

Relevance and Application of Gandhi's Philosophy of Sarvodaya in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The ideal society according to Mahatma Gandhi is a stateless society, a society of enlightened anarchy where social life would become so perfect as to be self-regulated. The pure ideal of Gandhiji is an ideal of philosophical anarchism, a stateless classless society marked by voluntary cooperation. The Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya can be traced to the fundamental teaching of India's spiritual heritage although Gandhi had immediate inspiration from Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' of which the term Sarvodaya is his rendering, Sarvodaya (Sarva and udaya i.e. rise and welfare of all) has been believed like, Ruskin that the socio-economic organization that guarantees the well-being of all the high and low, the rich and poor; the strong and the weak is the only one striving for, what is good for all must also be good for everyone individually. Gandhi's modification of the concept from the welfare of the last (antoydaya) to the welfare of all (Sarvodaya) is profoundly significant.

Keywords: Gandhi, Sarvodaya, Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhian Philosophy, Indian History etc

India for ages has been the sacred land of people, who have shown great reverence for spiritual values. As Swami Vivekananda has rightly described India as the blessed *pujya-bhumi* (holy land) and the land from where came the founders of religions from ancient times deluged the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truths. *'The integration of social, religious, and political changes by individuals and by society as a whole stand as a tribute to the versatility and adaptability of Indian minds and made a critical and unique contribution to the stability of the modern Indian state'*¹. All religions require us to look upon life as an opportunity for self-realization, etymologically, the word 'dharma' is derived from the root 'dhr' which means 'to uphold, to sustain to nourish'. The concept itself may be traced to the 'rta' of the *Rigved* which means both the order of nature and the moral order of man's life, individual as well as collective to bring in a certain measure of mortality. In this sense, dharma is man's inner nature, the greater the approximation of the moral standard, the more truly man realizes his nature and the ultimate spring of hope is the faith in man's reason, goodwill, and sanity. Thus, society acts as the training ground, where an individual can try to

learn the art of self-development through self-discipline, self-sacrificing, social participation values, and along with those spiritual entities that manifest themselves in the course of progressive realization of the fuller stature of our being.

Mahatma Gandhi like every other great thinker of the world was a product of his times, he absorbed the ideas and forces of his times and showed a way to overcome the moral, social, and political maladies, as he once stated *'my own experience has led me to the knowledge that the fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a living law, in obedience to which the whole universe moves. A man without that faith is like a drop thrown out of the ocean bound to perish. Every drop in the ocean shares its majesty and has the honour of giving us the ozone of life'*². The ideal society according to Mahatma Gandhi is a stateless society, a society of enlightened anarchy where social life would become so perfect as to be self-regulated. The pure ideal of Gandhiji is an ideal of philosophical anarchism, a stateless classless society marked by voluntary cooperation.

He placed his immense faith in the moral development of the people as a final solution to what he

considered, the universal oppression of the many, by the few. Gandhi ji said '*I believe in Advaita I believe in the essential unity of man and for that if one man gains spiritually the whole world gains with him and if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent*³. Gandhi believed, that no society can be built on a denial of individual freedom. In reality, even those who do not believe in the liberty of the individual, believe in their own. He thus believed that the personal good is thus inseparably connected with the common good or welfare of all. Gandhi ji further observed '*willing submission to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society both the individual and the society, society of which one is a member*⁴. As an individual, according to him, is that our actions should be responsible enough to contribute to society equally, as we contribute to our well-being. Gandhiji pleaded '*The source of moral force is the human heart. It comes from the determination to do something and sacrifice something for the sake of the human cause*⁵. In this way, he tried to appeal to people to have a broader outlook that would eventually prepare them for any sacrifice toward the development of our society. He further states that '*the world teaches us there are two opposing forces which are wholly different in kind*⁶. While discussing them he says '*The one is the moral or the spiritual force, the other is the physical or material force*⁷.

The Gandhian philosophy of *Sarvodaya* can be traced to the fundamental teaching of India's spiritual heritage although Gandhi had immediate inspiration from Ruskin's '*Unto This Last*' of which the term *Sarvodaya* is his rendering, *Sarvodaya* (*Sarva* and *udaya* i.e. rise and welfare of all) has been believed like, Ruskin that the socio-economic organization that guarantees the well-being of all the high and low, the rich and poor; the strong and the weak is the only one striving for, what is good for all must also be good for everyone individually. Gandhi's modification of the concept from the welfare of the last (*antoydaya*) to the welfare of all (*Sarvodaya*) is profoundly significant. In another course, it appears that he was also influenced and must have borrowed the word '*Sarvodaya*' from a Jaina scripture written by Acharya Samanta Bhadra who lived about two thousand years ago.

Jaina Acharya stated

*Sarvpadam antakaram nirantam,
Sarvodayam, tithamidam, tavaiva.*

Sarva as a connotation is explained that unless and until the boundary between me and the world breaks down and the well-being of the individual is seen to be inextricably connected with the well-being of all, there can be no end to misery in this world.

Udaya means rising or reaching one's aim. It implies all-around well-being or perfection. An integrated spiritual outlook, a ceaseless endeavour to convert every human activity into a means for spiritual elevation, is the key to the life and teaching of Gandhi.

