dignity of labour and the removal of the stigma attached to a particular work.<sup>17</sup> For him, there was no high or low work, but everyone was doing their work mainly for livelihood. Hence he did not find any problems with the caste system. He only desired to reform this caste system by removing the untouchability and changing the attitude of caste or *savarna* Hindus towards untouchables and their work. He wanted to make the caste Hindus realize that even though the untouchables may be involved in cleaning work, which renders them dirty for the time being, they cease to be untouchables after a bath and cleansing.<sup>18</sup> Just as we revere our mother when she does sanitary service when we are infants, so are *bhangis*

(scavengers) who do sanitary service to us.<sup>19</sup> Considering them untouchable was a sin, according to Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi, therefore, wanted not the abolition of the caste system but its reform through untouchability removal, as can be seen in his own words 'The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true *Varna-dharma*, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other'.<sup>20</sup> This attitude towards the caste system is seen as one of his strategies not to alarm the upper caste Hindus and believe his campaign to be an attempt to destroy their religion and tradition. That is why he could not be radical in asking for the complete abolishment of the caste system, as that would amount to an attack on their religion since caste was intertwined with religion. And that would make the caste Hindus even more determined to cling to their caste system than ever before. Therefore Mahatma Gandhi emphasized that he needed to purify it rather than destroy it completely as part of his strategy.<sup>21</sup>

However, we see a change in the attitude of Gandhi toward caste system in the later period. Earlier, he considered caste to be a changed form of *varnashrama dharma*, but later he believed it to be a complete antithesis of the latter and hence strived for its complete abolition.<sup>22</sup> But he continued to believe in *Varnashrama dharma*, the fourfold division of society in its original form and not distorted form as practiced in the form of castes wherein there is no social mobility but rigidity.<sup>23</sup> This change in his attitude is seen in the historical context wherein by the 1930s, he assumed the mass appeal and was in a better position to hold more radical views regarding caste practices.<sup>24</sup>

Though Gandhi wanted to abolish untouchability, he did not want the immediate result by forcing a change through legislation, fast or *Satyagraha*. He believed that religious reform should be that of persuasion and not of legislation.<sup>25</sup> Even when some untouchables expected him to start a fast for his campaign against untouchability he rejected the idea saying he would not do fast to appeal to anyone, but that should come in accordance with truth alone.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, he did not approve of untouchables claiming it as their right to enter temples. During Vykom Satyagraha in 1924, he asked the leaders not to overawe the orthodox. When the untouchables in the Bombay presidency started a Satyagraha to assert their right to temple entry, Gandhi disapproved of it, saying Satyagraha cannot be used against Indians but only against foreigners.<sup>27</sup> Similar was the case with the untouchables of Kavitha village in Gujarat, whom Gandhi

advised to vacate their village to avoid the atrocities of caste Hindus rather than forcing the latter to acknowledge their right to send their children to school along with caste Hindus.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Satyagraha for temple entry in Malabar was not considered necessary.<sup>29</sup>

For him, religious change should come from the heart and not be forced upon as can be gathered from his words 'After all, what is wanted is not the removal of untouchability by law. If the Hindu heart harbours untouchability, it will be there, whether the law recognizes it or not'.<sup>30</sup> Therefore he was against the forcible opening of temples to Harijans.<sup>31</sup>

The removal of untouchability was aimed at self-purification and reparation, which the caste Hindus had to do towards untouchables. It cannot be forced but was a voluntary act that should come from the caste Hindus willingly. That was why Gandhi did not want to hand over the leadership of *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (an organization founded by caste Hindus to help the untouchables) to the untouchables when they demanded it. He denied them, saying that Caste Hindus were in debt to untouchables; hence they were the debtors, and untouchables were creditors. The role of the Harijans was to ascertain whether they approved or disapproved of the measures of improvement by caste Hindus. The role of the Harijans is to suggest. It is up to the caste Hindus whether it is acceptable or not. But Gandhi said he was trying his best not to incur the displeasure of Harijans by denying them their demands.<sup>32</sup>

For Gandhi, untouchability was a matter of superiority and inferiority complex on part of Caste Hindus and untouchables respectively. Therefore he wanted the untouchables to shed their inferiority complex and not return the scorn of the Brahmins with scorn. If they did that, then they were prone to the path of hate and violence. And Gandhi wanted them to follow love, non-violence, mutual respect, and brotherhood. Gandhi believed that the untouchables could shed their inferiority complex and realize their self-worth only when Brahmins or caste Hindus will do repentance.<sup>33</sup> Though he hated untouchability, he did not hate the domineering Hindus who practiced it, and he had a similar approach for untouchables to adopt.<sup>34</sup> Since the untouchability movement was the removal of the feeling of high and low, Gandhi did not emphasise much on inter-dining and inter-marriage initially.<sup>35</sup> However, he later gave importance to inter-caste marriage between caste Hindus and Harijans. He requested the caste Hindu girls to take Harijans as their husbands as this would remove the stigma associated with untouchability.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps this change in attitude resulted from B.R Ambedkar's emphasis on inter-caste marriage as the only way to break

the spirit of caste consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

Since untouchability was practised by caste Hindus, they had to take steps against it and not the other communities, let alone untouchables.<sup>38</sup> The first step which Gandhi wanted the caste Hindus to take to improve the lot of the untouchables was to open temples for them. He focused more on temple entry than on economic uplift. He believed that once the temple entry is given to Harijans, it will automatically mean opening other avenues to them, like education and economic uplift.<sup>39</sup> Caste Hindus had no problems touching untouchables on the railways and other public places but not in temples, as was complained by B.R Ambedkar. Because of that, Gandhi gave more emphasis to temple entry.<sup>40</sup>

He wanted to open the existing temples to Harijans and not construct new ones solely for their use. He said that he staked his life by starting a fast to avoid separate electorates for them in 1932, as separate electorates would mean forever labeling untouchables as untouchables, and it would spell doom for his efforts to remove that label of untouchable. Therefore separate temples for them would do the same thing.<sup>41</sup>

However, he did not focus on temple entry alone but also believed in starting a constructive programme for the betterment of the untouchables. For the same, he tried to convince the people to switch to Khadi as it would support the untouchables who were involved in its making.<sup>42</sup> He even tried to revive the village industries with an all-India Association to help the untouchables since the village was their base.<sup>43</sup>

### **Relationship between Caste, Untouchability and Hindu religion**

Though Mahatma Gandhi considered Hinduism synonymous with *Varnashrama Dharma*<sup>44</sup> he did not accept the argument of B.R Ambedkar and the like that untouchability had religious sanction. He was against the scriptures given by B.R Ambedkar to justify his stand saying that these were merely interpolations and not authentic. For him, religion meant spiritual quest, and hence caste had nothing to do with religion. It was just a social custom.<sup>45</sup> He refused to consider untouchability as part of Hinduism, saying that "custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered".<sup>46</sup>

Even when untouchables specifically mentioned the *slokas* (couplets) in the *Manusmriti* (religious scripture), which imposed disabilities upon them, he appealed to them not to go by the selective *slokas* as it contradicted the overall essence of the religious scripture of Hindus, which emphasized on humane approach towards all.<sup>47</sup> He believed that we could not go according to the scriptures alone all the

time, as can be known from his words "Scriptures cannot transcend Reason and Truth. They are intended to purify Reason and illuminate Truth".<sup>48</sup>

Gandhi believed that Hinduism is quite pure, like the river Ganga at its source but gains impurities along its way. The content of any scripture comes into being owing to the demands of a particular time, and if it is inconsistent with present times, then we should discard it. Ultimately "Hinduism abhors stagnation".<sup>49</sup>

He appealed to the Hindus that they should be aware of the defects in their religion and should therefore strive to overcome them.<sup>50</sup> He held the view that "if we are imperfect ourselves, religion, as conceived by us, must also be imperfect. Religion of our conception, being imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution".<sup>51</sup>

For Gandhi "the essence of religion was morality"<sup>52</sup> and as long as there was an absence in any religion, he was ready to reject that religion.<sup>53</sup> He was prepared to discard any tradition if it was inconsistent with reason and morality.<sup>54</sup>

Gandhi considered truth as God and was bent on its quest. He believed that any amount of sacrifice did not matter if he could face God. Since God was to be found in the lowliest of His creatures than high and mighty, he supported the cause of suppressed classes and meant to serve them. By doing this humanitarian service, he meant to get closer to God.<sup>55</sup>

For him, "God is light, not darkness, God is love not hate, God is truth, not untruth, God alone is great. We, His creatures, are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures".<sup>56</sup>

He believed that a religion that revered cows "cannot possibly warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings".<sup>57</sup> Gandhi felt that our knowledge of religion is confined only to a feeling of inferiority and superiority and restriction on food and drink. For him, the character was the only deciding factor of inferiority and superiority, not birth. God cannot create some individuals as untouchables.<sup>58</sup>

Lastly he believed that "A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to if not to improve upon".<sup>59</sup>

Faced with untouchables threatening to change their religion to escape oppression and persecution of caste Hindus, Gandhi tried to convince them that the fault does not lie with Hinduism but with those who profess it. He believed that those who commit the sin of untouchability are ignorant of the teachings of Hinduism.<sup>60</sup> He believed

that conversion should be governed by spiritual reasons and not by material considerations.<sup>61</sup>

However, he appealed to the reformers not to hold back those Harijans who had decided to leave Hinduism by offering material gains but instead focused on giving them justice.<sup>62</sup> Though some untouchables converted to other religions, many decided to remain within the Hindu fold despite inhuman treatment.<sup>63</sup> Gandhi called these untouchables staunch believers and said, 'If Harijans can patiently bear persecution, they are bound to come triumphant in the end'.<sup>64</sup>

### Validation

The attitude of Mahatma Gandhi that laws alone cannot bring about a desired change, but it should come from the individuals who are perpetrating the crime is worthwhile to accept. His opinion was that laws could be a first step towards improving the situation, but you cannot solely rely on them to see the change. He was quite right about that because if laws had brought about a change, then there would have been no crime in any part of the country. Similarly, he believed that 'it is one thing to hold certain views and quite another to make them acceptable in their entirety to society at large'.<sup>65</sup> For him, change in people's attitudes cannot be wrought overnight, and he had to work patiently and with the principle of compromise.<sup>66</sup> So through laws, one cannot force a change in heart, which is equally true for Mahatma Gandhi.

Accordingly, he intended not to remove untouchability by laws but to focus on changing the heart and attitudes of upper-caste Hindus practicing it. That was why B.R Ambedkar accused him of going too slow in his approach towards untouchability.<sup>67</sup> But if he had been slow, then he would not have faced with black flag demonstration, burning of his effigy, interrupting his meeting by heckling the speaker or throwing a bomb on his group, which he narrowly escaped by orthodox Hindus during his Harijan tour in 1934, as for them he was going too fast.<sup>68</sup> Even though his method of bringing about a change was slow and gradual, it aimed at removing untouchability from its roots or the hearts of the caste Hindus. He shifted the onus from untouchables to caste Hindus to improve the conditions of the former.

It was commendable of him to understand that the real change would come only when the caste Hindus shed their superiority complex attached to their particular caste. Until and unless this does not take place, any laws would not successfully remove the untouchability and caste superiority from the heart. This is quite true even in present times if we look at the matrimonial advertisements which go according to the caste category. So the change should come



from within and not through external elements. His quest to remove the label of untouchable and not use that label for gains but instead give importance to merit is creditable.<sup>69</sup>

The other aspect of his campaign against untouchability was appealing to untouchables to shed their inferiority complex. Even when facilities were provided to them, they were hesitant to avail themselves, which speaks of their fear and inferiority complex. Gandhi realized that for ages, the untouchables believed their work and profession were of low rank and therefore developed an inferiority complex towards their work. But his efforts to bring about the dignity of labour and change the belief of high and low work are praiseworthy. Even in the face of injustice, he asked the untouchables not to develop resentment, anger, and bitterness as these negative feelings are equally bad for one's mental health.

His steadfast belief in Hinduism against all odds is admirable. He was not ready to go by selective *slokas* as the overall essence of Hinduism mattered to him. And the essence did not support untouchability. For him, religion is to be lived and not recited by a verse or a prayer. Therefore, how a man lived mattered, not how many verses or prayers he could recite. When orthodox Hindus considered untouchability as part of Hinduism, Gandhi retorted back and said that Hinduism of their conception is a distorted one. At the same time, he had lived all his life as a Hindu.<sup>70</sup>

### Criticism

It was quite ironic that Mahatma Gandhi did not consider untouchability as part of Hindu religion but considered efforts against untouchability as a religious campaign or religious reform. It was a sin and a crime against God first and humanity to practice untouchability.. Even when B.R Ambedkar was striving to make untouchability a civil issue through Mahad tank Satyagraha in 1927 to demand water as a right, Gandhi resisted this change to repeated in other Satyagrahas specially Vaikom and continued to emphasise on untouchability issue within the ambit of Hinduism.<sup>71</sup> By treating it as a civil issue, B.R Ambedkar wanted the inclusion of other communities in this struggle. Still, Gandhi's appeal to Caste Hindus to purify them to tackle this issue automatically made it a religious issue, and the involvement of other people would amount to trespassing.<sup>72</sup> If this was his approach, then why was untouchability not part of Hinduism?

