



# EXPLORING THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GEORGE JOSEPH AND GANDHIJI

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## Abstract

George Joseph implemented all freedom struggle movements initiated by Mahatma Gandhiji in Madurai. George Joseph, one of the unpopular freedom fighters (1837-1938), during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, played an indispensable part in moulding the policies of Indian National Congress and extending the Indian freedom struggle to the most southern parts of India based in the city of Madurai. He had his first meeting with Gandhiji in 1919. This meeting took place in Madras, on the Marina beach Gandhiji was on his tour to provide propagation for his civil disobedience movement and also to exhort the people to observe a hartal on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1919 and protest against the Rowlett Act. George Joseph was one among the people who were invited to meet Gandhiji. This meeting had a deep impact on the life of George Joseph. George Joseph drew much inspiration from Gandhiji during his meeting with him. This meeting brought out crucial changes in the life of the western educated Barrister George Joseph.

Gandhiji had a good relationship and they were in contact through letters often and personal visit sometimes. Though there were some ideological clashes between them, causing George to leave the Congress for some time, he ensured to return back and continue participating in the Indian freedom struggle. The objective of this paper is to bring out the personal and political relationship between Gandhi and George Joseph during freedom movement.

**Key Words:** Nationalism, Freedom Struggle, Movement, Relationship, Khadi Issue

## INTRODUCTION

English East India Company had ruled India till 1858 C.E. and then the British Raj ruled up to 1947 C.E. During this period, Indian Subcontinent was gradually brought under the British paramountcy by adopting various strategies from time to time. In order to get relief from the clutches of the Britishers, Indians raised their voice against the Britishers from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Mass movements occurred from 1801 onwards. From 1857, Indians became restless due to the growth of patriotism. Hence, Indian national

Movement was one of the biggest mass Movements in modern history that galvanized millions of people from different ideologies, and classes which helped to bring the British Empire down and attain independence in 1947. Irrespective of castes and creeds, people joined together to fight for the Indian freedom. The Heroic activities of Hero Alagumuthukone, Rani Chennamma, Velu Nachiyar, Hyder Ali, Tippu Sultan, Kattabomman, Rani Lakshmbai, Nanasaheb and others had contributed for the freedom of India. When the Queen of Britain assumed the power of Empress of India the Indian national movement commenced in full swing. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Gandhiji had organisational ability and the moral conquest to collect the masses and execute the protest against the British Government in non-violent way which was massive hit around that time to liberate our motherland from the British rule.

Indian Sepoy Revolt of 1857 was sparked when the soldiers of British Empire army and many Indian kingdoms have actually rebelled against the British hegemony. This mutiny was started due to the usage of cow and pig fat in 1857 calibre pattern 1853 Enfield p/53 rifle cartridges in British Indian army. The soldiers had to break the cartridges by teeth to load in to the rifle. As this was against their religious faith by both the Hindu and the Muslim soldiers, they refused to use the cartridges. This has resulted in a massive mutiny in which the famous freedom fighter Mangal Pandey along with the village Jamadar were hanged to death.

After this, mutiny had been crushed by the British, a new class of an educated elites have formed which actually had sought political rights and representation and they remained largely loyal to the British Empire. After this short period of time, public outrage has been started due to the suppression of civil liberties, political rights and culture. The common man faced many issues related to trust and belief system; this has led to the next round of revolution to dethrone the British Empire.

The Indian National Movement had shaped India's cultural, religious and political unity under the leadership of Gandhiji in the way of non-violence and civil disobedience. Gandhiji's commitment to Purna Swaraj had started in 1930, for the next 2 years until 1932 the struggle continued which constrained the British to afford freedom to India. This Movement was running in to difficult path due to British Government's delaying tactics. This has resulted in much more radical thoughts within the organisation and emergence of Subash Chandra Bose who was defeated by Gandhiji's candidate in Tripuri Congress Working Committee. This was the centre of the Movement when both radicals and conservatives parted ways. Though the aim of these two groups were focussed on Indian freedom, the activities and means by which they wish to achieve the same was different.

