CHAPTER 3

GANDHI'S SOCIAL IDEAS AND THEIR PRACTICABILITY

3.0 Indian society and civilisation

Indian civilisation has lived through more than 4,000 years and its survival is basically its ability to accept and mould foreign ideas into its civilisation, enabling it to survive through the Aryan invasion, Persian rule, Muslim invasion and finally British colonization.

A distinct trait of Indian civilisation is its ability to absorb new changes and goes on without changing its old ideas. It merely moves on with the old ideas that are still perpetuated by a minority no matter how tiny to ensure its survival. Nehru once said India was "an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden . . . what had been written previously.,"[145]

Within this ancient civilisation itself, Gandhi proposed ideas to revitalize and reform the underlying social ills. Whether or not his ideas work still remain to be seen. According to Gandhi, man's daily activities cannot be divided into compartments as they are a whole.[146] If one is unable to perceive this, social transformation is not possible. Hence, Gandhi himself expressed, politics is needed in order to germinate his own social ideas.[147]

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[145] "The Economist (US)." *Deconsecrating Gandhi: does fashionable muckraking about India's founding heroes say more about them or about India's disappointment with itself?* 347. no.8083 (1998): 73-75. Expanded Academic ASAP. Infotrac (24 April 2003).
[146] Mahadeva Prasad. *Social Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*. 34.
[147] Midatala Rani. *"Sarvodaya* as Development Strategy.". 213.

Social ills can be simply defined as an action that harms people or detrimental to the health of a society.[148] It also exists when it is defined by an influential group as a condition that threatens the values of a society and affects a substantial amount of people within the society and this condition can be remedied through a collective action.[149]

Social ill is also a very general term referring to conditions or behaviors that manifested because of social disorganization and requires social engineering to ensure the continued well-being of society.[150]

3.1   Social ills in the Indian society

3.1.1   Caste System

Caste system is a type of social class system unique to the Indian civilisation though class system is found everywhere in society. It is better known as the *varnajati* system in Hinduism. In Hinduism, the caste system serves to differentiate their levels of spirituality and their own roles in serving.

Caste system can be traced to the Hindu's scriptures, the *Vedas*. According to the *Vedas*, God divided humankind into four different parts, chosen to do

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[148] Thomas J. Sullivan, *Introduction to Social Problems. 6th ed*, (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, 2003), 4.
[149] Sullivan, *Introduction to Social Problems.6th ed*, 5.
[150] Marshall, Gordan, ed., Oxford Dictionary of Sociology. 2nd ed., 620.

different occupations as befit their disposition.[151] They are *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Shudra*.

Hindus were brought up in the belief system. Caste, to them, is as natural as their beliefs in the universe that everything has its own place, as a living organism. According to the *Rig Veda*, there is no distinction between the *varnas* in terms of their path. However, as time goes by, man has fallen away from the path of the *dharma* (truth), thus they belong to the lower *varnas*.[152] As such, they would have to work again harder to purify themselves to be worthy again of a higher *varna*.

There is no difference in their paths. Hindus strongly believed that those born in the lower castes and also the Untouchables are merely paying for their bad dues accumulated from their previous lives. To be insulted, abused and cursed are to be their common lot as it can help them to pay off their bad *karma*.

This is the world-view of the Hindus. Caste system is an integral part of their socio-religious fabric in life. To challenge the caste system would also to challenge their fabric of civilisation itself. This is not something that can be undertaken lightly.

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[151] R.C. Gupta, *Hindu Society and Influence of the Great Epics*, (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1991), 110.
[152] R.C. Gupta, *Hindu Society and Influence of the Great Epics*, 111.

Even before the advent of Gandhi's social reform, Buddhism and Jainism tried their utmost to abolish this system. The Buddha stated men's virtues are not determined by birth but their strife for enlightenment. Other examples are the *Bhakti* movement of medieval times or the *Satya Shodhak Samaj* (1873) of *Jyotiba Phule* (1827-1890), the *Arya Samaj* movement (1875) of *Dayananda Saraswati* (1824-1883), the Bombay Social Conference (1882) of N.G. Chandrakar (1855 – 1923) and the Depressed Classes Mission (1906) of V.R. Shinde (1873-1944).[153] All these reforms have been in vain even before Gandhi's time in 20th century.

According to Gandhi, there is nothing wrong with the caste system as it was originally thought of and practiced. Indeed, Gandhi defended social divisions using the term *varnasramadharma*. He stated that one's birth does determine one's social functions and duties in society.[154] This is based on the father-son's learning of trades in the village whereby the son will learn the trade of his father from an early age. Naturally, he is expected to be more proficient than an outsider.

He only objected to the fact that it contains an aberration within it, the Untouchables. He fought for the way the Hindus have treated the Untouchables as he felt that they are desecrating Hinduism itself. His

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[153] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India." *Gandhi Magazine* 16, no.1 (1994): 57.
[154] Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 83.

intention of getting rid of Untouchability was to help to keep Hinduism alive.[155]

Although caste is not urban in nature, it has been influenced by urbanization and industrialization and has undergone changes nowadays. Still, caste system has persisted in India even within the cities even more so within the rural villages of India.[156]

On the other hand, the *Harijan* leader, Ambedkar said that the Vedas has bonded his people – the Untouchables in Hinduism into a prison of which they have no recourse to within this lifetime.[157] Due consideration should also be given to the Untouchables as the lowest rung of society that suffers the most from any ill-fortunes that befalls the Indian civilisation. Hinduism offers them no opportunity for them to better themselves, only a miserable existence that they are supposed to resign themselves to. There was no room for development in this world.