Even B.R. Ambedkar, the strongest critic of Mahatma Gandhi in his own time, held the same view that untouchability was practiced because people were religious-minded or just performing their religious duty. He held that the belief in the sanctity of *shastras* needed



to be removed since they supported caste. He attacked Gandhi's stand that one should go according to the essence of *shastras* and not according to its exact wordings saying that it does not make any sense to know the essence of *shastras* when majority of the people go according to its wording and therefore practice untouchability. And as a reformer, one should have the courage to attack and question the authority and sanctity of *shastras* and not defend it like Gandhi.<sup>73</sup>

When Gandhi overlooked those religious texts supporting caste and untouchability, saying that they were just later interpolations and not authentic, B.R. Ambedkar questioned him, saying that common masses do not know to differentiate between interpolations and authentic. They believe what is told to them and are told that observance of caste and untouchability is a religious duty.<sup>74</sup> B.R. Ambedkar even went a step ahead and said that even though the teachings of Bhakti saints taught religious equality, they never taught against caste; they said all men were equal before God but not among men.<sup>75</sup> And another reason why the interpretation of *shastras* given by Bhakti saints or Mahatma Gandhi himself differently does not change anything concerning learned few or ignorant many is because people tend to honour these people but never follow them.<sup>76</sup>

There were contradictions in Mahatma Gandhi's take on Hinduism; on the one hand, he said that religion remains unalterable; on the other hand, he told Hinduism abhors stagnation. Though he advised using reason when it comes to understanding scriptures, Manusmriti was strictly against the same, according to B.R. Ambedkar. Hence there was no scope for the application of rationality in understanding caste.<sup>77</sup>

The adamancy of Mahatma Gandhi regarding his reliance on Caste Hindus to alleviate the condition of untouchables bespeak of charity that he wanted to hand over to untouchables and not justice as he was against the practice of untouchables demanding things as their rights. If Satyagraha was a weapon to fight against injustice and oppression, why were untouchables not justified in using it against the caste Hindus? His belief that the caste Hindus would be moved by the feelings of shame over their practice of untouchability and thereby will help untouchables was nothing less than fooling untouchables and the world at large.<sup>78</sup> Gandhi's reliance on Caste Hindus to purify themselves and to make avowed efforts to help the untouchables turn them into heroes, saviors, and patrons of untouchables did not place untouchables on equal footing but always in awe of Caste Hindus.<sup>79</sup>

B.R. Ambedkar realised that the word of the intellectual class, i.e., Brahmins in the case of India, carried more weight than any other

caste or people. But he equally understood that Brahmins could not start the social reforms as it would mean sacrificing their power and position which religion accorded to them.<sup>80</sup> That was why he faced opposition bordering on violence from caste Hindus for asserting their rights through Mahad Tank Satyagraha (1927) or entry into Kala Ram temple, Nasik (1930).<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this opposition made him to give secondary importance to temple entry as a way to uplift the untouchables and rather focus on economic uplift for them.<sup>82</sup> Therefore he felt that the work should be carried forward by the untouchables and not depend on others for favour, especially Brahmins or other high caste Hindus. It is their struggle, and they should lead it.<sup>83</sup>

According to B.R. Ambedkar, the main reason why Mahatma Gandhi emphasized assuming responsibility to help untouchables through Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS) which was composed entirely of caste Hindus and not untouchables was to prevent untouchables from organising themselves and becoming strong and independent of the control of the caste Hindus.<sup>84</sup> Ambedkar found a similarity in the activities of HSS to the story of the demoness Putana who wanted to kill Lord Krishna through kindness. Similarly, HSS wanted to kill the spirit of independence from among the untouchables through kindness under the pretense of service.<sup>85</sup>

Even though Gandhi acknowledged untouchability as a matter of high and low, he did not do the same about caste. Initially, he supported the caste system in the name of *varna* and considered it as a division of labour. To this argument, B.R. Ambedkar said that it was not a division of labour but that of labourers in a water-tight compartment with gradation. There is no question of choice and aptitude pertaining to occupations, but they are pre-destined. In fact, there are some occupations that are considered to be degraded by the Hindu religion and carry a stigma along with them. Hence people tend to avoid those occupations, and if they are involved in them by destiny, they are stigmatized. Therefore, Gandhi's argument that the caste system was a division of society into different occupational groups did not hold ground with B.R. Ambedkar.<sup>86</sup> If we go by Gandhi's contention regarding caste, then B.R. Ambedkar would have never become an intellectual and occupied the highest place in Indian history and politics, which was beyond his ancestral calling.

According to B.R. Ambedkar, untouchability was an extended form of caste system, and without its abolishment, there was no scope for abolishing untouchability. Perhaps the strong case of B.R. Ambedkar against the caste system made Gandhi denounce it as an antithesis of his *varnashrama dharma*. But overall, Gandhi was not much vocal against removing caste as he was against untouchability.

Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against untouchability was more of preaching sermons than about practice, as he never approved of using *Satyagraha* or observing fast to redress the issue. It was only about pleading with caste Hindus to do penance for the wrongs that they have done to untouchables and praising the enduring ability of untouchables to suffer silently. B.R. Ambedkar accused him, saying that his appeal as a political leader was more among Hindus than as a social reformer; hence he was unsuccessful in helping the untouchables after so many efforts. And the main reason why Gandhi did not go beyond preaching is that he did not want to antagonize the caste Hindus.<sup>87</sup> For him, 'Gandhism was opium to lull the people into false beliefs and false security'.<sup>88</sup>

Even Mahatma Gandhi's attempt to revive village industries and shift the focus to the village to help the untouchables was seen with scepticism by them because, for them, the village was a hell where all discrimination dominated.<sup>89</sup> After 1934, the issue of untouchables took a backseat in the Harijan journal. Gandhi also acknowledged it, saying that since now the power was gradually coming into the hands of Congress, he needed to focus on other issues.<sup>90</sup> Does that mean he raised the untouchability issue just to give Congress political gains, or was it because he wanted a united front against the British and could not allow untouchables to deviate from Congress?

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that Mahatma Gandhi condemned the practice of untouchability and desired its removal. But his hesitancy in adopting the same approach towards the caste system made him the object of criticism by B.R. Ambedkar regarding his sincerity towards the untouchability issue. However, one cannot deny that he worked meticulously to remove the feelings of high and low attached to particular occupations, thereby bringing about the dignity of labour. His efforts did disturb the orthodox section of Hindus, which almost cost him his life during his Harijan tour in Poona in 1934. Though he overlooked the selective religious passages which supported untouchability and gave his version of religion, how far people were ready to go by his conception of religion is questionable.

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# The Body Politic: M.K. Gandhi and the Ascetic Ideal

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper addresses the imbrication of ascetic ideals with Indian nationalistic discourse. A corollary concern would be the construction and evolution of religious elements, particularly their transformation in colonial India, and their socio-political and cultural implications for our times. Though the ascetic may have gained acceptance and authority among nationalist ideologues as an indigenous ideal to counter imperial dominance, it will not be far-fetched to note that this process led to the formulation and legitimization of diverse new entities, but primarily that of the 'Hindu' ascetic. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to trace and analyse the ascetic elements, fashioned and fashioning Indian nationalistic discourse. It delimits by discussing the 'experiments' undertaken by Gandhi, viz. as an ashramite, practising Brahmacharya, ahimsa and anasaktiyoga, further transmuted and structured for disciplining the nation.*

**Key words:** Ascetic, Nationalism, Mahatma Gandhi, Karmayogi, Brahmacharya, Ahimsa

## Introduction

AN ASCETIC IS commonly supposed to practise a higher ideal. The 'asceticism' is both actual as well as ideal in that it is a way of life characterised by stringent and rigorous notions of celibacy, austerity, self-discipline and humility—a "perception and instinct of the most favourable conditions of higher spirituality".<sup>1</sup> Though ascetics supposedly inhabited the "wonder that was India" and wandered through its wilderness and ancient history, the figure of the Indian ascetic underwent a major transformation in the nineteenth century.

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It does not imply that the ascetic's image was stuck in time. On the contrary, it is to emphasise that the transformation of the ascetic figure in the nineteenth century was significant, to the point where it could be said that the ascetic figure was fully recreated and remodelled.

The ascetic in the Indian sub-continent is not merely a religious character who withdraws from the social world to live in seclusion and often in solitude, but one who connects with various socio-cultural issues. The transmutation of the ascetic elements as a conscious technique of construction and self-fashioning was affected as part of the Indian nationalist agenda in the nineteenth century. While conditioned by colonial and nationalist compulsions, the ascetic figure also played a significant role in shaping, if not determining, modern India's socio-political and cultural history. The nineteenth-century transfiguration of the ascetic elements arguably created persistent misunderstandings, tensions, conflicts, and controversies that continue to irk our present.

#### GANDHI AND THE ASCETIC IDEAL

Gandhi conceptualised various ascetic principles, some of them expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He uses the text to defend the notions of truth, *svadharma*, *swadeshi*, and *satyagraha*. He promoted self-discipline, which through religious devotion, is altered into public power to achieve nationalist goals. The concept of *ashram* was re-structured by him, and it was brought in conjunction with the nationalist discourse in British India. Further, the *ashram* observances are advocated and culminate with national reform and self-improvement ideas. As a Satyagrahi, an ascetic serving in the midst of society, Gandhi assisted in re-constructing a religio-political India. As per Gandhi's notion, the ascetic subject seems to facilitate reunification of the cultural identity in the Indian sub-continent. Gandhi as a "political sannyasi" changed the social world, and he is accepted as a cultural hero.

#### Brahmacharya

One of the ascetic principles—which gained prominence and contributed a major role among the Indian nationalists—was *Brahmacharya* (celibacy). Through this ascetic ideal, religion was brought out into the public sphere. The concept of celibacy was systematised into an important aspect and campaigned as a "technology of the self" and a mechanism to control the bodily powers. It was further appropriated as an aspect that would procure for one freedom from colonial rule. The individual body was trained and assumed to "transform the soul". The aspect of bodily training at

*akharas* was constituted to relegate the “effeminate” body. Also, it was believed that a robust, healthy masculine body would reflect a healthy country. The religio-spiritual aspects were to be learnt through physical fitness. The observance of a perfect celibate life became crucial in the nineteenth century. It might be said that the British formulated the ideology that the colonised were at liberty to rule India if they were competent in maintaining control over their sexuality. Due to the above British conception, a potential doubt took shape in the minds of the Indian nationalist ideologues that the Indian populace became “effeminate” as they did not retain any check over their sexual activities. This doubt prompted them to take up a few necessary steps: disciplining the body through suppressing desires, a rigorous practice of *karmayoga* (selfless action), and the observance of *brahmacharya*. In his *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi points out, “Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, becomes emasculated and cowardly. He whose mind is given over to animal passions is not capable of any great effort”.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi took the powerful vow of lifelong *brahmacharya* during the Zulu “rebellion” in 1906. He felt that “one aspiring to serve humanity with his whole soul could not do without it”.<sup>3</sup> In the later years of his religio-political career, Gandhi considered that the world was to “know of his tryst with brahmacharya in which women constituted an integral part”.<sup>4</sup> However, it should be remembered that for Gandhi, it was a broad idea rather than mere abstention from sex or continence. It represented an absolute thought and a moral authority to be practised in thought, word, and deed – a definite path to *moksha*.

Gandhi’s concept of *brahmacharya*, which had ascetic characteristics, was to be executed through the performance of duties to achieve mastery over one’s thoughts and passions. By doing so, one can learn more about oneself. This represents Gandhi’s actions and preaching based on the above concept. “His quest is to know himself, to attain moksha that is to see God (Truth) face to face. In order to fulfil his quest, he must be an ashramite, a satyagrahi and a seeker after Swaraj”.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi’s experiments were primarily efforts to acquire self-awareness through the practice of *brahmacharya*, which may also be interpreted as an effort to master the body and self. Perhaps, a majority of his experiments with Truth were possible through the ashram and its observances.

*Brahmacharya* as an ascetic principle took a prominent position in the hands of Gandhi. He considered it to be a “mode of life which leads to the realization of God. That is realization is impossible

without practising self-restraint. Self-restraint means restraint of all the senses".<sup>6</sup> The observance of *brahmacharya* was considered would derive great benefit. Gandhi states that *brahmacharya* is a mode of life that leads one towards God. The important aspect was to keep one healthy and help him save his vital fluid for performing one's duty to the nation. He states in a speech that the man of "virtue practises *brahmacharya* and tries to conserve to his level best, the crucial resource of energy in the body".<sup>7</sup> It was more than abstaining from sexual intercourse. However, it should be remembered that Gandhi was specific that "they will have observed *Brahmacharya* only if, though possessed of the highest virility, they can master the physical urge. In the same way, our offspring must be strong in physique. If they cannot completely renounce the urge to violence, we may permit them to commit violence, to use their strength to fight and thus make them nonviolent".<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi thought that violence would make an individual abandon his quest for self-knowledge, comparable to the search for Truth. Furthermore, it would cause self-forgetfulness, and the act of self-realisation would be abandoned. He believed that if one's main purpose is Truth and one is faithful to anything but Truth, one will eventually adopt *brahmacharya*. He describes it as a *mahavrata*, realising "that service of the community was not possible without observance of *brahmacharya*".<sup>9</sup> Gandhi began fasting and striving for physical discipline while still a student in England. But long afterward, he realised the link between observing a celibate life and palate control.

### Ahimsa

Gandhi believed that pragmatism of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and his experiments with Truth could only be realised and practised if *brahmacharya* was achieved in thought, word, and deed. Gandhi affirmed that the observance of *brahmacharya* was important for Truth and *ahimsa*, which in turn was fundamental for undertaking *satyagraha* and the search for *swaraj*. Suhrud notes that "Satyagraha involves recognition of Truth and steadfast adherence to it. It requires self-sacrifice or self suffering and use of pure, that is, non-violent means by a person who is cleansed through self purification. Satyagraha and Swaraj are both modes of self recognition. This understanding allowed Gandhi to expand the conception of *Brahmacharya* itself".<sup>10</sup> Gandhi declared that maintaining chastity and celibacy in marriage was important. The *grihastha* was to maintain *sannyasa* and behave as if he was not married.

