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## **Gandhi's Struggle in South Africa : A Path to Realization of God**

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### **Abstract**

*Mahatma Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893 as a newly qualified lawyer to act on behalf of a local Indian trader in a commercial dispute. He stayed back for 21 years to fight for rights of the Indians in South Africa. He always mentioned in different meetings that he was born in India but was made in South Africa. As he said ' during the struggle in South Africa while serving the community he realized the aim of his life i.e. self realization or in other words realization of God '. In this paper the author has discussed Mahatma Gandhi's views towards service to the community and realization of God.*

**Key Words:** Service to the Community, Realization of God

### **Introduction**

'...I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self realization.' (Gandhi M. K., An Autobiography, p. 132)

Mahatma Gandhi's struggle in South Africa is an example of service to the community. The quote indicates that to Gandhiji service to the community is instrumental. It is not an end in itself. This thought has always a contemporary relevance because many people in the society are engaged in service to the community. In those days, even many NGOs are providing training in social service. Social Work has been emerged as a Discipline and is studied at colleges and Universities. Either through training or any other way people have got their own personal theories of social service. Those personal theories are of very important concern because, if they are not proper, person's social service may result in a painful situation for himself or herself. This can be revealed by following examples.

### **Case 1**

A person who is born in very poor family, took highschool education in Ashram schools and afterwards higher education with the help of some merciful people in the society. After taking the Bachelor's degree in Education, he started a coaching class for highschool students. He got a great success beyond his expectations. Soon he became rich. He used to help poor students coming to his class. He used to help any needy person who came to him.

Once one of the persons whom he helped to stand on his own feet, abused him very rudely due to some reason and at that time he found it so shocking that his blood pressure went very high and he had to run to the doctor. This happened to him at the age of 35. Now he is a B. P. patient and has to take the medicine regularly. He says, I have suffered due to my nature of helping others. This is not true. He suffered because he does not have a proper theory of service to others.

## **Case 2**

An eldest brother in a lower middle class family after he joined a lecturer's job, provided good education to the younger brothers and sisters. He did not care about his own higher education and made financial arrangements for their Ph. D. also. Upto a certain period all was well. However, a time came when there were clashes and this eldest brother who was an ideal of sacrifice turned into a frustrated, ill-tempered person. He filed a case against his younger brothers and sisters and he made a claim for all the money he spent on their education, even for the food he provided to them. He is now a psychic patient.

These two cases are representative of the unexpected painful results of the service to others. Why such things happen? People start helping others at the cost of their psychological deterioration. This is because, as said earlier the people have no proper theories of service to others. The theory of social service as revealed by Mahatma Gandhi during his struggle in South Africa is discussed in following paragraphs.

### **Service to Others – Instrumental or Intrinsic?**

As discussed before, for Gandhiji service to the community was a path towards realization of God. It was instrumental and not intrinsic. Because he was clear regarding his purpose, he could evaluate his own deeds of service to others and modify them accordingly. Like Gandhiji, every social reformer has to be clear in his mind about the purpose of the service he is rendering to the society, so that he can evaluate his achievement on the path of such service.

### **Understanding the Interlock**

According to Mahatma Gandhi, service to the community purifies our mind and annihilates our ego. This in turn helps us in self-realization or in realization of the God, which is actually the aim of life. In his own words, 'Man's ultimate aim is the realization of the God,... The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it.' (Prabhu, R. K. and Rao, U. R., Mind of Mahatma Gandhi)

Thus, a person who desires for his own welfare in true sense, he will have to strive for others welfare i. e. person's striving for his own welfare and his striving for the welfare of the society cannot be separated from each other; they are interlocked.

And of course, a wise man will always prefer a path through which we reach the welfare of both the person and the society. This was emphasized by Gautam Buddha in a different style.

### **Gautam Buddha on Best Man**

Addressing the Bhikkus Gautam Buddha once said, there are four classes of persons, to be found in the world –

- he who has not striven for his own welfare or that of others;
- he who has striven for other's welfare but not his own;
- he who has striven for his own welfare but not others;
- he who has striven for both his own welfare and that of others.

And among the four, this last person who has striven for both his own welfare and that of others is best and chief, topmost and highest and supreme. (Ambedkar Babasaheb, The Buddha and His Dhamma, p. 380).

Thus, for the betterment of the society as a whole, it is very essential that the person strives for the betterment of the self and also for the betterment of the society.

### **From Truth to Service**

While writing about his experiences during the Sanitary Reform in Durban Gandhiji said, 'thus service of the Indians in South Africa ever revealed to me new implications of Truth at every stage. The deeper the search in the mine of Truth, the richer the discovery of the gems buried there, in the shape of openings for an ever greater variety of service.'

Thus, truth should form the basis of one's service to others. It is the truth, as Gandhiji said, which successfully leads us on the path of the service, towards self-realization. Without truth, it is impossible even to walk on this path and find proper direction.

### **Vigilance Against Ego**

It is said that it is better to be a non-egoistic man not helping others than to be an egoistic man helping others. As the person goes on helping others, he may become more and more egoistic which is deterioration, moving away from self-realization because self-realization is actually destruction of ego. Ego isolates person from the rest of the nature, which is harmful to himself. Therefore, Gandhiji once said, 'All living creatures are of the same substance as all drops of water in the ocean are the same in substance. ...A drop that separates soon dries up.' (Johnson Richard, Gandhi (Mahatma) p. 88)

In this regard he further says 'when the isolated drops meet, they share the majesty of the ocean to which they belong.'

Thus, a person engaged in service to others should always be cautious enough to observe and examine his own mind so that there is no growth of ego and he moves towards selflessness.

### **Need of Infinite Patience**

About the experiences of his struggle for Sanitary Reforms in Durban, Gandhiji says, 'These experiences taught me, better than ever before, that without infinite patience it was impossible to get the people to do any work. It is the reformer who is anxious for the reform and not the society, from which he should expect nothing better than opposition, abhorrence and even mortal persecution. Why may not society regard as retrogression what the reformer holds dear as life itself?' (Gandhi, M. K. An Autobiography, p. 182)

Thus, the true social reformer expects opposition, abhorrence and even mortal persecution instead of acceptance, gratefulness and rewards from the society.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Gandhi's struggle in South Africa is an example of service to the community. To Gandhiji his service to the community was a means for realization of God. This thought has always a contemporary relevance because many people in the society are engaged in service to others. They have their own personal theories of social service. However, if these personal theories are not proper the results are painful.

From Gandhian point of view it is the duty of the social reformer that –

1. he finds answers to the following questions – whether his service to community is instrumental or intrinsic? If it is instrumental then what does he want to achieve through the service? Whether it is realization of God or anything else? If it is anything else, whether it is worth enough?
2. he understands the interlock between striving for others welfare and striving for one's own welfare.
3. he accepts truth as the basis of his efforts towards social reform.

4. he is vigilant against his own ego.

5. he has infinite patience.

So these are the guidelines for those who want to be social reformers . Thanks to Gandhiji for that.

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