It is of interest to put them in the category of social ill because of Gandhi's desire to purify the caste system. As the caste system is the core social fabric of India, it is of utmost importance to see how Gandhi affects this social fabric itself.

[155] S.S. Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, (New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 2001), 94.
[156] S. Selvam. "Participatory Structure: The Concept and Forms." , 36.
[157] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 101.

3.1.2 Communal Tensions

Communal interests always lie latent within the fabric of the Indian civilisation. It is natural because of the differences between the two communities in terms of their religions, communities and social customs. Most of the time, they have already reached a compromise and lead their lives peaceably enough.

Communal tensions only flared up when communities feel that their interests are impinged by the other community. A strong sense of insecurity and perceived wrongs would have incited communities to riots. This too of course requires a leader who incites this. Communal tensions are by no means confined only to Hindus and Muslims though it will be discussed here as it was Gandhi's most cherished hope was to see harmony and good relations between the largest minority and the dominant community in India.

Modern India has always been proud of its plurality of its languages, cultures and religions and their ability to co-harmonize together. Rapidly, this harmony is being put under fire more and more with the communal riots spreading throughout India with the raze of the Babri Mosque in Ayodha in 1992. More than 2,000 Muslims were killed.[158]

India has rapidly been disillusioned with the grand promises after independence. Discontentment abounds. India perceives itself as under siege

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[158] Julian Crandall Hollick, "Ayodhya postcard: temple of doom," *The New Republic*, 203, no.23 (1990): 14(2). Expanded Academic ASAP, Infotrac (24 April 2003).

by Western's model of consumerism, affirmative action system for lower castes and untouchables, a political system rife with corruption and modernization that is rapidly changing the family structure itself.[159]

The Hindu community, by no means, must be looked at a homogenous entity. Their religion itself has so many different beliefs that one Hindu might differ from another from their sets of rituals. Regardless of their differences in rituals, worshipping of deities, and other customs, there are certain general characteristics accepted by Hindus, such as the caste system and the acknowledgement of karma and rebirth.

On the other hand, the Muslim community sprang from a mixture of Arabic traders who had come for trade early in the 11th century in the West Coast of India and through the invasion of Muslim army in the north. At length, many of the locals were converted into the new religion, particularly those from the lower castes and untouchables to better their social statuses.[160]

The fact is that most of the Muslim Indians were not Arabic or foreign in descent. They were actually low-caste Hindus desperate for change who have converted from a Hindu to a Muslim. No doubt the Hindu Indians have a right to their grudges as during the invasion, much of their cities, temples and people were killed. In addition, the Hindus find that a Muslim is as

[159] Marina Budhos, "India - a hard passage back; fundamentalism aflame," *The Nation*, 257, no.20 (1993): 721-726. Expanded Academic ASAP, Infotrac (24 November 2003).

[160] Jerry H. Bentley & Herbert F. Ziegler, "India and the Indian Ocean Basin," *McGrawHill Online Learning Center.* http://highered.mcgraw hill.com/sites/0072424354/student_view0/chapter16/table_of_contents.html (accessed 16th October 2004).

polluting as the Untouchable, thereby limiting their social interaction with one another.[161]

Although there were adequate interactions within the two communities under the Mughal dynasty with intermix of Hindu and Muslim leaders working together, their co-operation did not go very far. When perceived that there is a threat to the community's religious identity, Muslims and Hindus immediately put up their defences.[162]

Today, communal fires between the Hindus and Muslims are not just based on present quarrels but quarrels of the past. Memories of the past are at best hazy and not the best of records. In fact, it provides enough vagueness to enable quarrels to be picked among any other nations in the world. This is further exacerbated by the BJP whose vision that a true Indian can only be a *Hinduvta*.[163]

Communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims were chosen as it is rapidly seen as becoming a danger to the secular state of India. This is discussed as Gandhi found it a dilemma in trying to bridge the gap between the two communities. This is also the reason Gandhi was assassinated. It seems to be a social ill that grows in proportion with India's troubled progress from the 20th century to the 21st century.

[161] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 168.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Budhos, "India - a hard passage back; fundamentalism aflame," 721-726.

3.1.3 Poverty

Poverty is a social problem in India because of the wide gap between the poor and the rich. In India 400 million people live on an income of less than US$1 per day.[164] They are one-third of the poorest people in the world.

People live in streets outside because they do not have enough houses. Unemployment is rampant despite the fact that India has clung tenaciously to its socialist ideals.[165]

Their nature of poverty can be determined through their living conditions, lack of employment chances and the perception of the Indian's upper echelons. The effect of the poverty is that there will be an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. This gap could threaten the stability of the society. Perhaps of this communal violence tend to grow, with people with an eye for power to turn ignorance into violence.