### **Swaraj and Brahmacharya**

It has been observed that Gandhi was more concerned with subduing the enemies in our body than going out to conquer worldly enemies. His self-government was to be attained not from the British but by conquering one's own body. He proclaimed this self-conquering of the body would help the individual serve the country. There should be self-restraint and self-suffering, which he considered would allow one to keep the body healthy. These healthy people, he manifested, would win *swaraj* (self-rule).<sup>11</sup> Gandhi proclaimed that there was a moral drain in the country and wanted the *grihastha* "to see India become a nation of strong and handsome well-formed men and women, would practise self-restraint and cease to procreate for the time being.... it is our duty for the present moment to suspend bringing forth heirs to our slavery".<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi says that "He alone can be considered the true man who having subjected his passions becomes perfectly self-restrained. . . . He alone is fit for *swaraj*. He alone is a seeker after Truth. He alone becomes capable of knowing God".<sup>13</sup> The observance of *brahmacharya* was the key to a healthy body and essential for acquiring knowledge. It was to bring perfect control over the senses and organs, and the *brahmachari* would attain the necessary power and energy to serve society. However, Gandhi agrees that it is ideal and has been rarely achieved. The "ascetic ideals" were to be followed for greater perfection. The ideal state of abstaining from sexual thoughts, activities, and speech would lead to spiritual perfection. The process of national evolution was necessary for men who could perfect themselves in the art of *brahmacharya* and this alone would help in "mobilizing sufficient strength to destroy the British Empire".<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi is found to have been completely preoccupied with the physical details of his "daily life because mastering his physical self was part of his program of mastering his spiritual self".<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he preached that the attack against the imperialistic rule was to be through self-suffering. Gandhi thought the experiments of self-suffering and self-restraint would lead him and the masses towards self-realisation—an act of facing God face to face in utter transparency. Gandhi attributed all kinds of virtues to the concept of *brahmacharya*. The Indian masses were to institutionalise the practice of *brahmacharya* to preserve the vital fluid that would help one accumulate energy and peacefulness. He says:

the conception of *Brahmacharya* was to be treated as a duty until the nation attains *swaraj* and further used to raise the moral level of the nation. Gandhi's perception was so deep, intense and confident about

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non-violence, Truth and *Brahmacharya*, if were to be completely followed in action, speech and thought, 'then we should certainly get swaraj this year; we may also get it if someone else from among us can do these things, or if the *tapas* of all of us taken together proves sufficient for the purpose.'<sup>16</sup>

Gandhi, at various phases of his life, accepts that it was impossible without the constant invocation of God to become one with the ideal; *Brahmacharya* in word, deed, and thought. Kakar notes that for Gandhi, "celibacy was not only the sine qua non for *moksha*, but also the main spring of his political activities. It is from the repudiation, the ashes of sexual desire, that the weapon of non-violence which he used so effectively in his political struggle against the racial oppression of the South African white rulers and later against the British Empire, was phoenix-like born".<sup>17</sup>

#### Nation and Brahmacharya

The disciplining of the nation, as Gandhi presumed, could be attained through *brahmacharya*. He considers it as one of the "greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness".<sup>18</sup> The idea of reforming the nation was to be smothered with the technology—*brahmacharya*, as its central concern. Hardiman notes, "Gandhi advocated celibacy as the surest means through which the Indian people could sustain their health and decolonise their bodies".<sup>19</sup> He was keen on disciplining the nation through ascetical approaches.<sup>20</sup> These approaches assisted him in attacking the imperial administration, not the administrators.

The disciplined nationalist ascetic was to look upon himself as a servant to the society, "earn for its sake and spend for its benefit, then purity enters into his earnings and there *ahimsa* in the venture".<sup>21</sup> According to the interpretations of Gandhi, the ascetic principle of celibacy becomes an affair of continuity for *ahimsa*. The aspect of self-control was to lead the body politic towards self-suffering, and this, in turn, towards Truth.

The act of disciplining the body was to retreat from violence and generate the true strength of *ahimsa*. Gandhi states that "God is a living Force. Our life is of that Force. That Force resides in the body, but is not the body".<sup>22</sup> *Brahmacharya*, as a way of disciplining one's body, was to constitute the body politic for a national religio-political duty. The masses were to believe in the existence of the great Force and thus remain potent. The effective 'weapons' derived from religious affairs were never to assist religion in divorcing politics, instead, go ahead to create a nation that will have "no political institution and

therefore no political power. . .that government is the best which governs the least".<sup>23</sup> *Satyagraha* was "not only a method based upon the moral superiority of self-suffering; but is a code of conduct that leads to self-knowledge".<sup>24</sup> Gandhi desired his adherents to practise what he called "pure means". The exercise of self-searching was an act of purification and a quest for Truth. Furthermore, *satyagraha* evolved into a way of self-discovery, which was inextricably related to *swaraj*. The idea of *swaraj* for Gandhi is, "when we learn to rule ourselves. This idea of ruling the self was fundamentally different from self-rule or home-rule. To rule ourselves means to be moral, to be religious, and to have control over our sense".<sup>25</sup>

### **Satyagraha**

Gandhi asserts that the ascetic features and institutionalising non-violent resistance were to be emulated by Indians for the sake of the mother nation. He defines *satyagraha* as pure soul-force:

Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called *satyagraha*. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love. "Nonviolence is the supreme dharma" is the proof of this power of love. Non-violence is a dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on.<sup>26</sup>

The interface between religion and politics is manifest in *satyagraha*,<sup>27</sup> *ahimsa* and *tapas* (self-suffering). Here, religion means that which underlies all religions. Gandhi affirms that there were spiritual implications to socio-political life. His experiments were formulated with Truth and non-violence in mind.

In *satyagraha*, the opponent was to be won through self-suffering i.e., by love. This would enable one to undergo "every form of bodily suffering so that the soul may be set free and be under no fear from any human being or institution. Once in it there is no looking back. Therefore, there is no conception of defeat in *satyagraha*. A *satyagrahi* fights even unto death. It is thus not an easy thing for everybody to enter upon it".<sup>28</sup> The practice and behaviour were to signify a complete disarming of all opposition. *Satyagraha*, the truth-force, is used to confront and surmount untruth, subjection, and violence. The dutiful individual was to take up *satyagraha* for reconstructing politics in a truth-centred and non-violent manner. As a *satyagrahi*, the individual was to restructure the relationship with the oppressor into a state of mutual interdependence.

Gandhi states that the "weapon that has fallen into your hands is invaluable. No one can stand against it. One who has realized the

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beauty of it would firmly say that there is no other religion but that of truth".<sup>29</sup> The people were to follow the course of ascetical practices of maintaining a routine of meditation, restriction over diet, and in addition, physical labour and spinning. This productivist set of principles of proper conduct and moral values in the body politic implied a transformation of social relations in the spirit of *satyagraha*. Gandhi said that "satyagraha becomes a celestial weapon" and the one resorting to it "possesses manliness and courage".<sup>30</sup>

Gandhi considers that "pure bravery lies in the power of endurance and this becomes an authoritative *satyagraha*".<sup>31</sup> However, Gandhi emphasises that this is not cowardice or weakness but a higher form of courage. The observation of fasting, devoting oneself to religious contemplation, and trying to understand the true nature of *satyagraha*—guided by religious spirit and holy scriptures—were considered aids for national progress and the development of ascetic nationalist ideals. The act of adhering to *satyagraha* was even considered to unite everyone.<sup>32</sup> The selfless action, synchronised with self-discipline, was to generate spiritual consciousness in the nationalist ascetic.

Gandhi was clear that his action of non-violence would be a protest and persuasion designed to resist the oppressor's system. It was a symbolic act showing that the body politic was strong in its own traditional way. Gandhi's *satyagraha* was to be a creed, a way of life, and not merely a tool to attack the imperial regime's institutions and the methods adopted by its administration.

### Political Sannyasi

The 'political sannyasi' was to be constructed through a systematic effort, which mainly aimed at removing the inherent structural violence. Gandhi was well aware of the fact that violence was deeply rooted in the state and is formulated in an organised form. So, he seems to have re-shaped the ascetic ideals in such a manner that this 'brutal force' was to be re-systematized into 'truth-force'. This 'soul-force' was to weaken the methods and systems and not the 'enemy'. Gandhi's ideological manifestation of non-violence was grounded on accepting suffering. He knew that the acceptance of suffering, an 'ascetic practice', was designed to 'purify' the body politic. Moreover, the 'enemy' was expected to undergo a transformation of truth conscience. The act of implementing *satyagraha* was considered to bring a change in the opponent's values and a change in his behaviour and an understanding of his self. Gandhi wanted the *satyagrahi* to be a great ascetic serving society by rooting self-control and selflessness in his heart. He preached that "if things do not bind us, if we are not attached to things even when they are easily available, that, according

to me, is a greater test of our detachment than mere withdrawal to a lonely forest".<sup>33</sup>

Gandhi's initial reading and even personal discovery of the *Gita* was inspired by Edwin Arnold's translation. Gandhi preached that "there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. He regarded politics as a "death-trap" without religion and it could "kill the soul".<sup>34</sup> He believed that "the *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection".<sup>35</sup> Some Hindu religious scriptures are likely to have been interpolated, 'misread,' and misconstrued.<sup>36</sup> He stated that he had swear by Bhagawadgita for many years and it not only answered his difficulties but also remained "my kamadhenu, my guide, my 'open sesame', on hundreds of moments of doubts and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me".<sup>37</sup> He encouraged people not to consider factors that are incompatible with *ahimsa* and Truth. Gandhi adds:

It does not matter that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the Vedas. It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in Vedic scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of Vedic society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*.<sup>38</sup>

### **Gita and Gandhi**

Gandhi was one among the Indian nationalist ideologues who re-structured the *Gita* for a nationalist cause. He was quite aware of the fact that his interpretation of the *Gita* differed from the generally accepted one. Gandhi was more concerned about formulating the principle of non-violence in the *Gita*. However, he approved that the *Gita* admitted war. At the same time, he emphasised that it was more a kind of metaphorical replication of the "war going on in our bodies between the forces of Good (Pandavas) and the forces of Evil (Kauravas)".<sup>39</sup> He wanted the *Gita* to be looked at as a text that would illuminate the spiritual knowledge in one's inner self. For Gandhi, it was a book of ethical and moral devotion that establishes selflessness for a human cause. He wanted the masses to acquire a state of self-realisation, and *Gita* was the means to achieve that state.

The *Gita* served as a model for Gandhi in his discussion on the issue of renunciation of fruits for action. The "spiritual dictionary" became the manifesto for establishing nationalist devotion. The observances of the ashram and most of his experiments were based

on “the mother who never let him down.”<sup>40</sup> Gandhi constantly referred to the *Gita*. He believed and preached the saying in the *Gita*: “Have devotion, and knowledge will follow.”<sup>41</sup>

Gandhi asserted that “the teaching of the *Gita* does not justify war, even if the author of the *Gita* had intended otherwise”.<sup>42</sup> He further proclaimed that it had changed men’s lives. It was a book that used historical personages and issues to depict the fight between “good and evil, spirit and matter, God and Satan”.<sup>43</sup> Gandhi stated that self-control and non-attachment, as portrayed in the *Gita*, are not just “mental and moral preparations for the fullness of religious life.” He viewed them to be the very core of religion, and hence the very “essence of the message of the *Gita*”.<sup>44</sup>

Gandhi used the *Gita* as a guide to produce desire in one’s heart through a constant devotion toward the goal of attaining freedom. The aspect of renunciation meant in the *Gita*, for him, is an action undertaken without expecting the fruit. No doubt that Gandhi’s ideas of the nationalist discourse were inspired by the *Gita*. His solutions for religio-political aspirations were derived from the *Gita*. The aspect of detachment is one of the most highlighted issues in the *Gita*, and the other aspects are considered to be revolving around this central theme. Gowda noted that

...it was through the concept of *anasakti* that Gandhi evolved two important notions in his nationalist discourse: the *satyagraha* and non-cooperation. Although, Gandhi applied the principles of *satyagraha* widely in various situations, in the context of *anasakti* it meant performance of dispassionate, ceaseless, and intense activity by a *Karmayogi* by strictly adhering to *ahimsa* and Truth and ultimately attaining self-realization. Similarly, the notion of non-cooperation meant non-engagement in others’ duty. *Satyagraha* is the positive form of *anasakti* and non-cooperation is its negative aspect.<sup>45</sup>

The mechanics, duty and devotion were to become selfless and devoid of connection to its result. The individual—aspiring to become a perfect devotee for the nationalist cause—was meant to realise himself. The perfect devotion was to assist and attend the aspect of duty for the practical concerns of everyday life. The aspect of *anasakti* was linked to *ahimsa* and Truth.

### Gandhi’s Nation and *Gita*

Gandhi aspired for a nation that was to be found not merely on historical equations but on ethical and moral foundations. In this regard, the aspects of *tapasya*, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, *anasakti*, and devotion with non-attachment were qualified as central. The *anasaktiyogin* was

never to take *sannyasa* or self-centredness as an alternative, instead take the doctrine as a strong bond, which would establish the thought of caring the welfare and selfless service for others. The concept of duty becomes a religious devotion or service rendered to God. Gandhi considered that the “anasakti ethic would consolidate communal solidarity and varna since it was tied to universal welfare. Anasakti regarded striving for public good and God-realization as identical. Further, anasaktiyoga places human beings at a much deeper level of equality than mere consideration of material possessions or vocation”.<sup>46</sup> The body politic was to structuralize by putting the aspect of *anasaktiyoga* into practice for a universal goal.

