

Social Problems Discussed in *Satya Na Prayogo* by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

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Abstract

Satya Na Prayogo by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is not merely an autobiography but a profound reflection on the social, moral, and political issues of his time. Gandhi uses his personal experiences to expose key social problems and to propose ethical solutions grounded in truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*). The issues discussed are **racial discrimination, caste discrimination, poverty and economic exploitation, religious intolerance**, etc. He promotes **Swadeshi** and self-reliance to restore dignity and economic independence.

Gandhi critiques the **colonial education system**, arguing that it fails to develop character and practical skills. He also reflects on **moral degradation**, stressing that personal discipline and truthfulness are essential for social reform. Additionally, Gandhi addresses **gender inequality**, supporting women's empowerment and opposing restrictive practices like child marriage and purdah.

Overall, Gandhi connects social reform with personal transformation and ethical living.

Keywords

Satya (Truth), Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satyagraha, Racial discrimination, Caste system, Social inequality

Introduction

Satya Na Prayogo (My Experiments with Truth) by Mahatma Gandhi is far more than a personal autobiography. It is a deeply reflective narrative that sheds light on the social, moral and political conditions of his time. Through honest self-examination and detailed accounts of his life experiences, Gandhi explores several social problems that plagued society in India and abroad. His work serves both as a critique of these issues and as a guide for reform grounded in ethical principles such as truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*).

One of the most striking social problems discussed in the book is **racial discrimination**, particularly during Gandhi's stay in South Africa. Gandhi recounts several humiliating experiences. The most significant and life-changing experience was his removal from a first-class railway compartment despite holding a valid ticket. This incident marked a turning point in his life, awakening his consciousness regarding systemic injustice.¹ He observed how Indians and Africans were treated as inferior by the European population, denied legal rights, and subjected to institutional discrimination. These experiences led Gandhi to challenge racial injustice through organised resistance, eventually shaping his philosophy of *Satyagraha*. His reflections highlight how deeply entrenched prejudice can dehumanise individuals and justify inequality.

Another significant issue addressed by Gandhi is **caste discrimination** within Indian society. He openly criticises the rigid hierarchical structure that marginalised certain communities, particularly those labelled as "untouchables." Gandhi considered untouchability a grave moral wrong and a blot on Hindu society.² He actively worked for the upliftment of these communities, advocating for their inclusion in

¹ Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part IV, Chapter 20, pp. 51–56.

² Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part XI, Chapter 64, pp. 136-137

social, religious, and public life. Through his narrative, Gandhi emphasises that true spirituality cannot coexist with discrimination and that social equality is essential for national unity.

Closely related to caste is the broader problem of **social inequality and injustice**. Gandhi observed that Indian society was fragmented along lines of caste, class, and religion, which weakened its collective strength. He believed that these divisions were exploited by colonial powers to maintain control. His writings stress the importance of unity and mutual respect among all sections of society as a foundation for freedom and progress.³

The issue of **poverty and economic exploitation** is another recurring theme in Gandhi's autobiography. He witnessed firsthand the harsh realities faced by the poor, particularly in rural India, where people struggled to meet basic needs. Gandhi linked widespread poverty to both colonial economic policies and the neglect of indigenous industries. He advocated for *Swadeshi* (self-reliance) and promoted the use of locally produced goods, such as khadi, to empower rural communities.⁴ According to Gandhi, economic independence was crucial for social dignity and national sovereignty. His critique of materialism and overconsumption also highlights the moral dimension of economic inequality.

Gandhi also critically examines the problem of **education**, particularly the colonial education system imposed in India. He believed that this system was disconnected from Indian culture and failed to address the real needs of society. Instead of fostering character and practical skills, it focused primarily on producing clerks for administrative purposes.⁵ Gandhi proposed an alternative model known as *Nai Talim* or basic education, which emphasised holistic development through the integration of intellectual, moral, and manual training. He argued that education should empower individuals to become self-reliant and socially responsible citizens.