A few factors have been identified as main generators of poverty. One of the clearest is corruption. Corruption lives everywhere, from the poorest to the richest.[166] This causes a lot of abuse in terms of money used for the benefits of the poor. Frequently, the poor are the ones to suffer as they are the ones who have the least clout and softest voice.

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[164] Naveed H. Naqvi. Review of Development, Poverty and Fiscal Policy: Decentralisation of Institutions, edited by M. Govinda Rao, *Journal of Development Studies*, 39, no.3 (2003): 206.
[165] Shashi Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium,* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 181.
[166] "Transparency International India & Org-marg research pvt. Ltd." *Corruption in India: An empirical study*, 2002, http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/ti-india/documents/corrInd-pt1.pdf (27th November 2003)

This is compounded again by their inability to rise from their social status, rigidly slotting into occupational positions that do not help them to achieve better position to help themselves and subsequently their community. Frequently, the poor of India is from the lower castes and the Untouchables. Though they are been given affirmative privileges, most of time, it doesn't reach all of them, reaching only a selected few.[167]

Though India has nuclear abilities, it seems incongruent in view of people still staying in Stone Age poverty. Gandhi had viewed economic poverty as a symptom of greed rather than a sign of lack.[168] Thus, he preached the sermon of ethical economics.

3.1.4 Gender Inequality

Women in India are generally treated as second class even until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are mainly seen as wives and mothers. Women are considered adult when they marry and most of the time, they are married off at a very early age in arranged marriages.[169] Generally, boys are more preferred than girls. According to the Indian census 2001, there are only 933 females per 1000 males in India whereas ordinarily women outnumber men. The death rate of female infants was 1.3 times higher than males and most sudden unexplained deaths with no history

[167] Shashi Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 109.
[168] Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers*, 130.
[169] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 208.

of illness were girls.[170]   The general consensus was that girls are regarded and treated less favorably in terms of health care.

Even today, although women were given better education and social status, arranged marriages are still the norm. Families in India still preferred boys as girls will bring additional burden to their family with their need of dowries. Dowries were officially outlawed in the country in 1961, but payments to the groom remain a constant, not to mention costly, part of almost every Indian wedding.[171]

However, cases of dowry deaths occurred with almost deadly regularity. In 1995, 6,000 dowry deaths every year stated the National Crime Bureau of the Government of India. A more recent police report stated that dowry deaths had risen by 170 percent in the decade to 1997.[172]

There were cases of wife abuses over dowries with the support of the husband and his mother. Women are also not encouraged to work outside their home, with emphasis that their lifework is with their family. This of course is in line with the traditional role of a woman who should stay at home.

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[170] R Khanna; A Kumar; JF Vaghela; V Sreenivas; JM Puliyel, "Community based retrospective study of sex in infant mortality in India (Papers)," *British Medical Journal*, 327, no.7407 (2003): 126–129. Expanded Academic ASAP, Infotrac (24 November 2003).

[171] "People Weekly," *The Bride Says No: Nisha Sharma stops her wedding--and becomes a symbol—over a $25,000 dowry*, 59, no.24 (2003): 65. Expanded Academic ASAP, Infotrac (24 November 2003).

[172] Amanda Hitchcock. "Rising number of dowry deaths in India." *World Socialist Web Site*, 4 July 2001, http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jul2001/ind-j04.shtml (27th November 2003)

Gandhi himself believed that women are the pillars of society, working best from their society by molding the characters and knowledge of their children.[173] He had also a very strong belief in them to carry out *satyagraha*, especially from home-based. One does not deny that Gandhi had elevated the status of women in India, but he had also conformed to the perceived view of Indian womanhood of the old days rather than of now.

3.2   Social Ideas during Gandhi's time

3.2.1   Caste System

Gandhi did not start off with the aim to eradicate untouchability in the Hindu caste system although he did find it preposterous.   It was a natural progression of his fight against the discrimination of the whites to the Indians and blacks. It gradually dawned on him that they too are the discriminators perpetrating unequal rights on their own for thousands of generations.[174]

With this realization, Gandhi decided to start off as with everything else with his own self. He voluntarily got untouchables to stay with him in the *ashrams*. The conflicts were so great that support was withdrawn from the *ashram* itself.[175] It was his personal *satyagraha*.

The term Gandhi used to describe the untouchables as *Harijans* suggested that he thought they too derive from the Brahman in the same way as the twice-born *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and once-born *Shudra*. That being

[173] Clymes Augustine & A.K.Sharma. "Gandhi and the Contemporary Challenges: The Emergence of New Social Movements.", 447-448.
[174] Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi*, 87.
[175] Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth,* 356.

the case, they are in no way different from them and they are clearly not to be regarded as outcasts. As *Harijans*, they partake of the nature of God or Truth and must, therefore, considered at one with caste members of Hindu society in particular and with mankind in general.[176]

It will be seen that caste was originally related to functional distinctions within Aryan society. Later they ceased to be simply functional and came to be related to birth (*jati*). Social divisions and the different stations in life related to functional distinctions were considered to be of divine origin and found mythical expression in the hymn to *Purusha*.[177]

Gandhi believed that in revamping the caste system, social change reflects inner change of the people. Although it may not be strong enough to eradicate untouchability, it is an important factor of helping the *Harijans*.[178] To remove the social stigma of cleaning nightsoil and scavenging, Gandhi insisted in his *ashrams*, he and all his family and followers did this task. In 1901, in the Congress annual session, he did his own cleaning. This is Gandhi's teaching through examples.[179] Gandhi has even went as far to say that if Hinduism sanctions untouchability, he henceforth declared himself a non-Hindu.[180]

[176] Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 81.
[177] Ibid., 82.
[178] Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 89.
[179] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 95.
[180] Ibid., 95-96.

