

# Mahatma Gandhi on Human Rights

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## Abstract

This research article is a study of Mahatma Gandhi with special reference to human rights. the national movement led by Gandhi for various social causes. It was a bold step taken by a man of strong conviction and determination. The concept adopted by the Gandhiji was moral.

**Keywords:** United Nations, Universal, Notion, Dalits, Discrimination, Fundamental Rights.

## Introduction

Seventy years ago there was no body of international human rights law to speak of. There were, to be sure, philosophies and theories, but the international rules that reflected them were absent. Today, through the United Nations and half-century of enactments, an impressive body of human rights doctrine is embodied in international law. Mahatma Gandhi was a champion of human rights and he adopted a moral concept that was a wider concept. He tried to eradicate some social evils also.

## Objective of the Study

Mahatma Gandhi – the man of the millennium, has been recognized as one of the champions of human rights. The aim of the present research paper is to analyse the views and opinion of Mahatma Gandhi on human rights. It also focuses on the notion of human rights in a historical perspective.

## The Gandhian Perspective

Mahatma Gandhi – the man of the millennium, has been recognized as one of the champions of human rights. His work in south Africa initially and later back in India, created a new era of hope to millions of fellow human rights to whom basic human rights were denied under dehumanizing circumstances perpetrated by oppressive force of various kinds including social, political and economic. To him, the violation of human rights were identified as a crucial area for creating awareness in the minds of the victims as well as their perpetrators. However, with Gandhi, it became a highly organized movement for regaining the voice of the suppressed humanity. He asked the people to be bold enough and fearless to fight their rights. In this respect two historic incidents in 1893 in South Africa and 1956 in USA, are living examples which undoubtedly prove that Gandhi and Mrs. Rosa Parks fought for the rights of millions of people on the universe and both changed the course of history of civil rights movement for human rights all over the world. The eviction of Gandhi from the train at Petermaritzburg for having dared to travel in first-class compartment was a unique incident. Similarly, in 1956, Mrs. Rosa Parks and stoutly refused to vacate a seat she has been occupying in a public bus in Montgomery and accepted to be fined for the refusal to obey the order to vacate the seat being a Negro woman. These two identical incidents had enormous impact on humanity's march to ensure equal civil rights rise in revolt when basic human rights or freedom are violated or denied to the poorer masses. Accordingly, Gandhi's first remarkable experience compelled him to think over that the individual's right of equality should not be segregated on the basis of one's colour or race. Thus, the South African period is an important landmark in Gandhi's life as it resulted into the transformation of a mild youth into a fighter for social justice and eradication of racial discrimination as he had the taste of his first experience of racial discrimination as soon as entered the land of South Africa.

As stated above, he was thrown out of the first class compartment only on the basis of the colour of the skin. This, however, was not the end of his ordeal, worse was yet to come when he was not allowed to sit inside the stage coach and beaten by the coachman mercilessly without any fault. Besides, he was asked by the magistrate to remove his turban.



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He was taken back, his whole enthusiasm had dampened and ultimately refused to comply the order and preferred to leave the court.<sup>1</sup>

In this autobiography Gandhi explains: "I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. Should try, if possible to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the colour prejudice."<sup>2</sup> anyhow, Gandhi determined to stay in South Africa to fight for social justice and basic human rights. In this respect, one of the prominent biographers of Gandhi comments: "...from that hour he refused to accept injustice as a part of the natural or unnatural order in South Africa. He would reason; he would plead; he would appeal to the better judgement and the latent humanity race. He would resist, but he would never be a willing victim of racial arrogance.

It was not so much a question of redeeming his own self respect as that of his community, his country, even of humanity."<sup>3</sup> In this way, Gandhi remained about 21 years in South Africa, united Indians of all faiths- Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians to discuss ways and means to protect and safeguard the basic human rights which were denied to them by the while ruling people there. As a matter of fact, most of them had been brought into South Africa by Europeans under a system or bond of indenture, whereby they were slaved at the places of plantations and mines. They were subjected to many hardships and imposed unnecessary and heavy taxes. Besides, Gandhi experienced the dehumanizing face of untouchability as practised by the white rulers in South Africa. Just as untouchables are relegated to remote houses of a town or a village in India, similarly, Indians were given coolie locations or ghettoes. There was a criminal negligence of the municipality to correct its wrong done to the so-called untouchables. Accordingly, South Africa not only developed the political acumen of Gandhi but also made him more responsible and active for bringing a complete transformation in his personal life by developing his qualities.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

It is now clear that Gandhi's struggle in South Africa against the violation of human rights and exploitation was not a peculiar phenomenon of that country alone. It had its impact on the Blacks and native population living there, who are still groaning under the greater malaise of racial discrimination – apartheid. It has taken a long time for them to stand and fight against it and gratefully they have acknowledged that they were influenced by Gandhi's approach to fight against injustice. Nelson Mandela's speeches are living example in this respect. At one occasion Mandela expressed: "under the leadership of Gandhi, the Indian National Congress has developed a strong international outlook, with the elimination of colonialism and racism all over the

world as the foremost concern and established contacts with freedom movement in other countries."<sup>5</sup> Further, his impact was not confined to South Africa only as Dr. Martin Luther King, also followed Gandhian method of non-violence against racial discrimination and segregation in the U.S.A. He expressed: "from my background I gained my regulating Christian ideas, from Gandhi I learnt my operational technique."<sup>6</sup> Prof. N. Radhakrishnan, a prominent Gandhian scholar observes: "The twenty-one years Gandhi spend in South Africa offered valuable insights to Gandhi in familiarizing himself with the inhuman and highly deplorable situations that existed outside, as well as helping him develop appropriate concepts and techniques of non-violence defense. His decisions to define the most humiliating Asiatic Ordinance with non-violent strategies which included suffering and readiness to atone the mistakes committed by others. Like a master craftsman he developed the various instruments of nonviolent resistance to evil. The struggle initiated by Gandhi for human dignity and freedom had not only lasting impact on South Africa and India but it left its imprints of human psyche and influenced freedom fighters, human rights activists all over the world."<sup>7</sup> similarly, the national movement led by Gandhi for various social causes like abolition of untouchability and Dalit rights for entry to temples were indeed very important milestones in the annals of human rights movement in modern india,<sup>8</sup> as a matter of fact this was a bold step taken by a man of strong conviction and determination.

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