Gandhi attributed to the *Gita* characteristics that would be associated with his nationalist ‘ascetics’. The body was to be affirmed with devotional duty towards an ascetic nationalist foundation. The devotion for the nation was to be maintained by being selfless, ever forgiving, fearless, pure, and disciplined. The religious text was taken up as a manual by Gandhi and his followers to liberate the nation through selfless action. The text was regarded as a religion of active revitalization and the moral proposition of the Indian nation. However, the traditional institution of asceticism can be counted to be underplaying the engagement of the masses in their performance of duty towards the nation. The religio-political situation that was meant to be stabilised was more in tune with an ascetic moral spirit, which was never to be accepted by Gandhi. His nationalist discourse, rather than just Indian, was more in tune with a universal goal and the liberation of the ‘self’ at the same time. Gandhi’s concept of freedom was universal and ‘internal’ in nature.

The religio-political synthesis that Gandhi tried through his technique of asceticism was already a structuralized movement in the hands of the nationalist ideologues like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Moreover, Gandhi acted differently in his approaches to reach the above said goal. However, “it is possible to detect remarkable similarities between their thought patterns and teachings; so much so that it appears as if it was Gandhi’s historic role to carry forward the work for reform and revitalization of Hinduism, which Vivekananda left unfinished”.<sup>47</sup>

For Gandhi, the ascetic ideals had become measuring principles of his own sense of self. He characterised and categorised the conception of asceticism by acclimatising it to his own ideological production of a category that is constituted as religio-politics. Gandhi interpreted concepts according to requirements of the time like “fasting was not merely a necessary ritual for the pious; it could be used as a tool of social action. An ashram was not merely a place for prayer and

meditation, but also for training workers for service of the country".<sup>48</sup>

The Gandhian praxes inscribed the 'ascetic ideals' as *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, *darshan* and *tapasya* in a distinct religio-political undertone for a nationalist cause, and emphasised itself with a reconstructed self-image through the ideal of a moral self-definition. The Gandhian analysis attempted to standardise and incorporate the 'ascetic ideals' as disciplined moral values in everyday life. Gandhi considered this could be constituted by maintaining a good and healthy body. He wanted the body to be trained for the sake of being immune to societal things but remain in the society and move through it by enveloping the ascetic values. The structuring of disciplinary practices was more in tune with social terms.

### CONCLUSION

Gandhi conceptualised that the masses should revolutionise themselves to become self-controlled bodies—a construction, as if, did not exist before. His idea of celibacy was applied to real-world conditions and would never become obscure in its practices. It was intended to be a step in the direction of self-realisation. The body politic was meant to discipline the 'body' without becoming worldly renouncers, even though the process was very much ascetic-like. The notions of devotional discipline and *brahmacharya* were considered as effective agencies of action when ascribed with an encompassed religiosity. Gandhi characterised service, submissiveness and celibacy as spiritual and moral virtues. He brought out the *grihastha-sannyasi* image—the one who earns, is part of the societal affairs, and is a celibate.

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# Understanding Individuality in Gandhi's Moral Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper traces the notion of individuality in Gandhi's moral philosophy and argues that his notion of individuality is tied with a 'supreme principle of morality'. Swaraj is the epistemic venue from where spring up impulses of individuality. Further, this paper argues that the quest for self-knowledge and autonomy moralises Gandhi's individuality by guarding it against atomism and possessive individualism. By situating the self in an interrelated cosmos, Gandhi radicalises the notion of individuality.*

**Key words:** Individuality, supreme principle of morality, principled mixing, emancipatory power, religiosity, autonomy.

INDIVIDUALITY HAS A long philosophical pedigree. John Locke's 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding' is one of the pioneering works on individuality. Before Locke, the idea of individuality had made a beginning in 'Confessions' of St. Augustine, and it travelled to Locke through Michel de Montaigne. Liberalism defines individuality in distinctly unique ways.<sup>1</sup> It is founded in the principle of equality of civil liberties, perceived in terms of 'non-interference' and 'right to privacy'. 'Individual' alone is the unit-recipient of civil liberties, which allow them to have, preserve and celebrate 'difference' and 'uniqueness'. Individuality is held as the most precious possession of all humans, hence inviolable. The career of 'Individuality' has remained tied to 'individual liberty' for a long time until Kant formulated it in terms of autonomy: the ability to be a law to oneself,

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to direct one's life based on guidance derived from within<sup>2</sup>. In fact, the quest for self-knowledge is to facilitate the individual to explore her individuality.

Why locate individuality in Gandhi's moral philosophy? In his seminal treatise, *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi seems to have a moral project at hand: to set out the 'supreme principle of morality'<sup>3</sup>, a yardstick for each individual to ordain her civic, social and political life. Gandhi's *swaraj*, as he postulates it, is not to be a readymade tool for accessing freedom. It is rather to be a climate of freedom. Hence, in Gandhi's philosophy, individuality is not as simplistic and atomistic as in liberalism. *Swaraj* as 'self-rule' lays out a self-other relationality framework. It is a 'disciplined rule from within'<sup>4</sup>, the rule of the self over itself. It is "a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraints<sup>5</sup>...." His expositions of *swaraj* in his writings radiate impulses of individuality. They provide a moral motivation to fathom how he understood individuality and to inquire if his notions of individuality are at variance with liberalism. Notwithstanding temptations to see him as a reformed liberal, this paper argues that his notion of individuality strikes a harmony between the self and the other rather than seeing them in adversarial or atomistic terms. Further, understanding Gandhi's individuality entails a cosmic framework. We maintain that applying a Western-liberal framework to fathom Gandhi's notion of individuality is an anachronistic and methodological mismatch.

### **Swaraj and Individuality**

The core meaning of *swaraj* has been outlined above. Gandhi's notion of individuality draws from his theory of *Swaraj* as the rule of the self over itself. It transcends epistemological categories that have so far dominated the landscape of political theory. *Swaraj* is the quest for self-knowledge. The quest for self-knowledge rests on two premises<sup>6</sup>. First, the individual-centric premise is that each of us is uniquely constituted. It is more of a question of 'who I am' than 'what I am'. Charles Taylor's work, 'Sources of the Self' is instructive in this sense. He writes, "We seek self-knowledge, but this can no longer mean just impersonal lore about human nature as it could for Plato. Each of us has to discover his or her own form. We are not looking for the universal nature; we each look for our own being"<sup>7</sup>. The second premise is that of individual autonomy. The mainstay of the second premise is that each person is the author of her own life, shaper of her own destiny, and ruler of her own self. This is made possible, however, only if one knows oneself in authentic ways. Modern autonomy theorists, such as Gary Watson, Harry Frankfurt, Gerald Dworkin,

Joel Feinberg, and others, have elaborately worked on resolving the problem of authenticating self-knowledge. Gandhi, though not typically an autonomy theorist, would contribute significantly to the literature on autonomy studies. He would converse with them on the problem of authentication. And in the end, he would suggest to them a more comprehensive idea of autonomy based on an authentic notion of the self.

### **Politics, individuality, and religiosity**

Bracketing Gandhi within a single account will be a methodological error. Instead, we argue that he appears to suggest his own methodology. Given his metaphysical commitments, it will be a mistake to understand Gandhi in a reductionist manner. For, a reductionist methodology constricts interpretative freedom. Gandhi never claimed he was a philosopher, yet his writings problematize established methods of philosophical inquiry. Gandhi would agree with Marx to the extent that alienation leaves a jeopardizing effect on the person's self. He emphasized the inevitability of manual labour for everyone, regardless of howsoever intellectually genius the person may be. He believed that manual labour engenders a liberating effect on the person's senses. It accounts for his hatred for commodity fetishism. His critique of it is evident in 'Hind Swaraj' and his other writings. However, Gandhi and Marx recede from each other on the question of determining the most fundamental cause of self-indulgence, which, in his view, is an obstacle to self-knowledge. Gandhi warns against the vice of self-indulgence. "Literature, full of the virtues of self-indulgence, served out in attractive forms, is flooding this country from the West and there is the greatest need for our youth to be on their guard."<sup>8</sup>

In Gandhi's view, then, neither the family, capitalism, nor even colonialism was the fundamental cause of self-indulgence. Rather, it was the spectre of modern civilization which was at the root of it. Colonialism and capitalism were products of modern civilization, creating a creed and self-indulgent culture. The biggest damage was that it prohibited the fundamental possibility of the persons knowing themselves, for it produced, propagated, and domesticated a false notion of the self, engrossed an insatiable desire for multiplying wants, and derelict persons from duties to the self and the God. It debased humans from the metaphysical roots of the self, therefore, from self-knowledge. It is fair, therefore, to conclude that Gandhi's quest for the realisation of the self involves a liberation from the arbitrary identity imposed on persons by the Western modernity and its nemesis, which humans often accept, because these identities appeal

to their desire to escape from the real question of 'Who I am'. Hence, the moral terrain of the idea of individuality in Gandhi is much wider than in liberalism.

It is worth noting that Gandhi's quest for Swaraj does not entail complete withdrawal from the 'world' (worldly pursuits), in particular, political and economic affairs. Instead, drawing from the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi's pursuit of Swaraj recommends active engagement with the 'world' and 'principled mixing'<sup>9</sup> of religion with politics. The project of principled mixing of religion and politics is fraught with dangerous repercussions. Such advocacy is also prone to be misunderstood by critics. The core of 'principled mixing' is that while Gandhi does not allow the political apparatus to control persons' unhindered right to religious freedom, he recommends the purification of politics by deriving sanctity and universality of human welfare which all religions of the world propagate. Also, at the individual level, he wanted individual persons to spiritualise his will, which, in another form, is akin to Kant's intellectual product- 'the good will'<sup>10</sup>, directing oneself toward the welfare of the entire humankind. By acquiring the capacity to direct the self toward human welfare, one can do good politics. The quintessence, as we put it, is to bring 'religiosity' to politics by this proposition. Thus, we argue that autonomy, for Gandhi, is a route to doing good politics. Politics, for him, is a constant search for a new definition and widening the horizons of human welfare without losing sight of informed individuality. Liberal realists conventionally define politics as the pursuit of power. Gandhi's 'principled mixing', as argued above, would redefine politics as 'pursuit of emancipatory power', where the self of the person doing politics will be overwhelmed by the 'religiosity' to direct itself to the welfare and amelioration of all humankind, generally, and of the ordinary and the ignored, especially. Gandhi's unique way of weaving individuality with social welfare is what the contemporary practitioners of politics could learn.

### **Individual and community**

The argument that knowing the self involves withdrawing from family, society, and politics is central to some schools of Indian and Christian philosophy for contemplative life. Gandhi, though he imbibes a great deal of insight from classical Indian philosophy, departs from this canon on this count. The problems of self-knowledge and the value of self-knowledge have been accounted for. Before we conclude this section, it is imperative to visit Gandhi's critique of modern civilization again to substantiate the argument that self-knowledge is Gandhi's vantage point of conceptualizing individuality.

First, the logic of Western modernity has overpowering universalizing impulses. Thus, it doubts the efficacy of the locale, whether community, tradition, or culture, to evolve its own paradigms of modernity. It is dismissive that tradition can be a viable source of supplying morality by which individual persons would judge themselves on their progress of self-knowledge. There has to be a standard to judge the progress of the pursuit of self-knowledge. This standard cannot be alien to one's tradition and culture. Thus, Gandhi recommends tradition to be a good ally of persons questing for the pursuit of self-knowledge.

Second, given the above argument, critics fear that Gandhi would perhaps give in to the community in the tussle between individual and community. This would be a hasty conclusion. Gandhi spells out a cognitive process for pursuing swaraj in which the individual is the key agent. The self is the unit agency, the key to the quest for Swaraj at every step. The pursuit of Swaraj by the individual begins with 'self-examination', which enlightens one with 'self-knowledge'. The knowledge of the 'self' red flags the areas to work on, leading to 'self-transformation'. Finally, a transformed self experiences Swaraj, the ultimate state of inner and spiritual freedom, where the self begins to treat 'other selves' as an organic constituent of one's own self. We describe this as 'cosmopolitan self', which is obligated to follow the cosmopolitan dharma<sup>11</sup>.

We wish to underscore two imports to lay out a conceptual framework of Gandhi's individuality. One, Gandhi keeps the individual and the community in a tensional balance. Swaraj is a predicate of a considered role of the self at each step of its pursuit, indicating that individuality has to remain a non-negotiable value. Hence, the question of subordinating it to the community, which rank communitarians do, does not arise. Thus, individuality stands tall in Gandhian philosophy. Second, the nature and purpose of the liberal notion of individuality are entirely at variance with that of Gandhi's. We should recall that in his critique of modern civilization, Gandhi considers utilitarianism as a Western morality, which glorifies the pursuit of happiness conceived broadly in terms of the hedonistic index of bodily pleasure. Gandhi grounds his propositions against materialism and utilitarianism in the revised version of spiritualism that allows active engagement with worldly affairs. Although product of the Western scholarship, Kant and Rawls have shown us that a teleological theory, such as utilitarianism, does not mind treating some individuals as a means to attending the telos of overall happiness. Such a philosophical theory is unacceptable for both Gandhi and Rawls, hence worthy of outright rejection. The value of individuality has to be the same for



everyone. Subjecting some to sacrifice their individualities, which entitles one to realize the worth of life, in the trade-off for general happiness, is unethical, hence unjust. At least in this common place, Kantian and Gandhian ethics share the same moral terrain.