He had not wanted to press the orthodox Hindus too much so that it will upset his attempt to gain political freedom. With this political freedom, he had envisioned a possibility for social reforms to take place.[181] Gandhi wanted the Hindus to see the errors of their ways by presenting to them his example.

To change the position of the untouchables in India, Gandhi used public speeches and in the press to put his viewpoints of the terrible injustice that has been done. For the untouchables, Gandhi exhorted them to change their personal hygiene and to stop differentiating even among untouchables. On the other hand, Gandhi did not believe that their occupation is in any way demeaning.[182] This is how he hoped to extend a public repentance for all Hindus.

This method used by Gandhi was not useful at all. It did not change much of the perception of the other castes and merely alienated the untouchables against Gandhi. The untouchables felt that concrete issues such as economic clout and political voice were not addressed by Gandhi at all.[183] Naturally, the untouchables were doubtful he actually meant to help them or to reform the caste system.

[181] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 206.
[182] Ibid., 206.
[183] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 206.

Perhaps Gandhi had foreseen the impossibility of his reform and one must remember, Gandhi had always said the change in society must always start with oneself first. Unfortunately, Gandhi expected too much from mortal flesh and blood. The changes Gandhi initiated were just too superficial, similar to a finger wagging at the offenders and a sermon without much concrete action.[184]

It was said that Gandhi is in a paradox. On one hand, he wanted to eradicate Untouchability in Hinduism, on the other hand, he wanted to preserve the caste system. He was tutored in the Western philosophy and tradition that emphasizes on the equal status of men. One cannot doubt he truly believed in the equal footing of men, but one can question how Gandhi was able to reason his belief with his belief of caste system that strongly emphasizes on the inequality of man by birth.[185]

Because of the Communal Awards that Gandhi feared that will divide Hindus against Hindus, he fasted to change the minds of the Untouchables Leader, Dr. Ambedkar. He succeeded. Many acclaimed that the reforms by the higher castes Hindus to exhort the untouchables to believe them was massive. As indeed it was. Unfortunately, the momentary repentance does not last long. Old habits died hard. Eventually, Ambedkar himself, despair of changing Hinduism turn to Buddhism with his followers.[186]

[184] Ibid., 207.
[185] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 97.
[186] Ibid., 105.

He wanted to change the untouchability in the caste system by appealing to those who are perpetuating it, by appealing it to their nobler sentiments. While his appeals worked while he was alive, gradually the people he asked to show their nobler sentiments lapsed and showed apathy.

The Untouchables were not happy with Gandhi because he did not give them any autonomy in their own affairs in the *Harijan Sevak*.[187] Instead, he told them he wanted the Hindus to do amends for their own wrongs. We cannot say Gandhi does not have the best of the *Harijan*'s interests in his heart, we can say that he is trying in a uniquely Indian way, which is to look at the Untouchable not as the same grounding as the other Hindus of the higher caste but lower and therefore needing protection. A person needs to take part in his or her empowerment because it will help in his or her development in all sectors and not just socially. With empowerment, they can gain economic, political and social leverage they may not have had.[188]

Gandhi's call for the upper-caste Hindus for repentance towards their treatment of the Untouchables can actually be seen as his call for them to carry out personal *satyagraha* though he did not call it that explicitly. Not many can hold on to the soul-force as forcibly as the Mahatma himself much less affect any changes.

[187] Ibid., 107.
[188] Ashutosh Varshney, "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Rationality," *Perspective on Politics*, no.1 (2003), 1:85-99. Online Cambridge Journal (22 November 2004).

The application of *satyagraha* in the case of the untouchables have never been sanctioned and approved by Gandhi.[189] This again did not reflect well on Gandhi's determination to eradicate Untouchability.

Gandhi's *Dalit* Policy has done nothing but to shed a little of their social stigma and returning a little of their self-respect. However, Gandhi didn't do much for their economic and political empowerment.[190]

Gandhi didn't allow or even train them to fight using *satyagraha*. Gandhi's insistence that the Untouchables followed the traditional jobs, restricting them for a better life.[191]

3.2.2 Communal Tensions

In the beginning, though there was dissatisfaction between the Hindus and Muslims in the Independence Movement, it had not occurred to them they to break India into Hindu and Muslim India. They had always worked hand in hand to achieve independence.