Another important social problem Gandhi discusses is **moral degradation and lack of self-discipline**. Throughout the book, Gandhi reflects on his own struggles with truthfulness, dietary habits, and personal conduct. He openly admits his mistakes, such as instances of dishonesty in his youth, to illustrate the importance of self-improvement.⁶ Gandhi believed that societal reform begins with individual transformation. Without moral integrity, he argued, it is impossible to address larger social issues effectively. His emphasis on truth and non-violence serves as a moral framework for both personal and collective life.

The issue of **gender inequality** also emerges in Gandhi's reflections. Although his views were influenced by the socio-cultural context of his time, he recognised the unjust treatment of women and supported their empowerment. Gandhi acknowledged the strength and resilience of women, encouraging their participation in social and political movements.⁷ He opposed practices such as child marriage and Parda, which restricted women's freedom. Gandhi's perspective underscores the need for gender equality as an essential component of a just society.

Gandhi further addresses the problem of **religious intolerance and communal disharmony**. Living in a diverse society with multiple religions, he understood the potential for conflict arising from differences in belief. Gandhi advocated for mutual respect and understanding among religious communities, emphasising that all religions ultimately seek the same truth.⁸ He practised interfaith dialogue and encouraged people to appreciate the values of other religions while remaining rooted in their own faith. His vision of religious harmony remains highly relevant in contemporary times.

Another social issue highlighted in the book is **addiction and unhealthy habits**, particularly alcoholism. Gandhi viewed such habits as destructive not only to individuals but also to families and

³ Gandhi, M. K. (2021), Part XIV, Chapter 74, pp.151-153

⁴ Gandhi, M. K. (2021), Part XVI, Chapter 81, pp.166-167

⁵ Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part XI, Chapter 67. pp. 141-143

⁶ Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part I, Chapter 5, pp.22-25821

⁷ Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part VIII, Chapter 56, pp.117-119

⁸ Gandhi, M. K. (2021). Part I, Chapter 7, pp.25-26

society as a whole. He believed that addiction led to moral and economic decline, especially among the poor.⁹ Gandhi advocated for self-control and discipline, considering them essential for personal well-being and social progress.

In addition to these major issues, Gandhi also touches upon **the problem of blind imitation of Western culture**. While he appreciated certain aspects of Western civilisation, he criticised the tendency among Indians to abandon their own traditions in favour of foreign customs. Gandhi believed that true progress lies in adopting what is beneficial while preserving one's cultural identity.¹⁰ His emphasis on cultural self-respect was closely tied to his broader vision of national regeneration.

In conclusion, *Satya Na Prayogo* offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the social problems that Gandhi encountered throughout his life. Through his personal experiences and reflections, he identifies key issues such as racial discrimination, caste inequality, poverty, flawed education systems, moral decline, gender inequality, religious intolerance, and social vices. More importantly, Gandhi does not merely describe these problems; he proposes solutions grounded in ethical principles such as truth, non-violence, self-discipline, and compassion. His work continues to inspire individuals and societies to strive for justice, equality, and moral integrity. Even in the modern world, the social concerns raised by Gandhi remain relevant, reminding us that meaningful change begins with a commitment to ethical living and collective responsibility.

Conclusion

Satya Na Prayogo presents a powerful critique of the major social problems of Gandhi's time while offering practical and moral solutions. Gandhi emphasises that true social change begins with individual transformation guided by truth, non-violence, and self-discipline. His ideas on equality, unity, and ethical living remain highly relevant in addressing modern social challenges. The work ultimately inspires a vision of a just and harmonious society built on compassion, responsibility and respect for all.

अहिंसामेव संश्रित्य हिंसां गन्धयितुं क्षमः ।

गांधिरेको महात्मा स्यात्कुटुम्बी जगतो मुनिः ॥ ४ ॥

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2. Gandhi, M. K. (2009). *Satyasodhanam*. Navjivan Publishing House.

⁹ Gandhi, M. K. (2021), Part VIII, Chapter 49, pp. 103-105

¹⁰ Gandhi, M. K. (2021), Part XVI, Chapter 82, pp. 167-168