Last point that we wish to argue is liberalism defines individuality in terms of entitlement to liberty and the right to self-realization, which is perceived, as Mill tells us, in terms of the 'self-development' of intellectual and creative faculties. It is also perceived as the right to privacy and to preserve one's identity. However, it lacks a vision of the self, as to where the person would derive morality from, what the person will do with their freedom and privacy. It has little to do with the community and the least with humanity. Thus conceived, it promotes a constricted vision of morality, limiting its scope to justifying individually defined conceptions of the good, privacy, and a notion of identity which valorises atomism. In sharp contrast, Gandhi's individual is placed in a cosmos. There is a metaphysical system dwelling on the Gita that encourages the individual to attain self-knowledge and liberate oneself from materialistic and egoistic constraints that prevent the individual from ethically relating oneself with the entire humankind. There is a craving to liberate the self and undertake the emancipatory project. Thus, the very essence of individuality is spiritual, as against teleological. Mill and Rawls, perhaps the two greatest philosophers of individuality, though with antithetical justificatory frameworks, fall short of both Gandhi's ethical framework, in which individuals are invested with moral purpose and Gandhi's methodological framework, which transcends the individual from asocial atomism. Gandhi does not dwell on either teleological or contractarian method to conceptualise his idea of individuality.

### **Gandhi's metaphysical commitments**

Gandhi lays out a cognitive process for acquiring self-knowledge. It draws from the Advaita metaphysics in which Brahma's fundamental reality is the universe. According to the Upanishads, Brahma is completely a real 'Being'. "It is pure 'Being'. It is apriori, that is, the 'Being' is necessary in order for anything to be; it is not a posteriori, that is, a being discovered by empirical experiences. It is the basis of the empirical world, although it cannot be experienced itself."<sup>12</sup> The Upanishads, described the Brahma from two points of view: the higher knowledge (para vidya) and the lower knowledge (apara vidya). In other words, 'para vidya' means the world under the aspect of eternity and 'apara vidya' means the world viewed under the aspect of time. "The Brahma of the higher form of knowing is the Brahma without

attributes (Nirguna Brahma). The Brahma of the lower form of knowing is the Brahma with attributes (saguna Brahma). Nirguna Brhama cannot be described as good or evil, just or unjust, or loving or non-loving. All attributes are inadequate. Because all such attributes denote an order of reality but less than Absolute reality. Nirguna Brahma is sometimes described as satchitanand (being-consciousness-bliss)."<sup>13</sup>

The Brahma is the transcendental unity behind all plurality. The Brahman is the essence of consciousness. It is not consciousness as minds can be conscious. It is the foundation of knowledge. So, if we are cognate to know the Brahma, we cognate to know the 'Truth'. Since Brahma is the Absolute reality, which causes all plurality to exist, knowing the 'Truth' will amount to directly knowing the self. Thus, the cognitive process of self-knowledge will not prescribe separating subject and object. Brahma is, above all, duality, both metaphysical duality and epistemological duality.<sup>14</sup>

"Brahma is the essence of Happiness. Brahma is not happy as men may be happy, but Brahma is the foundation of Happiness. The uniqueness of satchitanand stems from Brahma's lack of all limitation. If Brahma is the only reality, what sort of reality does world have? In dealing with this problem, Shankara seized upon an Upanishadic expression 'iva' (as it were) and developed the doctrine of 'maya'. The term 'maya' first appeared in the Rig Veda to denote a kind of magical power. Later in the Upanishads-as they are interpreted by Shankara, 'maya' became the power of Brahma to manifest itself in a world which has 'iva' reality. The world itself is then said to be 'maya', and 'maya' is often translated as illusion or unreality<sup>15</sup>". Max Muller<sup>16</sup> writes, "Brahma is true, the world is false, and the soul is Brahma and nothing else. In Advaita metaphysics, thus we see that the Brahma is God. It is the Being of all existence, the Knower of all knowledge, Foundation of all bliss. Brahma is beyond space, time and causality."<sup>17</sup>

The above expositions cast Gandhi's view in the web of relationality, from where one can understand the thread of connection and complementarity between the self and the other, the Absolute truth and relative truth, unity and plurality, and above all, transcendental self, empirical self, and cosmopolitan self. This exposition also suggests what Gandhi had in mind as to how he wanted to execute and justify 'self-rule.' As suggested earlier, this journey begins with 'self-examination,' followed by 'self-knowledge,' followed by 'self-transformation,' leading to 'self-rule,' i.e., Swaraj as autonomy. Thus, it is not the idea of Swaraj that by itself constitutes a notion of autonomy; rather, it is the cognitive process implicit in the individual pursuit and practice of Swaraj that makes it a good candidate for

individual autonomy. It is, at the same time, both a process of transcendental and empirical knowledge; it guides both relationality and rationality. This is, in large part, the Gandhian idea of individuality.

### **A critique of the Western-liberal framework**

It would be worthwhile to juxtapose Gandhi's ideas with the Western-liberal framework, which tends to conceptualise individuality in oppositional frames and binaries. Much of liberal discourses are caught in the tension between the negative/positive binary. A vast corpus of political theory literature is devoted to justifying the binary or critiquing it. A major limitation of this approach is that it makes individual freedom contingent on the state. The absence of the state or its presence in varying degrees is considered a condition of freedom. Even in contemporary Western discourses, the state continues to be the most important site of inquiry on philosophizing individual freedom.

A second philosophical antinomy centres around the 'self-other' relationship. John Stuart Mill tried to rescue liberalism against charges of brute individualism. He offered a powerful corrective of equating freedom with the absence of external constraints. Mill's conception of freedom emphasizes the necessity for individual autonomy. Exercise of individual autonomy opens access to various choices and possibilities. It facilitates one with means and opportunities for realizing the full range of values, considered formative for self-development and self-government. However, even Mill could not bridge the antinomies of self-regarding and other-regarding freedom. Mill had an enormous influence on subsequent thinking about individual freedom. Many subsequent writers have misleadingly cast Mill's 'On Liberty' as a classic statement of the negative view of freedom. Liberal freedoms empower individuals to be authors of their choices and preferences. Gandhi would ask, how do we form our choices? Where do we get moral motivations to form our principles?

Gandhi would also call for a gender-centric inquiry into liberal individuality. Although this is too ambitious a research subject to be discussed here, a brief mention is worthwhile.

Philosophical inquiries into liberal ideas of freedom and their exercise in the real world are institutionally gendered. The realm of the private is an impregnable forte. The intimacy of personal and civil liberty is closely associated. Liberals construe the intrusion into the realm of the private as a violation of civil liberty. In practice, what we witness is a gendered exercise of freedom. The gap between the self and the other becomes prominently visible. Men automatically assume the role of the self, whereas women are relegated to 'the other'

domain. When we say 'individual freedom,' it is foremost the men's freedom. When we say 'civil liberty,' it is primarily men's liberty. Far from making it a binary subject, Gandhi radicalises his notion of individuality by foregrounding it in the individual's agency. Swaraj, for him, is more of an enabling agential instrument rather than a structural ingredient. Given Gandhi's ethical importance to the other, his swaraj would be more agentially enabling for women than men.

We find that liberal individuality borrows heavily from the literature on rights. Everyone is a rights carrier. Critics fear that rights concepts have become so loose that almost anything can plausibly be advanced as a rights claim. And, when class interest is promoted in the name of rights, there is a potential danger of getting the claims of those commanding greater resources and influences recognized as valid. Consequently, there is a danger for those without power to flounder and remain unrecognized and unattended. In societies where social ranks and privileges are sharp, the historically deprived remain unattended in the allocations of individual freedom.

Gandhi conceptualizes his idea of individual freedom around the word 'Swaraj.' Swaraj, for him, is not to be understood in terms of demands for the independence of India. Gandhi interprets Swaraj as self-rule or spiritual freedom to be attained individually. The novelty of Gandhi lies in the fact that he made the attainment of self-rule, which was hitherto understood as apolitical activity, compatible with the pursuit of politics and economics. The attainment of self-rule no longer demanded withdrawal from political and economic activities.

Thus, the notion of individuality ingrained in Hind Swaraj echoes the voice of Gandhi's ordinary persons, including women, who undergo debasement by many forms of domination, subjugation, and exclusionary practices. It takes on all forms of domination- individual, social, cultural, and colonial, and finds them detrimental to persons' individuality. "For just as a free civilization demands mastery over mind and our passion, so freedom for individual consists of each person establishing self-rule. If we become free, India is free. And in this thought, you have a definition of Swaraj. It is a Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands... But such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself."<sup>18</sup> This is the core of Gandhian idea of individual freedom from where his notion of individuality springs up.

### **Concluding remarks**

Tracing individuality in Gandhi's moral philosophy entails, in the first place, an inquiry into the nature of the self. Acquiring self-knowledge is the starting point. Self-knowledge enables one to remove the cloud

of illusion and ignorance. It allows one can see oneself and one's place in the cosmos. The need for true self-knowledge thus has particular urgency for Gandhi because modernity tends to present distorted pictures of the true self. Modernity considers all desires worth pursuing so long as those desires are freely chosen and so long as no harm is done to others in their pursuit. This self roams around a vicious circle of rational egoism and rational choice. Such distorted pictures of the 'self,' which modernity offers, torments Gandhi and prompts him to call into action his own doctrine of Swaraj. Gandhi's emphasis on developing the cognitive capacity to achieve Swaraj and help others in this pursuit is urgent for him. As against utilitarian individuality, self-rule does not allow human nature to become individualistically voracious. Gandhi's individuality is, therefore, not characterized by enticement, temptation, and voracity of power and utility. Also, contrary to the atomistic or contractarian self, Gandhi espouses a relational notion of the self, where the self is socially situated. Gandhi radicalizes the notion of individuality by situating the self in an inter-related cosmos and by according ethical primacy to 'the other'.

*\*Excerpts of this article have appeared in the chapter: Gandhian Swaraj: A Theory of Self-Knowledge, authored by Kumar Rahul, in Sanjeev Kumar's edited book, 'Gandhi and the Contemporary World', London: Routledge, 2020.*

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# Assessing Sustainable Development Goals through Social Progress Index for Bihar

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## ABSTRACT

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the Global Goals within a universal agreement to end poverty, protect the planet, make it more habitable, and ensure peace and prosperity for all individuals. The Goals were formally adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, for 2016–30, to address the empirical and scientific evidence that the world needs a more radical and sustainable approach. The goals provide a well-consulted, scientifically robust, politically acceptable, and publicly intuitive framework. Considering these aspects, this research has analyzed the status of various SDG goals in Bihar. Further, the work highlights the policy-related elements adopted by the central government and the Bihar state government to achieve the targets of SDGs. This study is a comprehensive study to understand the performance of Bihar on SDGs standards and issues and measures adopted to address them.*

**Key words:** Sustainability, SDGs, Social Progress, Bihar, Poverty

## Introduction

**S**USTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS), or the Global Goals, were first adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.<sup>1</sup> There

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are 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets (Fig.1). The SDGs came into force on January 1, 2016. The SDGs are a comprehensive list of global goals integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development.<sup>2</sup> They recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that effect must balance social, economic, and ecological sustainability. The Agenda 2030 intends to incorporate every aspect of society, taking everyone and leaving no one behind. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an international framework to move by 2030 toward more equitable, peaceful, resilient, and prosperous societies.<sup>3,4</sup> Moreover, the plans ensure collaboration and alignment as we implement global approaches to secure a fair, healthy, and prosperous future.<sup>5</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030 intend to incorporate every aspect of society, taking everyone and leaving no one behind. It seeks to understand the critical role of all stakeholders and stress the need to localize the SDGs. The main aim is to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity, in the present and future as well.<sup>6</sup>

The Department of Planning & Development, Government of Bihar, is the nodal department for coordinating SDGs-related work at the State level. Department of Planning & Development also liaises with NITI Aayog and other central bodies to take the Agenda 2030. Despite the economic growth, human development challenges in Bihar are numerous, and achieving the desired sustainable development goal with the present growth momentum will take many years. Bihar is experiencing the highest total fertility rate, with decadal population growth coupled with recurrent floods and droughts. All these contribute to impeding the pace of development. These challenges further put insurmountable pressure on Bihar's resource base. As per the data released by National Family Health Survey (NFHS) (2019-21), the state of Bihar records the highest Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 3.0 against the national average of 2.0, which is far beyond the replacement level. Over the years, the frequency and magnitude of disasters have increased, with colossal potential to offset recent development gains. Bihar government's model of growth is "DEVELOPMENT WITH JUSTICE," which resonates with the principle of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), "LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND." SDGs provide a seemingly apt opportunity for Bihar to be on the path of inclusive development.<sup>7</sup>

### **Methodology**

This work tried to highlight the various aspects of sustainable development goals with a case study of Bihar. Despite having a great historical past and abundant resources, Bihar is performing poorly