When one looks back to the historical past of India, it has been perceived very differently by these two communities. The Hindus saw it as a disgrace

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[189] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 99.
[190] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India." *Gandhi Magazine* 16, no.1 (1994), 60
[191] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India.", 60

and shame whereas the Muslim, it was a glorious past before the advent of the British empire.[192]

Much to the dismay of these modernized and Westernized Indians, the use of religion in Indian politics forever colored the scene of Indian politics. . Perhaps Gandhi has done a disservice to the Indian community by serving to introduce the element of religion into politics. In the right hands, religion helps. In the wrong hands, it only serves to harm. Just as nuclear power can helps humankind, so can it be use to harm. Just a knife can be put to good use, so can it be put in bad use. It just depends on the wielder himself, even moral ethics and religious principles. Gandhi has opened the door to politics intermixed with religion in India. It looks as if he had opened the Pandora box, a wealth of despair with hope.[193]

Hindu fundamentalists followed his actions, mixing religion means with political ends, often with horrifying results that finished with bloodshed and pain. Their selective usage of Gandhi's terms would have horrified him if he were still alive today. For example, the BJP uses Gandhi's term in *swadeshi* to ensure that economically the nation does not open up, using only Indian products.[194]

Gandhi's attempt to use the religiously inspired movement of Khilafat to promote Hindu-Muslim unity ended up not only in communalizing politics,

[192] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 168.
[193] Ibid., 171
[194] M.Chenna Nagaraj. "Sudershan quotes liberally from Gandhi on economy," *Rediff.com*, October 15, 2000, http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/oct/15rss1.htm (27th November 2003).

but also widening the gulf between the two communities, and reviving the declining influence of the Muslim clergy.[195]

This is compounded again by the issue of religion. There has always been an extremist factor in religions. Luckily, most of these are at the fringes of the religion and have rarely enough authority to exercise power. Unfortunately, they flourished well under repression and perceived problems. People generally turn to religion for consolation in times of duress.

Hinduism and Islam have widely diverging world-view, where one has a platoon of gods and goddesses to choose from to worship; another has one and only God to serve and obey.[196] As a minority in India, Muslims are naturally fearful of being over swarmed by the Hindus. Unfortunately, the Indian Congress didn't recognize this aspect and their neglect led to the division of South Asia into India and Pakistan.

Unfortunately, for Gandhi he may be the indirect cause of some of the communal tensions in India. Most people do not understand the deeper meaning of the truths expounded by Gandhi. When he used Hindu terms in politics, essentially he is religiously politicizing India.[197] This can only prejudice the Muslim against him, that he was taking part of the Hindus. Even if the Muslim believed that he genuinely wanted a good relationship

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[195] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 171.
[196] Ibid., 168
[197] Ibid., 172

between Hindu and Muslim, they were equally aware that not every Hindu Indian is like that.

Gandhi tried to unite the Hindu-Muslim by preaching to them the brotherhood of love. He attempted to persuade them to take up *satyagraha* and *sarvodaya* in order to douse their hatred and fears of each other.

In addition, Gandhi was a very idealistic man, who tended to see the best in every man. On the contrary, humans are made with feet of clay more often than not. He strove to bridge the gap between the Hindus and Muslims by appealing to their brotherhood love. He did not understand the complexity of the relationship includes more than religion. It includes economic and political authority. Moreover, it underlies their very sense of *weltanschauung* (worldview or personal philosophy of life).[198]

Gandhi is truly a Hindu indeed to be able to accept and embrace many religions at the same time, finding truth and God in all religions. This is however prohibited by Islam whereby they believe only in the existence of the one True God.[199]

Banding together for their communal interest is only natural for them to ensure that they are fairly treated at least in the Constitution before the British leaves the Indian ground. Naturally, this fact is exploited skillfully

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[198] Dictionary of Difficult Words, s.v. "Weltanschauung."
   http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/difficultwords/data/d0013722.html
[199] S.Maqbul, *Gandhi-ji and Islam*, ed. S.C. Biswas (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), 77.

by certain British officers in the hopes that disunity will prevail and force them to stay on longer.

Hindu Indians, on the other hand, could not understand the fears of the minorities and the loss of their way of lives. In fact, according to sociologists, minorities tend to cling on to their traditional customs even longer that those who stays within their own cultures. This is a natural reaction to protect their way of life.

It was in the later part of the nineteenth century that an atmosphere of competitive communalism was created, and sporadic communal riots started occurring over such trivial issues as cow slaughter and playing of music before a mosque. So, the fat was in the fire and communal politics became an abiding feature of Indian political scene.[200] If it gradually acquired a more strident and sharper communal profile, it was not the Muslims were more communal than the Hindus, but because the latter did not face the sort of insecurity that the minority community did.[201]

In 1924, Gandhi went on a twenty-one day fast as an act of penance for the communal riots erupted at different places after the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation Movement. In 1925, he presided over the All Parties Conference to work out terms of agreement between the Hindus and

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[200] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 193.
[201] Ibid., 194

Muslims. Again, in 1928 he made a strong appeal for Hindu-Muslim unity at the All Parties Conference at Lucknow.[202]

Until the day he died, Gandhi had never been able to fully douse the flames of communalism between the Hindu and Muslim with either his personal *satyagraha* or his exhortation to the nation to practice *satyagraha*.

