

Gandhi's Values on Marriage and Sexuality

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Abstract

The paper looks at Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to the cause indentured labour in South Africa. It examines his first satyagraha in 1906 and the second in 1913, which led to the enactment of Indian Relief Act 1914. The £ 3 annual fee was abolished, Hindu and Muslim marriages became legitimate and Indians were granted the right to move around freely within South Africa. The paper also examines at how Gandhi started practising celibacy or brahmacharya in 1906 and how his views in this regard came to influence his behaviour and his political philosophy. As his own marriage became more spiritual than conjugal, his views on marriage and sex also started to undergo a transformation in South Africa

Keywords: Marriage, Ex-indentured Indians, Indian Relief Act 1914, Satyagraha

Introduction

Gandhi is one of the most studied and researched public figures in our modern history. He was not only a civil rights activist and the leader of our national movement, but he was also a social and political thinker and reformer. He began his political struggle in South Africa and it was there that he first started to practice his concept of *Satyagraha*. It was also in South Africa, that he avowed *brahmacharya* and started practising celibacy. This paper has a two-fold objective. The first is to understand Gandhi's contribution to the betterment of the Indian indentured labour in South Africa - first by way of *Satyagraha* against the Asiatic Registration Bill and then by playing a pivotal role in passing of the Indian Relief Act 1914, which did away with the £ 3 tax, started to recognise Hindu and Muslim marriages and allowed Indians to move about freely within South Africa.

The second objective is to understand Gandhi's views on marriage and sex. It was in South Africa that Gandhi started his practice of celibacy or *brahmacharya* in 1906. Gandhi had by then come to believe that before he could take up causes for greater public good, he needed to purge and cleanse himself from within, the first step in the direction of which was *sanyas* or *brahmacharya*. His relationship with Kasturba underwent a metamorphosis in South Africa and Ba, as she was fondly called, turned in to his spiritual and political companion from being his conjugal partner and the mother of his children. Gandhi's renunciation of sex had begun and his views in this regard would continue to evolve further with the passage of time.¹

Gandhi's campaign for indentured labourers in South Africa