Fight against the British rule was intensified during 1942 from multiple forces in India. Subash Chandra Bose had raised an Indian National Army (INA) to launch a military campaign to end the ruling of British, following the trial of Indian National Army officers in the red fort, mutinies broke out in the Navy (Naval Mutiny), Air force and Army. In the meantime, Congress also started the massive 'Quit India Movement' to get the British out of the country. Also following the wide spread communal riots in Calcutta, finally British Raj had ended on 15th August 1947.

While Indian Nationalism was on peak of their activities against British Raj, Southern part of India, especially Tamil Nadu also picked up the Movement and started against fighting the British Government. The Nationalism in Tamil Nadu is somewhat unique, though the style and content of the protest is same as compared to National Movement. The unique factor like race and language was missing in South Indian Nationalism.

The involvement of new class of educated elite in Tamil Nadu had started providing the teeth to spreading National Movement in Tamil Nadu. These educated elites had learnt different revolutions across the world like American War of Independence, French Revolution along with the recollection of past glory of Indian culture.

During this time freedom struggle that developed in South India inspired the National Struggle for freedom. The presentation has two aspects; one, dealing with the events and incidents in which the freedom fighters involved and two, the ideals and values that inspired the freedom fighters. George Joseph was one among the highly educated person who got impressed by Indian National Movement when he was studying in London. George Joseph was popularly known as 'Rosappoo Durai' as may the possibility of pronouncing his name as George by the people of Madurai. He was appreciated by all walks of people as he was an amazingly talented Journalist, a great visionary, well-cultured, and highly learned. He was also known for his exceptional contribution to trade union activities during his time in the textile industry. He has been living in the hearts of the people of Madurai. The challenge was to promote the protest launched by national leaders to be implemented in Southern part of India too effectively. George Joseph had good relations with Gandhiji. In this research paper an attempt has been made by the researcher to throw light on the personal and political relation with Gandhiji.

### **George Joseph's Relation with Gandhiji**

George Joseph got an opportunity to interact with various freedom fighters, who later became influencers and very close to him throughout his life. It was Gandhiji's connection that changed George Joseph's entire life. He influenced him to become a freedom fighter after having education in London

Gandhiji wrote a series of letters to George Joseph during the peak of the Indian freedom struggle. He wanted to use George Joseph's expertise in the field of Journalism and his thoughts and writings were always used to be factual and backed up with data and facts. Gandhiji had asked George to write a weekly article in Young India, mentioned as 'write in your best style' which shows how Gandhiji was thoroughly impressed with George's writing. This was not due to Gandhiji offloading some of his work, he always used to ask George Joseph's point of view on every burning national issue. This was specified in the letter very clearly.

Gandhiji wanted him to focus specifically on areas like Khaddar work (khadi) in which the promotion was happening by boycotting imported clothing, untouchability, and national education and the impact of these in local areas/districts. Gandhiji was in direct connection with George Joseph as the communications between them were always direct. Even the letter dated March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1924, written from

Andheri Mumbai where Gandhiji was requesting George Joseph to send all communications directly to him not to Sabarmati Ashram from where the handling and replies of all communications were happening.

The letter dated March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924, just six days after the previous letter clearly shows, that Gandhiji's connection with George Joseph was not just based on political arrangement. It was a very personal one. Suzanne was not well and suffered from Tuberculosis during the peak time of the Civil Disobedience Movement. George Joseph was not been able to get any conclusive report on Susanna's health with the existing medical infrastructure he had during that time.

Gandhiji was inviting George Joseph along with Mrs. Joseph to come to Baroda, Gujarat to meet Dr. Jivraj Mehta from the state hospital. He was not sure whether Mrs. Joseph would accept this proposal to move to Baroda, but still, he was insisting he come down in consultation with her at the earliest before her condition deteriorated. Gandhiji also assured him that Radha, Mani Ben, Kiki Ben, Maji, and also him personally will be around to take care of Mrs. Joseph when she will be in Baroda for treatment. This episode clearly explains Gandhiji's connection with George Joseph.