3.2.3 Poverty

Gandhi's plan to alleviate poverty was through Gandhi's Constructive Programme where mass poverty is overcome through self-reliance and the people hope for a better life by calling them to go back to their own self-reliant village method without unwanted wants and needs of the modern society.[203]

Gandhi did not give a clear, concrete and comprehensive policy unless you counted his belief that economics must be practiced together with ethics.[204] Thus, he gave the poor of India an idea that they should go for *Ram Rajya* – whereby their village will be self-sufficient with agriculture, khadi and village industries as the core of their economy.[205]

Trusteeship was proposed by Gandhi to remove poverty from the masses of India. He wanted the rich capitalists to help distribute the wealth they have made to the poor through their own convictions. Unfortunately, even during

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[202] Ibid., 169
[203] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 150.
[204] Ibid., 152
[205] Ibid.

his time, Gandhi was disillusioned with the fact that not even one of his capitalist friends became trustees of the people.[206]

Gandhi is an avid proponent of socialism, although he was not too enthusiastic of the Bolshevic revolution. He loved the socialist idea that no one would go without want and those who are capable of earning more would have to give back to the society.

Gandhi has also inspired the introduction of *panchayat raj* at the village levels with the Constitution. They were provided with authority in the early years of independent India. The constitutional provision states: "The state shall take steps to organise village *panchayats* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government" (Article 40 in Part IV – Directive Principles of State Policy).[207]

Gandhi never saw the concrete birth of *Panchayat Raj* though within the seeds is the idea of decentralisation. Eventually, he meant *Panchayat Raj* to take over the running of the whole country by the majority. According to S.Selvam, the principle behind the establishment of the system of *Panchayati Raj* was democratic decentralisation.[208] It aimed at decentralisation of power and of the sources of income. The primary goal behind this arrangement was

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[206] Ibid., 163
[207] S.Selvam, "Participatory Structure: The Concept and Forms," 310.
[208] Ibid., 311

to seek the participation of members of village communities in the developmental process.[209]

The system of *Panchayati Raj* has declined within a couple of decades since its introduction due to, among other things, more and more of centralised planning in the form of anti-poverty programmes and indefinite postponement of *Panchayat* elections by various state governments on flimsy grounds.[210]

Gandhi did not want socialism to be controlled by a centralized government. Thus, he advocated decentralisation by introducing *panchayat raj* whereby the village parliaments would make decisions for the grassroots. Gandhi stressed that these *panchayat raj* would then send its own candidates to the centralized government.

In the end, the poverty in India itself was not the lack of materials that causes it but the lack of greed. Gandhi stated that earth itself was not enough to provide for one man's greed but more than adequate for every man's need.[211] Thus, his call to live again in simplicity and voluntary poverty so as everyone would have enough.

[209] Ibid.
[210] S.Selvam, "Participatory Structure: The Concept and Forms.", 311-312.
[211] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 147.

3.2.4 Gender Inequality

During Gandhi's time, gender inequality is a norm. The way Gandhi treated his wife is a good example of the patricidal society holding sway in India. Women are deemed second citizen inferior to men. Despite of the women emancipation in the West, it has not reached India as yet.

Parallel to his treatment of his wife, Gandhi began to change perceptions of the role of women in his work. He began to appreciate the different roles women needed to play in life. Much of his social ideas, Gandhi claimed could more easily be absorbed by women because of their ability to feel compassion and love. He claimed *satyagraha* and *sarvodaya* are more easily understood by women who understand the concept of self-sacrifice.[212]

When Gandhi burst into the scene, he managed to help the women gain a toehold over the male-dominated political scene. It became accepted very quickly that women should also be as highly educated as men. However, Gandhi's views that women should be the builder of society from home still stands strong to this day.[213]

For Gandhi, women must be strong in a *sarvodaya* society, they need to purify, steady and conserve the best in the India's culture. Gandhi believed strongly women's contribution should mimic men, rather they deserve the same right and freedom because they are equal.[214]

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[212] Gandhi, *All Men are Brother*, 160.
[213] Ibid., 161.
[214] Kunal Roy Chowdhuri. "Gandhi's Theory of *Sarvodaya* Socialism." , 72.

Highly educated women would stay at home as homemaker. Gandhi was of opinion the roles of women within the household was necessary to ensure the health of society.

Gandhi advocated a better treatment rather than just an extension of a man's honor. He felt that widows who wished to remarry should be given the choice to do so.[215]

Gandhi also lifted another restriction for women. He strongly opposed to segregation of women believing that the purity of women should be guarded by the women themselves.[216]

Within India itself, the preferences are for the boys as the girls are deemed as liabilities though they contribute much to the unseen household chores and work.[217]

However, critics have claimed that Gandhi's effects on the change of women itself did not go very deep within the boundaries of the basic positions of the women's rights and their participation of swaraj. Women have still to strive for their rights, personal, social and economical until late in the twentieth century.[218]

[215] Richards, *The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas*, 93.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 208.
[218] Ibid., 213.

However, he did achieve in getting women to perform certain public roles within his freedom movement, which effectively paved the way for a more liberal treatment of women later on.[219]

3.3   Effects after Gandhi's time

There is no doubt Gandhi affected India profoundly whether it is successful or not. His actions did help the Indians to find pride again in themselves and their homeland. Indeed, within the Indians' soul, they can now find pride in their heritage and culture.[220]

Sadly, with his demise, it appears that his ideals for his homeland did not receive as much approbation as his statues and his names. It was an irony that Gandhi, a man of peace, was only paid lip service.