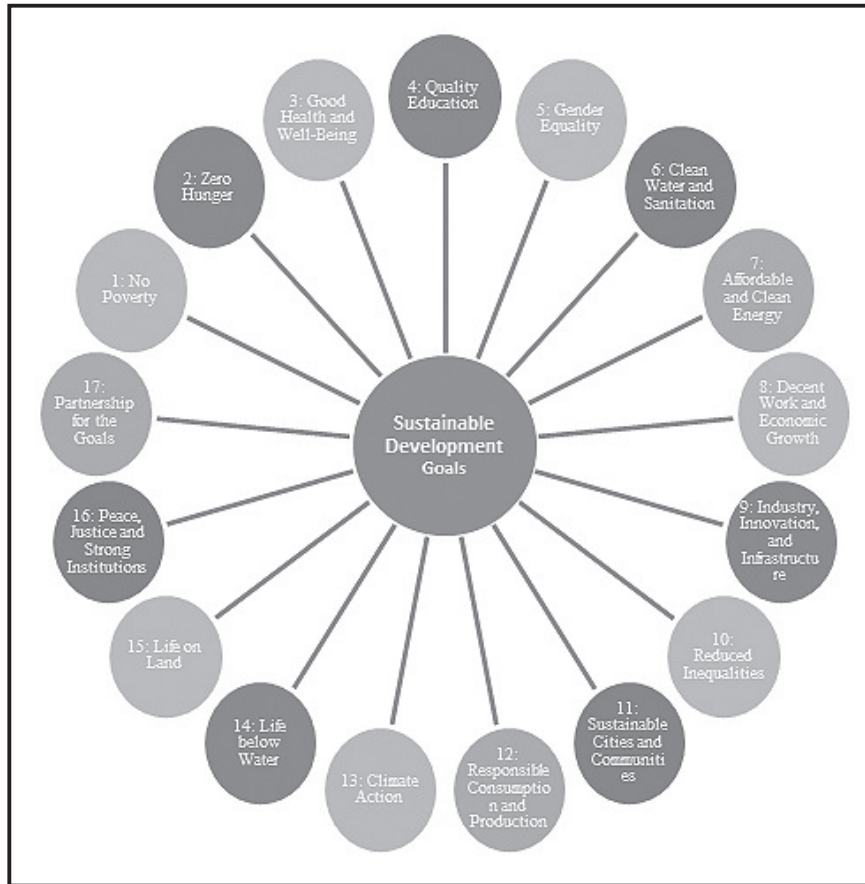


Fig. 1: SDG Goals

on social, economic and other parameters of development. A comprehensive analysis of its performance on various SDG goals was required to get an overall picture. For this purpose, this research work, with the utilization of secondary data sources available in the public domain, has highlighted the progress and performance of Bihar in terms of SDG goals. Further work highlighted various policies and initiatives adopted by state and central government to achieve SDG goals in the state effectively. Data were mainly drawn from the Census of India-2011, Economic Survey of Bihar-2017, NITI Aayog, UNDP, United Nations Development Programme India, etc. Based on the official data and earlier research works, a comprehensive analysis of sustainable development goals through the Bihar social progress index has been incorporated.

**Bihar and SDG rankings**

Overall, India's score in the SDGs Index, which evaluates how the country and its states have been performing on social, economic, and environmental parameters, improved by six points from last year, suggesting slight progress. The composite score ranges from 0 to 100 and denotes the overall achievement of the State/UT in achieving the targets under the Goals. A score of 100 implies that the State/UT has achieved the targets set for 2030, and a score of 0 implies that the particular State/UT is at the bottom of the table. The composite score for India improved from 60 in 2019-20 to 66 in 2020-21. This indicates that the country has progressed towards achieving the SDGs. Kerala and Chandigarh retained their top position in Niti Aayog's sustainable development goals (SDG) Index for states and Union territories, respectively. At the same time, Bihar was again placed last in the rankings released according to the government think-tank. Kerala retained its rank as the top state with a score of 75. Chandigarh, too, maintained its top spot among the UTs with a score of 79, Bihar's score was the lowest at 52 points, and the other worst performers were Assam (57) and Jharkhand (56). Although, according to the SDG dashboard, Bihar's performance has improved in hunger, health, well-being, education, gender, equality, water, sanitation, and justice, the state's performance deteriorated in poverty, work, economic growth, Industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

With a 10.4 crore population, Bihar is India's third most populous state after Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Bihar is one of the fastest-growing states in India. Bihar's impressive economic growth results from policy reforms and good governance agenda initiated in 2005-06. During 2005-06 to 2014-15, the State economy grew annually at 10.5 percent; despite progressive economic growth, human development challenges in the state are many and require growth momentum to be continued for years to achieve the desired level of sustainable development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of Bihar along with the universal Agenda that need to be achieved.<sup>8</sup>

**Performance of Bihar in SDG Goals and Crucial Policy Initiatives**

**1. No Poverty:** Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. Sustainable Development Goal 1 calls for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030.<sup>9</sup> As per the data of SDG India 2020-21, Bihar is the worst-performing state on the goal of no poverty, with an index score of 32 against the national index score of 60. 33.74% of Bihar's total population lives below the national poverty line. The headcount

ratio as per the Multidimensional Poverty Index is 52.50% against the target of 13.95% for 2030. The percentage of households with any usual member covered by a health scheme or health insurance is 12.30. Only 78.60% of people who demanded employment were actually provided employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). 87.97% of the population (out of the total eligible population) is receiving the social protection benefits under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), whereas 8.20% of households are still living in *katcha* houses (SDG India Index & Dashboard 2020-21).

### Policies to eradicate poverty

Poverty policy interventions are aimed at inclusive economic growth and social development by increasing Per Capita Income, Employment, and other income opportunities through the financial growth process.

- **Bihar State Rural Livelihoods Mission (JEEVIKA):** JEEVIKA is an initiative of the State Government to reduce rural poverty by providing support for livelihood activities. Another essential objective of the project is to empower rural women socially and economically.
- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS):** This scheme aims to enhance rural workers' livelihood by providing at least one hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- **Social Sector:** During the last five years, the Bihar Government has enhanced its development expenditure and utilizes 35% of its total spending on social services. The progress in Human Development, particularly in health and education, is satisfactory. Per Capita Development expenditure (PCDE) in Bihar has been low compared to the national average. However, during the last five years, PCDE in Bihar has grown by 16.4%.

### 2.) Zero Hunger

Sustainable Development Goal 2 seeks to “End hunger and malnutrition, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030 and make sure that all people, especially those in vulnerable situations, have sufficient nutritious food. It also aims to double agricultural productivity by 2030 and generate decent incomes. Bihar is a majorly rural state. Agriculture is the mainstay of Bihar's rural economy. A large workforce in rural areas is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Contributing to about 18 % of the State's GS DP, agriculture in Bihar has performed

well in the recent past. The data of SDG India 2020-21 shows that Bihar is the second worst performing among states after Jharkhand towards the goal of zero hunger having an index score of 31 against the national average score of 47. 99.85% of beneficiaries in Bihar are covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The percentage of children under five years who are underweight is 38.7 against the target of 1.9% for 2030. 42.0% of children under five years are stunted. 58.3% of pregnant women aged 15-49 years and 28.1% of adolescents aged 10-19 years are anaemic. The production of rice and wheat annually is 2374.02 kg/Ha. Gross Value Added (constant prices) in agriculture per worker is 0.29 Lakhs/worker. To address hunger and malnutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, several programmes are being implemented in the State; Noteworthy among these are as follows.

#### Policy to Zero Hunger

- **Agriculture Roadmap:** Bihar has been adopting and following the Krishi Roadmap since 2008. The Current and third Agriculture roadmap (2017-22) is being prepared.
- **Animal Husbandry:** Animal husbandry is vital in ensuring income and employment to the population. This provides an opportunity for poverty eradication, rural economy development, and unemployment alleviation.
- **Dairy Development:** To ensure the availability of milk, the strategy is to cover 65 percent of the inhabited villages under the milk cooperative network by 2022; milk production during 2011-12 was 66.25 lakh metric tons. In the Agriculture road map 2017-22, the milk production target is to achieve 159.9 Lakh MT by 2022.
- **Poultry:** The production of an egg has also increased from 75.43 crores in 2011-12 to 111. 16 crores in 2016-17, and is targeted to increase to 322.66 Crore by 2022. To achieve this target State Government would be promoting Murgi Vikas Yojana.
- **Fisheries:** This will help create gainful employment for fish farmers and improve the availability of a protein source for the rural population. The production of fish in Bihar was 2.67 lakh tonnes and the target by 2022 is to achieve 7.33 Lakh MT productions.

### 3). Good Health and Well-Being

SDG 3 aims to ensure health and well-being for all ages by improving reproductive, maternal, and child health, ending the epidemics of major infectious diseases. Good health enhances the capabilities of a person to work and participate in the process of economic development. For improvement in the health status, the major thrust

areas have been improving access to and utilization of health, family welfare, and nutrition services, with particular attention on underprivileged segments of the population. According to the data of SDG India 2020-21,<sup>10</sup> Maternal Mortality Ratio in Bihar is 149 per 1,00,000 live births, and the under-5 mortality rate is 37 per thousand live births against the target of 25 for 2030. 94% of children in the age group of 9-11 months are fully immunized. Total case notification rate of Tuberculosis is 100 per lakh population. Incidence of HIV per 1,000 uninfected population is 0.07. The suicide rate is 0.5 per 1,00,000 population. The death rate due to road traffic accidents is 6.00 per 1,00,000 population. 84.8% of total deliveries reported are institutional deliveries. Monthly per capita out-of-pocket expenditure on health as a share of Monthly Per capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) is 14.50. The total number of physicians, nurses, and midwives is 17 per 10,000 population. The government of Bihar has launched several new initiatives such as celebrating the Year of Newborn, Year of Safe motherhood, Year of Immunization, Muskan-Ek Abhiyan, scaling up the Quality Assurance of Facility-Based Newborn Care (QA-FBNC) model, Yukti Yojana (Safe Abortion Services), Nayi Peedhi Swasthya Guarantee Karyakaram, etc. Currently, there are 36 district hospitals, 55 sub-divisional hospitals, 70 referral hospitals, 533 PHCs, 9729 Sub-centres, and 1350 APHCs in Bihar.

**Policy towards Good Health and Well-Being:** To achieve the goal of good health and well-being for all, the Government of Bihar focused on some important policies like

1. **Maternal and Child Health:** By 2030, reduce the maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 1,00,000 live births, Mothers who had an antenatal check-up in the first trimester to be increased progressively from the current level of 34.6% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 90%, Institutional delivery to be scaled up from current level of 63.8% (NFHS-4, 2015-16) to 90%, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health - care services, including for family planning, information and education and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.
2. **National Health Mission:** The Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) strategy of the National Health Mission (NHM) has provided unprecedented attention and resources for improving maternal and newborn health and showcased a paradigm shift in perspectives through the continuum-of-care approach and health system strengthening, Bihar, since 2012, remained polio-free, and this in itself, was a significant achievement for polio eradication program in the State and India.



#### 4). Quality Education

The existence of the opportunity for quality education is essential to improve people's lives and their sustainable development. The literacy rate in Bihar is the lowest in the country though the state has made progress in terms of literacy rate in the last decade.<sup>11</sup> The literacy rate increased from 47.0 % in 2001 to 61.3 % in 2011. Apart from recording an increase in literacy rate, Bihar has also been able to reduce the gender differences in its literacy rates. In 2001, the male and female literacy rates in Bihar were 60.3 % and 33.6 % (implying a gender gap of 26.7 %), and in 2011 they increased to 71.2 & 51.5 (gender gap reduced to 19.7 %), respectively.

As per the data of SDG India 2020-21, Bihar is the worst-performing state on the goal of Quality Education with an index score of 29, and Kerala is the best performer with an index score of 80. Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio (ANER) in elementary education (class 1-8) in Bihar is 86.54 against 87.26 for India. The average annual dropout rate at the secondary level (class 9-10) is 28.46. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher secondary (11-12) is 26.39. The percentage of students in grade VIII achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in terms of nationally defined learning outcomes to be attained by the pupils at the end of the grade is 78.3. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (18-23 years) is 13.6. The percentage of persons with disability who have completed at least secondary education (15 years and above) is 18.5. Gender Parity Index (GPI) for higher education (18-23 years) is 0.79. Only 64.70% of persons are literate (15 years and above), and 88.66% of schools have access to basic infrastructure (electricity, drinking water). The percentage of trained teachers at the secondary level (class 9-10) is 78.44, and the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at the secondary level (class 9-10) is 58. Considering the aspects mentioned above, the Central and State Governments have launched various schemes. The main schemes implemented in the state are as follows:

#### Policy for Quality Education:

- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):** SSA was launched in 2000-01. Under the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India, free and compulsory education is a fundamental right for children aged 6-14 years.
- **Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act (RTE):** The Compulsory education act came into force on April 1, 2010. According to this Act, every child in the age group of 6-14 years will be provided 8 years of elementary education in an age-appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood.

- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):** The scheme's main aim was to provide access to upper primary education for disadvantaged girls in the age group of 10-14 years. It has provided a minimum reservation of 75 percent of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC, or minority communities since 2007.

## 5). Gender Equality

Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right but also crucial for society's sustainable future. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making will fuel sustainable economies and benefit society and humanity at large. Gender inequalities are deep-rooted in every community.<sup>12</sup> Girls and women in Bihar face several genders specific multidimensional vulnerabilities. The prevalence and intensity of these deprivations vary both spatially and socially. For the last several decades (1991-2011), the demographic composition shows a gap between the Male (52%) and Female (48%) population in Bihar. The gap in literacy has declined from 29 in 1991 to 20 in 2011, yet only a little more than half of females are literate (51.5%) in Bihar. The data of SDG India 2020-21 shows that the sex ratio at birth in Bihar is 895, which is far less than the global target of 950 for 2030. The ratio of Female to male average wage/salary earnings received among regular wage/salaried employees is 0.75. The rate of crimes against women per 1,00,000 female population is 32.3. 4.58 per lakh women have experienced cruelty/physical violence by their husbands or relatives during 2020-21. The percentage of elected women over total seats in state legislative assembly is limited to 11.52. The ratio of Female to male Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (15-59 years) is 0.06. The proportion of women in managerial positions, including women on the board of directors in listed companies (per 1,000 persons) is 214. Only 51.4% of married women aged 15-49 years have their demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods. Operational land holding gender-wise (percentage of female-operated operational holdings) is 14.00.<sup>13</sup>

**Policy to ensure Gender Equality:** There are several legal provisions, policies, institutional mechanisms, and programmes to empower women in the state; these are some of the noticeable achievements made in women empowerment areas: i) 50% reservation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies. ii) 50% reservation for women in primary school teachers' vacancies. iii) 35% reservation for women in recruitment of constabulary and

Sub Inspector rank of police in the state. iv) Mukhyamantri Nari Shakti Yojana (MNSY) v) Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana (MKSJ) vi) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP). Some key schemes and programmes to empower Women and Girl Children in the State are

- Mukhyamantri Nari Shakti Yojana
- Economic Empowerment of Women
- Social Empowerment for Women
- Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana
- Social Awareness Programme
- Social Rehabilitation Fund
- Women Helpline

The Government of Bihar wishes to ensure that women are respected and their dignity restored in all walks of life. The vision is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by removing all structural and institutional obstacles and creating an equitable society free of bias.