After around 10 days of his earlier communication regarding the health of Mrs. Joseph's treatment options, on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1924, Gandhiji wrote another mail to George Joseph expressing his happiness as he had decided to put Susanna under Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, he also a freedom fighter and worked along with George Joseph on various non-cooperation movements during the freedom struggle. Dr. Rajan was also a Congress President of Madras in the Legislative Council Assembly.

Gandhiji also advised him to grow cotton in Madurai as he was not happy to import cotton from nearby districts. As per the advice from Gandhiji, either grow cotton to the required level in each district or import hand-spun yarn from wherever it is found. He also mentioned about George Joseph's participation in Vaikom Satyagraha. Gandhiji had a clear opinion about this issue. Untouchability is a curse; Hindus are having which they have to fight and purify themselves. Gandhiji advised him to support this Movement by way of his writing, not by organizing movement and satyagraha. Gandhiji was reminding George Joseph about the resolution passed by the Congress conference held in Nagpur advised Hindus themselves should be fighting against untouchability. In the letter, Gandhiji mentioned that similar untouchability does exist in the Syrian Christian community as referred to by Mr. Andrews.

Certain communications were happening between the two leaders during the time of Vaikom Satyagraha. This indicates that George Joseph was in regular touch with Gandhiji and he used to take his advice most of the time. On April 11<sup>th</sup> 1924, George Joseph sent a telegram asking for Gandhiji's advice on the way the protest should go forward. The ground situation was, that the police were preventing access and refusing to arrest the Satyagrahis, people were all fasting and approached the front gate of the blocked premises and more and more people were joining every day as the struggle was gaining momentum. Gandhiji sent an immediate telegram reply asking the people to withdraw fasting and asked the Satyagrahis to be arrested by mentioning 'stand or squat in relays with quiet submission till arrested'

After a short telegram, the next day April 12<sup>th</sup> 1924 early morning at 4:30 a.m., Gandhiji again wrote a detailed letter to George mentioning the well-defined limits of fasting. Fasting should not be done against a tyrant as the same would be also a piece of violence for him. In those situations, the approach should be to invite a penalty for disobedience, but one couldn't inflict penalties on themselves, this could be a useful method. Fasting only could be done against a 'lover' not to extort rights but to reform him. Gandhiji had referred to the fasting he did in Bombay and Bardoli of that nature. He was also referred to as General Dyre hates him and regards him as an enemy. This renders it impossible to fast against Dyre.

In continuation, Gandhiji had instructed George to be very patient and wait for the deputation of the Dewan and Maharaja. He had advised to get up a 'monster petition from Orthodox Hindus' who involved in this Movement so far and asked him to observe anyone opposing. His advice to George was to stay away and support from outside in a variety of gentle ways and also to ensure the initiated agitation was not dying down as he had already become popular with his involvement in the Vaikom agitation.

On April 7<sup>th</sup> 1928, Gandhiji enquired about the loss of George's brother-in-law, when he mentioned the same in the letter, he remembered the time when he was about to leave George Joseph's home in Madurai, the kind of attention love, and affection the family shown on him. Gandhiji always remembered the same. These letters explained the kind of friendship between the two leaders.

When Gandhiji was in Yeravda prison on Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 1933, wrote a detailed mail to George Joseph when there was a conflict between both leaders regarding religious favouritism. George was not in alliance with Gandhiji on the topic of inner voice, in the post-Vaikom struggle. In this letter, Gandhiji was trying to explain two important points. The first point was to clarify the distinction between suicide and sacrifice as the same was explained to him by a Roman Catholic priest when Gandhiji was about to start an agitation by fasting. Suicide is a clear form of destruction and sacrifice means risking life, the extent of risk decides the level of sacrifice. Suicide on the other hand is a sin as per all religious faith.

Gandhiji agreed with the concept of George Joseph's 'God's Voice' as God can never be the face of any sin, if they do encourage that's called as devil. George Joseph had sent a copy of the book 'Imitation of Christ' for which Gandhiji had mentioned the book had been given to him by other Roman catholic friends earlier and he had completed reading the book in a single sitting.