India today garlands his statues but ignored his edicts that violence will only reap disaster. Taking note of the nuclear development in India, the continuation of the rigid caste system, the unabated quarrel with Pakistan, truly India has done nothing but mock Gandhi by praising him thus with the name of "Father of the Nation". On social issues Gandhi held dear, there is no evidence that Gandhi was the father of contemporary India.[221]

[219] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 213.
[220] Ibid., 386
[221] Ibid., 389

3.3.1   Caste System

There were hardly changes to the caste system made through Gandhi's direct actions to appeal to their hearts. The caste system in India is deteriorating, not because of the efforts made by the Indian people for change, it owed its changes to the global communication worldwide. More and more of the Untouchables are aware of their conditions and are demanding their rights. The Indian government has also done their part in the Constitution by giving the Untouchables their allocated privileges.

In retrospect, there have been hardly any direct change from Gandhi's effort to eradicate untouchability. Though it was true that he helped the Congress to reach to its conclusion on the equality of men and to root out untouchability, it was their collective action that untouchability was illegal in India today.[222]

However, sadly Untouchability still remains with its entrenched attitudes and the inability of most of the untouchables to gain economical and political clout.[223]

However, the hearts of the society has not changed at all. Upper caste Hindus are rapidly using their caste to bully the Untouchables, refusing them water. Cases such as these still happened frequently in India most especially

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[222] Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, 390.
[223] Ibid., 391.

in the remote areas. India's National Crime Records Bureau stated that in the year 2000 alone, 25,455 crimes were committed against *Dalits*.[224]

Gandhi's attempts to change the hearts of Hindus are short-lived. Once his influence over the better self is gone, so has their treatment of the Untouchables. This is not to say that all Hindus are like that, but the persistent discrimination still occurs. Although the Untouchables has the special privileges, those who have been privileged by the system help their own families rather than others. These privileges are abused and used as leverage to get their sons or daughters good positions in the government.[225]

All in all, this renewal attempt by Gandhi was a failure. The orthodox Hindus despise him, the Untouchables refused to call themselves the name he has given them, namely *Harijan*. They much prefer to be called *Dalits*. They did not see Gandhi as a fighter for their rights, merely a proponent that argues for the right of the caste system to perpetuate their suffering and misery. Gandhi's *Dalit* Policy merely helped the *dalits* to shed a little of their social stigma and gain them some social respect. Other than that, he had given nothing concrete.[226]

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[224] Hillary Mayell. "India's "Untouchables" Face Violence, Discrimination," *National Geographic News*, June 2, 2003, http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/06/0602_030602_untouchables.html (27th November 2003)

[225] Shashi Tharoor, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 109.

[226] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India.", 60.

Perhaps Gandhi had thought he could have given more energy towards to changing of their situation after gaining control of the nation from the British. He may not have dared to irk his Hindu backers in achieving independence.[227]

Still, in the newly independent nation, there are reservations of seats for the *dalits* in its legislatures. Article 17 in the Constitution made it an offence to mistreat an Untouchable and laws have been made to help the untouchables to get over their poverty.[228]

Within the constitution itself, the *dalits* have a reserved number of jobs for them in the government. Not only that, at Central and state level, the untouchables are given help to overcome their generations of deprivation.[229]

Unfortunately, this social ills still existed. A social survey convering 11.555 villages in twelve states shown that it is still being practiced through denial of access to wells, temples, hotels, restaurants, barber shops, laundries and so on.[230]

Even in the economic field, land reforms made did not reach the *dalits*. They have no industries they can identified with. Even with the legal right of the

[227] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India.", 60.
[228] Ibid., 61
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.

law behind them, *dalits* are still denied their allocated jobs such as the recent example that came out.[231]

Gandhi's attitude towards the untouchables has not been of help. He had never gotten any *dalits* within the political structure so that some part of autonomy could belong to them. He dealt with them only morally rather than politically.[232]

To this day, the untouchables rather called themselves *Dalits* than *Harijans* as a sign of rejection of Gandhi's social reforms with them. They stressed that Gandhi had never pushed any *satyagraha* movement on their behalf. Indeed, they are called to have patience and allowed the caste Hindus to make their penance. If indeed the untouchables tried to help themselves, he disapproved.[233] A good example will be the *Harijan Sewak Sangh* established by Gandhi. It was supposed to be an institution to help the *Harijan* welfare but none of its members were ever *Harijans*. This goes against the principle that those who are in need of help must include those who have received help.[234]

So far, the Untouchables leaders did not care for Gandhi, believing that he merely highlight their plights and did nothing concrete to improve their situation. Until today, the untouchables have never seen Gandhi as their

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[231] K.C. Yadav & R.S. Yadav. "A Fractured Legacy: Gandhi, *Dalits*, and the Present-Day India.", 64.
[232] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 109.
[233] Ibid., 107
[234] Ibid.

saviour.[235] Their present *Dalit* Leader, Kanshi Ram remarked: "What has Gandhi done? He has fought tooth and nail against the interests of the downtrodden people... He was a real hypocrite to my mind."[236] This aptly sums up how the Untouchable leaders perceived Gandhi today.

3.3.2 Poverty

Gandhi wanted to overcome poverty by similar methods, through appeal to landowners to go for trusteeship. He wanted them to look at their lands as a trust for their fellowmen. Even during his lifetime, none of his landowners ever did that in following his wishes to apply trusteeship into their own property.