#### 6). Clean Water and Sanitation

Clean water and sanitation protect people from disease and enable them to be economically more productive.<sup>14</sup> Water scarcity, poor water quality, and inadequate water hygiene negatively impact food security, livelihood choices, and educational opportunities of low-income families worldwide.<sup>15, 16</sup> As per the census of India 2001 & 2011, Bihar ranked third in 2001 and second in 2011 in terms of the availability of potable sources of water in the household among EAG states. Compared to 77% of households in India, 91 % of households in Bihar have access to potable sources of drinking water, even in 2001. Even after being rich in water reserves, the southern part of the state faces a severe water crisis in the summers.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, during the rainy season and floods in northern Bihar, drinking water becomes unsafe because of faecal contamination, causing increased incidents of diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid fever, jaundice, cholera, etc. The emergence of chemical contamination in the groundwater also poses challenges in providing safe drinking water; the rural drinking water supply mainly depends on groundwater. Now sustainability of the source and the system, along with the poor water quality, has emerged as a significant threat in providing safe and regular supply to all habitations. Out of 38 districts, 28 districts in Bihar are affected by arsenic, fluoride, and iron. The SDG India 2020-21 shows that Bihar is performing well toward the Clean Water and Sanitation goal with an index score of 91 against the national index score of 83. 65.19% of the rural population is getting safe and adequate drinking water within premises through Pipe and Water Supply (PWS),

and 96.29% of the rural population has an improved drinking water source.<sup>18</sup> The percentage of individual household toilets constructed against target (Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)) is 100, and the percentage of districts verified to be Open Defecation Free (Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)) is also 100. 97.92% of schools have separate toilet facilities for girls. The percentage of industries (17 categories of highly polluting industries/grossly polluting/red category of industries) complying with wastewater treatment as per CPCB norms is 96.84. 45.74% of the available groundwater is withdrawn. The percentage of blocks/mandals/taluka which are over-exploited is 2.25.<sup>19</sup>

**Policy to save and Provide Clean water:** Some major programs are implemented to conserve drinking water.

- **Har Ghar Nal ka Jal:** To provide clean drinking water to every citizen of Bihar without any discrimination, the state government has launched four schemes, namely Mukhyamantri Gramin Peyjal Yojna.
- **Ghar Tak Pakki Gali-Naliyan:** The State Government has been committed to providing pakki Gali-nali to all households, and to achieve this objective, the state government has launched four schemes, namely Mukhyamantri Gramin Gali-Nali Nishchay Yojana, Mukhyamantri Shahri Nali-Gali Nishchay Yojana, and Gramin Tola Sam park Nishchay Yojana
- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM):** the State Government is committed to providing toilets to each household. The government has targeted constructing 7.5 lakh toilets in urban areas. The estimated expenditure is Rs 602 crore, to be spread over four years. To date, a sum of Rs 241 crore has already been disbursed to 140 towns in the State; The physical progress is as follows:
  - (a) Individual toilets - 31765 are already constructed, and 60743 are under construction
  - (b) Community toilets-35 constructed and 70 under construction
  - (c) Public toilets - 30 constructed and 18 under construction.

## **7). Affordable and Clean Energy**

The contribution of energy is critical in fueling the engine of growth, and its role cannot be undermined in the development of societies. Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy is critical to human development.<sup>20</sup> Bihar has registered an impressive mark on the growth trajectory and has demonstrated a relatively higher transformative potential than other states. The State of Bihar needs a reliable electricity supply to sustain its growth rate. However, Bihar

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is one of the low power-consuming states in India. As per SDG India 2020-21, Bihar is performing well in achieving the Affordable and Clean Energy goal with an index score of 78, although 15 out of 28 states have already achieved the target. 100% of households in Bihar are electrified, and 76.55% of households have LPG+PNG connections.

**Policy and Programmes to Save and Distribute Energy:** The Government of Bihar, in tune with the national priority, has identified the energy sector as a critical area, and many initiatives have been undertaken in the recent past to cover the lost ground. There has been a significant improvement on all fronts.

- **Power Generation:** The Government of Bihar has made several plans for improving the state's power scenario. To achieve the objectives envisaged in '24 x 7 power for all' and National Power Policy, the State Government has initiated the extensive expansion of generation capacity through coal-based power plants, hydropower generation, and renewable energy generation.
- **Power Transmission:** Power is supplied to various consumers through a transmission network, which also involves transmitting high-voltage power to lower voltage. The transmission network is an essential link between the generation and distribution of electricity.
- **Power Distribution:** Distribution is an essential component of the electricity supply chain, as this is the only arm that generates revenue. This revenue enables the State Government to improve the supply chain by purchasing more electricity from the central pool. Thus, a significant challenge of the power sector reforms lies in the efficient management of the distribution sector. The distribution system in Bihar is being served by two distribution companies - NBPDC and SBPDCL.
- **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):** The Mission of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) is to develop policy and strategies with a thrust on self-regulation and market principles within the overall framework of the Energy Conservation Act (EC Act), 2001 with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.
- **Bihar State Electricity Board (BSEB):** It was constituted in April 1958 for the management of Bihar's generation, transmission, distribution and other electricity-related activities. Under the new Bihar State Electricity Reforms Transfer Scheme 2012, the BSEB was unbundled into five companies in 2012 vide State Government resolution no 999 dated 06.03.2012. These companies are (1) Bihar State Power (Holding) Company Limited, (2) Bihar State Power Generation Company Limited, (3) Bihar State Power Transmission Company Limited, (4) North Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited, and (5) South Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited.
- **Village Electrification:** Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana

(RGGVVY), as approved by the Central Government, has now been subsumed in the new scheme of the Central Government called Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gramin Vidyut Yojana (DDUGVY). This scheme strengthens and augments sub-transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas.

- **Har Ghar Bijli:** The main objective of this scheme is to electrify all un-electrified villages by the end of 2017 and all households by the end of 2018. Government, from its resources, will ensure that electrical connection is provided to each household.

To ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all, Bihar has adopted a long-term approach for the energy sector to fulfill its vision to provide “Har Ghar Bijli” as outlined in 7 Nishchay. The vision roadmap supports a low carbon pathway to sustain economic growth.

#### **8). Decent Work and Economic Growth**

The key is to encourage sustained economic growth by achieving higher productivity and technological innovation. Promoting policies that encourage entrepreneurship and job creation can significantly contribute towards improved livelihoods for people.<sup>21</sup> The Government of Bihar remains committed to the motto of good governance and growth with justice in its policies and actions. The basic idea has been to ensure adequate benefits flow to the poor and the marginalized as the economy grows. Recognizing that the growth process is usually uneven, the government has ensured the need to pay greater attention to backward regions and districts, which may not share the general improvement in living standards experienced elsewhere. Apart from this Banking sector will need to play a vital role in improving the investment climate in the state. The current credit deposit ratio of 32.8% has to catch up with the National average of 78.96% to come in successive years.

According to the data of SDG India 2020-21, the annual growth rate of GDP (constant prices) per capita in Bihar is 7.63, and the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) Score (feedback score) is 2.78. The unemployment rate (15-59 years) is 10.6%, and Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (15-59 years) is 41.4%. The percentage of regular wage/salaried employees in the non-agriculture sector without any social security benefit is 23.7. 100% of households are covered with a bank account under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) against the target. The number of functioning commercial bank branches per 1,00,000 population is 6.37, and the number of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) per 1,00,000 population is 6.84. 56.22% of the account holders in PMJDY are women.

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**Policy to Enhance Economic Growth:** To improve the employability potential, the government has been working to impart relevant skills for smooth absorption in the Industry. Given the enormity of the challenge, the government has taken the initiative for a comprehensive skill development program in the state in a mission mode and created the Bihar Skill Development Mission (BSDM). The Mission has set a target of training 10 million youth in five years (2013-14 to 2017-18). Besides the Scheme for Community Colleges for University and Colleges, Vocationalization of Secondary & Higher Secondary Education, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya also targets skill formation. The major paradigms and enablers to realize the vision of skilling Bihar, as stated in this document, are:

- Capacity Building
- Standardized Processes/ Frameworks/ Mechanism I Cost norms
- Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework
- Assessment & Certification
- Ensuring quality of training
- Post Training Placement
- Innovative Skill Development Models.

#### **9). Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**

This goal aims at the promotion of investment in innovation; quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure which supports economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access to all, and promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization. Though Bihar is primarily an agricultural state, the contribution of the secondary sector, i.e., industries, to the inclusive economic development of the state is of equal importance. The primary strategy for achieving this is by focusing on developing support infrastructure, prioritizing core sectors of future development with emphasis on advanced technology, skill development, a modified structured package of assistance, and balanced regional development.<sup>21</sup>

As per the data available, The number of registered micro, small and medium enterprises is 54 units (medium), 1964 units (small), and 2 lakh units (micro) at present. Between 2010- 11 and 2014-15, in five years, the growth of enterprises has been 315% (medium units), 27% (small units), and 9% (micro-units).

According to the SDG India 2020-21, Bihar is the worst performer among states towards the Goal of Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, having an index score of 24 against the national average score of 55. All-weather roads connect 97.18% of targeted habitations



in Bihar under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). The state has a score of 2.85, as per the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) report released by the World Bank. The percentage share of Gross Value Added (GVA) in manufacturing to total GVA (current prices) is 7.21. 5.30% of total employment is manufacturing employment. The innovation Score as per the India Innovation Index is 14.48 against the national average score of 35.59. The number of mobile connections per 100 persons (mobile teledensity) is 50.65, and the number of internet subscribers per 100 population is 30.99.

**Policy:** The Government of Bihar launched Industrial Policy, 2006 and 2011, which not only created an atmosphere for industrial development in Bihar but also attracted investments to some extent despite challenges on the infrastructure front,

**Industrial Policy of Bihar, 2016:** The scale and pace of economic change that Bihar has witnessed over the past few years have resulted from a comprehensive, home-grown reform program initiated by the government. These reforms ranged from managing public finance, reforming government expenditures, public investments in building infrastructure, and, most importantly, revamping the law and order machinery.

**Subsidy under Industrial Policy:** From time to time, Industrial Policies have been declared for rapid industrialization. Under these, different types of incentive/exemption facilities for industries to accelerate industrial development and attract investments include pre-production incentives, post-production incentives, industrial sickness, facilities for expansion diversification and modernization of units, and incentives on quality certification.

**Bihar Start-Up Policy, 2017:** Under one of the 7 Nishchay, 'Aarthik Hal, Yuvaon Ko Bal' for speedy industrial development in the State, Bihar Start-Up Policy, 2017 has been launched to facilitate and attract the people to initiate industrial action in the state. Further, Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Act, 2016 has been promulgated to simplify investing in Industry.

**Bihar Foundation:** Bihar foundation has been constituted to create a conducive atmosphere for industrialization in the state and increase investment from NRI, especially in the Bihari community. The foundation will work as a coordinating forum and link between the nonresident Bihari's/NRIs and the State Government. It would also act as a think tank for the State Government concerning the development of projects to assist nonresident Bihari's and NRIs.

**10). Reduced Inequalities:** The main aim is to reduce not only income inequalities but also inequalities of the outcome by ensuring access to equal opportunities and promoting social, economic, and

political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, gender, disability, religion, economic or another status within a society, as well as among nations to ensure the enhancement in the representation of developing countries in decision making in international financial and economic institutions (SDG India Index & Dashboard 2020-21).

As per the data of SDG India 2020-21, the performance of Bihar towards the goal of Reduced Inequalities is not good, and the state has an index score of 48 against the national average score of 67. The percentage of the population in the lowest two wealth quintiles is 75.2. Only 7.5% of women are elected over total seats in the State (Lok Sabha elections). However, 52.02% of seats are held by women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). 16.46% of seats are reserved for SC/ST in State Legislative Assembly. The ratio of transgender to male Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (15 years and above) is 0.59. The rate of total crimes against SCs (per 1,00,000 SC population) is 39.5, whereas, against STs (per 1,00,000 ST population), it is 7.3.

**Policy:** State Government has implemented many programs to address poverty, social and economic development, and infrastructural development. Several programs have been implemented to address equality among gender, social group, age, disability, religion, and financial status.

- Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana
- The first state to introduce 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions
- Alpsankhyak Kalyan Chhatravas
- Bihar Udyamai Yojana

## 11). Sustainable Cities and Communities

Urbanization has created new jobs & opportunities and reduced poverty. The sustainable development of cities plays a vital role in the development of nations as these offer opportunities for people to prosper economically and socially. Urbanization is integrally connected to the three pillars of sustainable development-economic development, social development, and environmental protection.<sup>22, 23</sup> Urbanization in India is showing a gradual increase. According to the 2011 census,<sup>24</sup> the rate of urbanization in Bihar is only 11.3 % compared to the national average of 31.2 %. The state accounts for 8.6 % of India's total population, but it has only 3.1 % of the country's total urban population.