There were a few telegram exchanges between Mahadev Desai, a personal secretary to Gandhiji, and Susan during George Joseph's final moment in life. She mentioned in her telegram dated March 5<sup>th</sup> 1938, saying "Joseph was sinking, inform to Babu". In reply, Gandhiji asked Mrs. Joseph to be brave and trust god. He advised Susan not to grieve for any loss, if we do that means we don't trust God as he gives life and takes away, that's all predefined. Gandhiji had reassured Susan to stay with them as he referred to her as his daughter.

Even after the death of George Joseph, Gandhiji was used to stay connected with his family. He sent a mail to Mrs. Joseph on her daughter's wedding and asked why the wedding card was in English and not in Malayalam.

## George Joseph and Gandhiji's Relation regarding the Khadi Issue

George Joseph had his own difference of opinion with Gandhiji on a few political issues, still he would support Gandhiji for various constructive programs, which contains three important elements. They are, the promotion of Khadi, the removal of untouchability and the restoration of communal harmony. Congress could not make much of impact on these programs in rural areas. The activities were planned on Khadi finally resulted in under employment to the rural population and also urban educated population were asked to wear dresses like peasants.

Gandhiji was aware of the imported clothing resulted in impoverishment of Indians and he wanted to arrest this trend by promoting home production of spun and clothing. In 1920, out of total 1570 million imported clothing nearly 600 million – 40% spent on clothing in the soil which exported clothing to the world countries by 100 years earlier. After 7 years of induction of this program by Gandhiji, he seems admitted to Motilal Nehru that the low productivity and high cost of Khadi. George Joseph was trying to point out various socio-economic issues related to the promotion of Khadi in India. The corresponding letter exchanged between the two leaders were really historic at the peak of their uncomfortable time during the National Movement. One such letter has been explained below.

On December 19<sup>th</sup> 1929, Gandhiji had written an article in the news 'Young India' regarding George Joseph's stand of Khadi versus imported clothing. George Joseph did not support Khadi Movement initiated by Gandhiji. And also, he had some ideas regarding the Khaki training to all students and also for the people in the society as this practice was prevalent in UK where he had done his education and fascinated by this idea. He wanted to militarise India as he thought weekly and yearly organised trainings would make people stand straight and speak straight and will be a great enrichment to the life of the people. Gandhiji shared his idea which is opposite to George Joseph's idea of Khaki.

And also, there was a discussion regarding Khadi Movement. George Joseph was totally against the same as he was talking about the total hours the people supposed to spend for weaving clothes and how much they earn and whether this idea of Khadi could provide the clothing for all people in India and he had raised the opinion on the total demand and supply and the volume of import done every year to serve the country. In response to this argument, Gandhiji had specified the time spent by the people are not part of their regular work. They spent some extra time to earn extra money in weaving. Gandhiji was not convinced with George's argument and he had provided all counter arguments for the same. Finally, he mentioned that since George Joseph was not in favour of Khadi program, he did not even provide alternate arrangement.

### Conclusion

The relationship between George Joseph and Mahatma Gandhi was marked by mutual respect, collaboration, and a shared commitment to the Indian freedom struggle. George Joseph was a staunch supporter of Gandhi's methods and philosophies. George Joseph, who participated in the Indian national politics for almost a quarter of a century. George Joseph as a journalist and politician immensely contributed in high-level national politics to define strategies for various national movements. As he was a western

educated barrister, with his thoughts, actions and opinions he made a great impact in national level politics during the time of Indian freedom struggle. George Joseph had frequent correspondence with Gandhiji regarding National movement. George Joseph was one of the first batch of barristers who sacrificed their comforts to engage themselves in nationalist work. He gave a distinctive individuality in his writing. He never hesitated to point out his opinion against his own thought process which is normally fact based. Though he had many ideological clashes between Gandhi, he had maintained cordial relationship with Gandhi. When we look at the history of freedom struggle his contribution was not much appreciated by historians. He has been an unsung freedom fighter whose role didn't come to limelight. Without the role of such unsung freedom fighters, India's freedom wouldn't be possible.

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