However, his disciple Vinoba managed the *Bhoodan* property collection.[237] Although it was smaller than expected, people actually do donate their lands for those who are landless. It goes to show that Gandhi's principles can work on the ordinary people. The only thing is they probably need a lot of motivation to do so.

After Gandhi passed away, it was given to Acharya Vinoba Bhave to pick up the thread and give a creative impetus to the Gandhian movement. He discovered *Bhoodan* (land gift), developed it into *Gramdan* (village gift), and the movement began to manifest new dimensions.[238]

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[235] Ibid., 108
[236] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 111.
[237] Sudarshan Kapur. "*Satyagraha* and *Sarvodaya* after Gandhi.", 413.
[238] Ibid.

Gandhi's principles of economics that must be closely linked with ethics does help to promote the good of every one within the society. It helps by creating safety nets especially for those unable to compete successfully.[239] He stated, "economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and, therefore, sinful."[240]

The success rate of his lofty ideals only bore fruits for a moment because it requires a great deal of sacrifice on the organizers to share their economic gain with others. This is not say people are unwilling to share but greed reigns far more easily in the hearts of men rather than self-sacrifice.

In 1952, the Community Development Programme was launched followed by the National Extension Service to help economic development in rural areas.[241] The impact was not great as not all people can be involved in the decentralisation programme.[242]

Gandhi's hope of decentralisation did not seem to work out although attempts had been made. An example will be Kerala. Kerala State Planning Board initiated the People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan in July 1996. It was modeled from Gandhian concept of Grama Swaraj[243]

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[239] Gill, *Gandhi: A Sublime Failure*, 148.
[240] Ibid.
[241] R. Jose Jayadeva Das. "People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala." *Gandhi Magazine* 19, no. 3 (1997) : 357.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.

This campaign was to include everyone in the decision-making process at the grassroot level. Everyone will then have a say in development of projects for their own municipalities.[244]

3.3.3 Communal Tensions

Communal tensions got worse with Gandhi's death. The zealous extremist Hindu parties got into power pushing the Congress out of their position by fanning communal fires. Thus, it is not surprising that communal riots between the Hindus and Muslims are increasing.

The breaking point of the tension between the Hindus and Muslims were fanned skyhigh with the incident of the Babri Mosque in 1992. Subsequently after that, the pro-Hindu party BJP (affiliated with Godse who assassinated Gandhi) took control of India. The situation therefore worsen for the Muslim Indians. A government with a clear manifesto of a orthodox Hindu belief do not generate trust between two communities. For the Muslim, this is especially true.

Hindu-Muslim element has become unstable most especially after the division of Indian Hindu and Indian Muslim. The Indian Hindu feels that the Indian Muslim should just move out to Pakistan and leave more opportunities for them. This is especially prominent when the people are suffering more from the economic setback.

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[244] Ibid., 358

Gandhi's sayings of the Hindu-Muslim unity probably sailed right out of their mind. Their hatred and fundamentalism fanned by perceived wrongs done to them, whether true or untrue, served only to fuel their perceived righteousness. For Hinduism, this is truly an irony, as it is one of the religions who proudly claimed that it can absorbed and tolerated any sort of other religious thoughts. Although not all Hindus are part of this monstrosity, there have been no alternative parties for them to vote in view of the Indian politics rife with corruption.

3.3.4 Gender Inequality

Women today in India enjoy a position that can be envied by women of the First World. They have ample opportunities to be educated. This however applies only to women of the higher and medium level income. For families of lower income, women are still seen as a liability to the family, not only in terms of the dowry they have to drain from their own family but also the loss of workforce after they are married.

Cases of wife killings still go on in India because of the dowry. Gandhi has elevated women a lot in giving them the chance for education and a better place in society. Although Gandhi himself indicated the radical political stances that women could and needed to take within the familial context, it remains doubtful whether these translated into visible political acts that altered the very structure of these spaces.[245]

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[245] Peter Ronald deSouza, *Contemporary India-transitions,* (New Delhi: Sage Publications. 2000), 267.

However, Gandhi had not been able to get rid of the social system that perceives women as a burden to the family. Other movements had to help the Indian women. Still, credit must be given to Gandhi by giving women a chance to help in the national liberation struggle, he acknowledged the importance of women.[246] With that platform to work with, women were able to build better benefits for themselves.

In the years of Gandhi's leadership, women naturally participated in the political struggle though feminists claimed that it was doubtful that their participation did much to help the women's movement.[247] However, the nationalist helped women in elevating their social and spiritual values.[248]

After thirty years of feminism in India, its movements have turn to Gandhi's principles for their ideologies to define their framework for many times.[249] They use Gandhi's *sarvodaya* philosophy as the point of arrival for many cases.

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[246] Clymes Augustine & A.K.Sharma. "Feminist Resurgence in India: Towards a Gandhian Framework." *Gandhi Magazine* 14, no.3 (1992): 489.
[247] Peter Ronald deSouza, *Contemporary India-transitions.* 267.
[248] Ibid., 267
[249] Clymes Augustine & A.K.Sharma.. "Feminist Resurgence in India: Towards a Gandhian Framework.", 501.