

## **The Changing Perspective of Indian Society and the Vision of Gandhiji.**

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### **Abstracts :-**

*The process of social nationalism which was occupied 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian society turned into political nationalism by the newly borne militant nationalists at the cost of social reforms and condemned the Indians into the dichotomy of social vs. political reforms, secularism vs. religion. On this background Gandhiji emerged as national leader to emancipate the nation from the clutches of foreign yoke. On the eve of an introduction of democratic institutions in the country by the alien rule, Gandhiji has obliged to extend his association with the newly borne democratic process on one hand and to mobilize the masses against the colonial rule on the other. However, he has to undertake the social problems simultaneously as the cries of suppressed and oppressed people may not be shut up. Hence Gandhiji started to undertake the social problems by using the liberal idiom of religion on varna and caste.*

The values like rationalism, secularism, materialism, individualism with scientific temper in all walks of life had finally stabilized the capitalist society in Europe at the cost of merciless exploitation of poor masses. The liberal laissez-faire doctrine on economic front in association with political democracy provided it the legitimacy. The Communism and the neo-liberalism by forwarding the different sets of value systems aiming at welfare society had deeply urged the need of total, more or less state interference in socio-economic activities, and strongly pleaded for replacing or changing the existing worst order. This debate provided the mobility to rest of the societies including the Indian in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Hindu social order along with its numerous hierarchical graded castes<sup>1</sup> had remained untouched until the emergency of nineteenth century. The feudal economy which carried definite caste based productive relations had avoided the occupational mobility had further impeded the growth of large scale industry.<sup>2</sup> The legal administrative and educational system of alien rule<sup>3</sup> has given a rude shock to this old age order. Obviously, the colonial rule aiming at to feed the growing industries in England by extracting the cheap raw material from Indian soil<sup>4</sup> has condemned India to be an exporter of raw material and importer of manufactured good.<sup>5</sup> Such severe blow to the traditional economic order<sup>6</sup> subsequently paved a path for urbanization.<sup>7</sup> As a result of transitional process the middle classes while serving the alien colonial interests<sup>8</sup> got enlightened to introspect their own social system on philosophical plane.

The early leaders of congress strictly secular in political outlook were remotely carried the sympathy to social reforms<sup>9</sup>. However, some of them like Ranade regarded the political progress and social reforms were interdependent.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently the revivalist tone of extremists<sup>11</sup> had caused a severe blow to the attempts for social reforms.<sup>12</sup> In fact the feudal lords

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and capitalists for their own survival and growth were obliged to contribute anti-imperialist role for which they provided funds to national movement.<sup>13</sup> The middle class elite within the congress<sup>14</sup> by unifying the different sections of Indian society irrespective of their divergent interests had served this purpose. Keeping aside the social problem, the extremists had attempted to enlarge the social base of congress, whereas by avoiding the strife on social plane, the Gandhi formula had reconciled between the social vs political reforms. The resolutions passed by the congress on the problem of untouchability in 1917<sup>15</sup> and subsequently on civil rights in 1931<sup>16</sup> after the 32 and 46 years respectively since its inception could be cited the examples of such compact integral policy. However, the divide and rule policy of alien rulers had obliged the congress to do so.<sup>17</sup>

In a tradition bound society men do not readily succumb to the conscious efforts at manipulating change<sup>18</sup> as such Gandhiji's close association with the living realities<sup>19</sup> urged him to evolve comprehensive set of ideas<sup>20</sup>. However, as practical idealist, some his concepts carried mysticism and away from rational outlook<sup>21</sup>. In this sense Gandhi was neither a philosopher nor a theorist<sup>22</sup>. Gandhiji followed none of his predecessor-the moderates and extremists and evolved his own-strategy that could make decisive assault on imperial rule. Seemingly he could have diluted the earlier controversies like secularism vs-religion and social vs-political reforms. His compact set of ideas, while enlarging the base of political mobilization, had avoided the clash of interests on socio-economic plane.

Gandhi recognized the possession of property in personal capacity of rich man as the trustee, required him only its reasonable consumption and rest of the property provided for social consumption in accordance to equal distribution.<sup>23</sup> Since the means of production aiming at common utilization for both – the haves and have-nots there would be no possibility of clash of interests or class war.<sup>24</sup> Gandhiji visualized such ideal society through the non-violent method of satyagraha generating the spirit of kinship.<sup>25</sup> as the greatest force and thus the panacea on socio-economic malady.<sup>26</sup> He presumed it casteless and classless society.<sup>27</sup> to be governed by mutual cooperation which he regarded socialism or communism.<sup>28</sup> To Gandhiji the industrialization on mass scale generating free competition and market system would turn into exploitation of masses; instead he offered the village self-contained manufacturing mainly for use.<sup>29</sup>

Gandhi essentially was a man of religion.<sup>30</sup> But he did concern no particular religion. His religion was the bunch of high moral and ethical principles upheld by all the religions.<sup>31</sup> This led him to spiritualise politics<sup>32</sup> and conceptualise secularism.<sup>33</sup> He, therefore, did make no distinction between politics and religion.<sup>34</sup> Logically on religious plane, Gandhiji followed the tradition of Vivekananda, Dayananda and Tilak and not that of Gokhale and Ranade.<sup>35</sup> However his style and charisma could be distinguished from his

predecessors.<sup>36</sup> Like Tilak, he used the religion for politics but his liberal religious idiom provided the countenance to politics<sup>37</sup> that politicised the masses. With regard to the truth and ethical standard, Gandhiji followed Gokhale.<sup>38</sup>

Gandhiji deeply believed in Hindu religion<sup>39</sup> and its cardinal concept of Varnashrama Dharma and caste system as inherent in human nature<sup>40</sup> and great secret and power<sup>41</sup> that promoted national well being<sup>42</sup> and saved the society from destruction.<sup>43</sup> He, therefore opposed the attempts to destroy varna and caste.<sup>44</sup> However, he urged the innumerable sub-castes need to be reduced through the fusion.<sup>45</sup>

The common goal of life enshrined in the hierarchical set up of castes has avoided inequality.<sup>46</sup> Thus Gandhiji regarded the social intercourse like inter-caste marriage not necessary for the promotion of spirit of democracy<sup>47</sup>. On the contrary such restraints on social intercourse constituted the source of purifying the will power that has conserved certain social values<sup>48</sup> and thus necessary for spiritual growth.<sup>49</sup>

Later on Gandhiji convinced the non-association of caste with religion and as a part of custom he regarded it harmful to the spiritual and national growth<sup>50</sup>, hence he divorced the caste from varna<sup>51</sup> and urged its abolition through the liberal methods.<sup>52</sup> However, still he believed in varna.<sup>53</sup> The varna defines duties and does not confer rights<sup>54</sup> with an absolute equal status of four divisions<sup>55</sup>; thus its horizontal structure<sup>56</sup> assigned each varna to follow its hereditary occupation<sup>57</sup> for earning livelihood<sup>58</sup>. While following the occupation of particular Varna in which the person born<sup>59</sup>, he is allowed to acquire the knowledge of other varnas for individual progress but he would not pursue the knowledge of other varna as the means to secure his livelihood<sup>60</sup>. The ban on interchangeability of occupations facilitated the individual to inherit specific qualities, that conserved his energy.<sup>61</sup>

This way the discipline of varna has avoided the worst competition.<sup>62</sup> Its revival would promote national spirit and establish true democracy. Indeed Gandhiji has reconciled the ancient varna order with that of self sufficient village system of medieval so as to offer it for resolving the problems of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian society.

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