As per the data of SDG India 2020-21, the performance of Bihar is good towards the Goal of Sustainable Cities and Communities, with

an index score of 67 against the national average score of 79. 1.10% of urban households are living in *katcha* houses. 87.8% of urban households have drainage facility. 103% of individual household toilets have been constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) (SBM(U)). The number of deaths that occurred due to road accidents in urban areas (per 1,00,000 population) is 21.63. 99.44% of wards have 100% door-to-door waste collection facility under SBM(U). Out of the total Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) generated, 58.3% of MSW is processed. The percentage of wards with 100% source segregation (SBM(U)) is 52.80. As a percentage of sewage generated in urban areas, installed sewage treatment capacity in the state is 5.62.

**Policy:** To improve the living conditions in urban areas, a number of development programs are now being implemented by the State Government. Most of these programs are funded by the Central and State governments.

**1. Smart City Mission (SCM):** The Smart City Mission is an urban renewal program initiated by the Central Government on June 2015. The program's main aim is to improve infrastructure and create sustainable and citizen-friendly urban cities. A smart city is defined as a highly developed city in terms of infrastructure and communications (Hammi et al., 2018).

**2. Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT):** AMRUT is under implementation in 27 cities. It has been launched to provide infrastructure for universal coverage of piped drinking water, sewerage, green spaces, and parks. It also incentivizes governance reforms in the cities.

**3. JnNURM:** This program was the first significant flagship program for improving urban infrastructure in Mission Cities. Now this scheme has been replaced with Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)

**4. Urban Infrastructure and Governance (UIG):** There were two mission cities in Bihar - Patna Urban Agglomeration (Patna, Danapur, Khagaul, Phulwarisharif) and Bodhgaya. Under this component, funds were sanctioned for implementing Solid Waste Management (SWM) projects, water supply projects in Patna, Danapur, Khagaul, and Phulwarisharif, and water supply and sewerage projects in Bodhgaya. The Khagaul water supply scheme has been completed, and Phulwarisharif Water Supply Scheme is near completion.

**5. Namani Gange Scheme:** This program of the Central Government targets towns located along the river Ganga for cleaning and rejuvenation of the river. There are 32 towns identified in Bihar for implementation of the scheme.

## 12). Responsible Consumption and Production

Responsible consumption and production have been defined as “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emission of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations, sustainable production, however, is concerned with the supply side, focusing on the economic, social and environmental impacts of production processes”. The monthly per capita fuel consumption in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas.<sup>26</sup> According to Census 2011, firewood as cooking fuel at all India levels is 49.0%, 37.4% for Bihar. The usage of LPG/ PNG as cooking fuel is low in Bihar (8.1%) compared to all India (28.5%). The usage of crop residue is significantly high in Bihar, with 32.5%, whereas the National average is 8.9%. Thus, it is clear that Bihar is using low-cost biomass with low combustion efficiency, which leads to higher carbon emissions.

According to the data of SDG India 2020-21, per capita fossil fuel consumption (in kg.) in Bihar is 50.5. The percentage use of nitrogenous fertilizer out of total N,P,K (Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Potassium) is 68.58. Hazardous waste generated per 1,000 population is 0.14 Metric tonnes/Annum. Out of the total hazardous waste generated, only 28.41% is recycled/utilized. 0.58 Tonnes/Annum of plastic waste is generated per 1,000 population. The percentage of Bio-medical Waste (BMW) treated to total quantity of BMW generated is 28.83. The installed capacity of grid interactive biopower is 1.02MW per 10 lakh population.

**Policy:** The Bihar Government is committed to ensuring sustainable consumption of natural resources and maintaining production patterns through specific policy initiatives; apart from the state government Central government is also making many policies to ensure the sustainability of consumption of resources.

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
- Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Scheme
- Namami Gange
- Bihar State Pollution Control Board
- Bihar Renewable Energy Development Agency.

## 13). Climate Action

The world is experiencing rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions, and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases which

threaten the lives of all the lifeforms, especially populations placed in the coastal areas.<sup>26</sup> With rising greenhouse gas emissions, ambitious plans and accelerated action are needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Bihar is situated in the Eastern part of the country, which lies midway between the humid West Bengal in the East and the sub-humid Uttar Pradesh in the West. Nepal bounds it in the North and Jharkhand in the South. Although the Bihar plain is divided into two unequal halves by the river Ganga, the Government of Bihar has articulated climate concerns and is committed to fostering an integrated approach to inclusive, sustainable, and climate-resilient growth and development.<sup>27</sup>

As per the data of SDG India 2020-21, Bihar is the worst-performing state on the goal of Climate Action, having an index score of 16 against the national average score of 54. The disaster preparedness score as per Disaster Resilience Index is 19.5. The percentage of renewable energy out of the total installed generating capacity (including allocated shares) is 7.91. 16.65 Tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> is saved from LED bulbs per 1,000 population. The Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) rate attributable to air pollution is 4308 per 1,00,000 population.

**Some Strategic Policies and Plans:**

1. Strategic planning at the agro-climatic zone level
2. Improving understanding of climate impacts on the water resource sector
3. Preservation of wetlands and maintenance of optimal wetland hydrology
4. Build adaptive resilience and reduce vulnerability across communities and sectors.
5. Raising quick response teams at grass-root levels
6. Exploiting potential for mitigating climate change through reduction in demand for energy.

**14). Life below Water**

Rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans cover more than 70 percent of the earth's surface and play a key role in supporting life. Oceans and seas support the most diverse ecosystems, contribute to and regulate the climate, and provide natural resources, including food, materials, substances, and energy.<sup>27</sup> The Lower Ganga Basin completely covers Bihar. The Basin is divided into several Sub-basins; eight rivers flow in North and South Bihar. Therefore, it is assumed that biodiversity or stress on the life below water, on different species, will be felt more severely when the water availability in Bihar declines. The water

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area in Bihar is 273.3 thousand hectares, and it also has 3200 km of river length. This constitutes about 3.9 % of the total geographical location. Consequently, there exists broad scope of fish cultivation in the state.

**Policy:** To conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development, the following suggestions are being put forth to protect the aquatic resources of the state further:

- 2020, all towns and municipal corporations situated on river banks must have a proper sewerage system and a complete ban on releasing untreated sewerage in the river system.
- All towns must have a proper solid waste management system and a ban on dumping waste in any water body.
- Mapping wetlands and work for their proper conservation and comprehensive development.
- Community participation and education campaign to monitor overfishing in wetlands and regular patrolling to ban fishing, especially during the breeding season
- Water efficiency, treatment of catchment areas, support for compatible land-use practices, infrastructure improvement to ensure sustained water balance, optimal wetland hydrology, and all-season water availability will be vital in protecting wetlands.

### 15). Life on Land

**The goal aims** to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; promote an equitable sharing of the benefits which arise from the utilization of genetic resources and ensure prevention of protected flora and fauna from illegal poaching and trafficking.<sup>28</sup> The state has 1 National Park and 12 Wildlife Sanctuaries, covering an area of 0.32 Mha, which constitutes 3.38% of the total geographic location of the state. The Valmiki Tiger Reserve, National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary, and the Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary are the more extensive protected area landscapes with an extent of more than 500 sq km.

The data of SDG India 2020-21 shows that forest cover is 7.76% of the total geographical area of Bihar, tree cover is 2.13%, and combined forest and tree cover is 9.89. 0.37% of the total geographical area is covered under afforestation schemes. The percentage of degraded land over the total land area is 12.66, whereas the state records an increase of 5.35% in the area of desertification. The number of cases

under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) is 9 per million hectares of the protected area.

**Policy:** The government of Bihar has taken an important initiative named Hariyali Mission under the Agriculture Road Map (2012-17) to increase the state's forest cover. The state had only 9.79% of the geographical area under forest tree cover in 2011. Apart from this, additional existing interventions in the state are:

- Habitat protection, biodiversity conservation, restoration, and management
- Implementation of an Agriculture Road Map to maintain rich, healthy, and diverse ecosystems
- Development of superior plant species,
- Sustainable use of the forest produce
- Adoption/development of modern technology for measuring flow in river areas.

#### **16). Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**

Sustainable development aims to provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Violence and armed conflict are the most significant and destructive challenges to societies' development, growth, and well-being.<sup>28</sup> As per the crime statistics published by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) for 2015, the average national rate of total cognizable crime per lakh population registered under the Indian Penal Code is 234.2, while the same for Bihar is 171.6. Based on the crime rate, Bihar stands in 22nd place among all States and Union Territories.

As per SDG India 2020-21, the performance of Bihar is good towards the Goal of Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, with an index score of 73 against the national average score of 74. The number of murders in Bihar is 2.6 per one lakh population. Cognizable crimes against children is 2.8 per one lakh population. Number of victims of human trafficking is 2.63 per 10 lakh population. Number of missing children per one lakh child population is 16.30. Number of courts per lakh population is 1.58. Cases under the Prevention of Corruption Act and related sections of IPC are 0.59 per 10 lakh population. 80.3% of births are registered, and 86% of the population is covered under Aadhaar.

**Policy and Act:** In the continuance of police reforms in Bihar, police investigation and law & order wings have been separated at the police station level (30% for investigation and 70% for law & order duties). This separation will make police functioning more officer



oriented, improve the quality of investigation, and will help in tackling law & order problems more promptly.

- The Bihar Right to Public Services Act, 2011
- The Bihar Right to Public Grievance Redressal Act, 2015
- Aapki Sarkar Aapke Dwar
- One Counter Insurgency and Anti-Terrorist (CIAT)

### 17). Partnerships for the Goals

The country is dedicated to strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development; the partnership among the different stakeholders like government, societies, etc., is essential for achieving sustainable development; the SDGs are a universal agenda covering the three core dimensions of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental in an integrated, interlinked and indivisible manner and underpinned by the aspiration for more peaceful and inclusive societies that are guided by respect for human rights and the rule of law. The SDGs affirm the importance of global partnerships to achieve the SDGs at the national and international level (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008).

**Policy and Vision:** Bihar Government has constituted the 'Bihar Vikas Mission'. One of its primary objectives is to partner with local and global organizations, governments, and financial institutions for capacity enhancement and resource mobilization for the mission's various activities.

### Conclusion

The SDGs are a global effort toward a socially just and environmentally sustainable future where no one is left behind. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown devastating consequences, some of what a lot threatened by further pandemics or climate and ecological crises could look like.<sup>29</sup> The SDGs touch not just on environmental justice and intergenerational justice but equitable economic growth and social stability, shaping development priorities around the needs of the disadvantaged and designing just and robust institutions to strengthen coordination between sectors and build accountability environments. Bihar, for its part, has made great strides in meeting SDG targets related to climate change and sustainable consumption and production. More progress, however, must be made in reducing poverty and hunger, improving education, and promoting inclusive economic growth. The country is seriously lagging in achieving gender equality

and building inclusive and resilient infrastructure. Nevertheless, Bihar overall made progress towards achieving the SDGs. With the challenges of the high burden of several human development deprivations, it is a foregone conclusion that achieving SDGs in Bihar is essential for both the state and the country.

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## **Non-violent Struggles of the Twentieth Century: Retrospect and Prospect**

*Edited by*

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### Information for Authors

Gandhi Marg is the premier quarterly journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation having a standing of more than half a century published from New Delhi in the months of March, June, September and December every year. Original contributions on themes of national and international importance falling under the broad area of Gandhian Studies are invited from scholars and practitioners. Articles submitted to Gandhi Marg are refereed. It is presumed that an article submitted to Gandhi Marg is original, and has not been under the consideration of any other journal. In general, the articles should not exceed 8000 words including notes and references. Periodically, we also bring out special issues on selected themes.

We also invite provocative shorter essays (1500-2500 words) for inclusion in the notes and comments section. Review articles assessing a number of recent books on a particular subject and book reviews are also solicited.

All articles should have an abstract of not more than 150 words and five key words. The name of the author, institutional affiliation and complete address including email and telephone/fax should be supplied. A short biographical statement of the author containing information about the area of specialisation and principal publications is also necessary. British spellings should be used throughout the manuscript. All the authors will be informed about the status of the submissions within three months. Author-identifying information including acknowledgement should be placed on the title page and not on any other page.

When an abbreviation is used, it should be spelt out in full the first time. All notes and references should be numbered consecutively and placed at the end of the article rather than on each page. References to books should include author, title (italicised), place of publication, name of publisher, year, pp. (in that order). Place of publication, publisher and year should be within brackets. In subsequent references to the same work, *ibid*, and *op.cit*. can be used. References to articles should include author, title of article in double quote, title of the journal (italicised), number of volume and issue, year of publication, pp. (in that order). All short quotations are to be included in the text with double quotation marks. Longer quotes are to be indented. All quotations should be accompanied by full references.

#### Examples

Books: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.23.

Articles: Ramashray Roy, "Parameters of Participation", *Gandhi Marg*, 12, 3 (October-December 1990), p.276.

Chapters within Books: Pearl S. Buck, "A Way of Living", in S. Radhakrishnan, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections* (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1956), p.51.

Internet Citations: Apart from name of author and article, include also the URL and date of download. For example: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) accessed on 10 May 2006.

All submissions are to be made electronically in the form of email attachments processed in MS word. Submissions should be sent to: [editorgmarg@yahoo.co.in](mailto:editorgmarg@yahoo.co.in) or [editorgmarg@gmail.com](mailto:editorgmarg@gmail.com)

A sample article in PDF form is available from: <http://gandhipeacefoundation.org/authors.php>

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