While identifying the concept of *Sarvodaya*, he tries to imply it with his political thought process as he rightly observes '*The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man's swaraj*'. '*I have not the slightest doubt that swaraj is not the purna swaraj until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it*⁸. His notion of *purna swaraj* was not isolated independence, but healthy and dignified interdependence. It should be understood that the application of *Sarvodaya* was not just a social and spiritual emancipation, but also had some political undertones. The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* takes up the Gandhian synthesis and tries to work out the implications of their ideas at more critical and analytical levels. It has tried to incorporate some ideas from western socialist and political philosophers. The word *Sarvodaya* epitomizes his whole social philosophy which aims at the attainment of mental prosperity (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual realization (*nishreyasa*). In the first place, the goal of *Sarvodaya* is not happiness, but all-around well-being or goodness. Thus, the term *Sarvodaya* has the same meaning as the concept *Sarvabhutahita* or the good of all living beings, advocated in the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Sarvodaya* aims for the universal good i.e. *Lokaniti* and also '*Sarvadharmā – Samantra*' of mankind in the pursuit of its universal ideal. *If we take care of means we are bound to reach the end sooner or later*⁹. The *Sarvodaya* ideal of sacrifice is both *tattvatyagam* and *dhana-tyagam* which denotes the involuntary surrender of man and his possessions.

If Gandhism was mainly a synthesis of moral intuitions and experiences, then the *Sarvodaya* philosophy

tries to build a synthesis of the theoretical abstractions and political and economic generalizations. Gandhiji wanted the sub-ordination of political and social consideration to moral consideration. *Sarvodaya* was regarded as the highest goal for all. *Sarvodaya* ideology is considered a creative blend of all humanistic and altruistic tendencies of the age. It can however be interpreted in terms of an integrated social philosophy in the age of crisis. *Sarvodaya* is not passive resistance to evil as much as the positive assimilation of good. It is a creative synthesis of individual happiness and social good. It is indeed considered the integrated social philosophy which redeems society. It is considered a synthetic philosophy of life because it includes in its scope all known philosophies, both human and social. All other absolute philosophies are its parts they exist as infinitesimals. The summing up of infinite members of these infinitesimals is ordinarily viewed as the political aim of *Sarvodaya*. However, the true ideal of *Sarvodaya* is not mere summation or integration of the diverse virtues, but their inherent application towards the service of man to become a real man. Gandhi was imbued with this tradition of spiritual Swaraj, but he applied it to a secular condition in a unique way. His social and economic objective of *Sarvodaya*, the good of all was the outcome of his spiritual outlook in life.

Sarvodaya is predominantly a spiritual activity participation which is different from participation in material goods. It is not something that a few can gain or enjoy to the exclusion of others. It is essentially an activity in which all must partake if it is to amount to a complete realization of the faculties of the human soul. The *Sarvodaya* philosophy gives primacy to the individual. In an age when the place of the individual is being threatened and the specter of total mass control is raised at every time. Gandhi insisted that no power on earth can make a man do a thing against his free will. *Sarvodaya* is both an all-comprehensive and inclusive ideology. It pervades every aspect of society, economic, ethical moral, and religious. In the ancient economic thought of India, the center of activities was a man and not wealth, and economics and ethics were interdependent. Gandhi wanted in modern times that rich men to hold their wealth in trust for the poor or give it up for them. He wanted that the rich should

become trustees of their surplus wealth for the good of society. Thus, society was to be regarded only as an extension of the family. He addressed it once in the following way *'We have to realize that if wealth accumulates in the hands of any, it is not due to his efforts alone. It is due to the collective effort of all and so it belongs to all in society.* To those who are already wealthy or would not shed their desire for wealth, Gandhi advised that they should use their wealth for service. In short, the real implication of equal distribution is that man must have the wherewithal to supply his essential and natural needs. So, the real meaning of economic equality is *to each according to his needs.*

Gandhi's conception of *Sarvodaya* becomes significant against the background of the spiritual philosophy of India to the modern world professing atheism, vitalism, agnosticism, mechanism, and realism. Gandhiji tried to attempt to bring into focus the substantive rationality of the ancient religion and its moral tenets. The ideal society is characterized by a respect for individual liberty and free growth and a simultaneous respect for the need, efficiency, solidarity, natural growth, and perfection of the corporate being, the society or nation. For Gandhi, society must provide opportunities for the maximum growth of the individual and the final decision as to what constitutes that growth. *Sarvodaya* teaches us a living principle of equal advantages. The economic needs of man and his non-economic pursuit are well apportioned in *Sarvodayan* sociology. Gandhiji tried to evolve a socio-economic system that would contain the indigenous ways of life and value system. Another aspect of Gandhian thought relates to economic equality which is the master key to non-violent independence *'Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands, is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand and leveling up of semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is impossible 'so long as millions persist'*¹⁰. Gandhiji observed *'mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accompanied. It is evil when there are more hands, than required for the work, as in the case of India'*¹¹.

Industrialization on a mass scale Gandhiji holds the view will necessarily lead to the passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition are marketing¹². Gandhiji wanted to persuade the capitalists to run their enterprises as trustees in the interest not only of themselves and their fellow owners but of society at large. In the hand-spinning, Gandhiji saw not only the economic salvation of India but also an answer to the psychological and political problems of the nationalist movement. Furthermore, he felt that khadi was a potent instrument of mass-up life and mass education. He advocated production by masses as against mass production through decentralization.

As Vinoba Bhave of his staunch disciple and his first individual satyagrahi had explained *Satyagraha* as

Politics + Science = Annihilation

Spirituality + Science = Sarvodaya.

The implication here is that, if scientific knowledge is misused by power politics, it would endanger the very existence of man on this planet, and on other hand, if scientific knowledge is combined with spiritual wisdom, it will bring peace on earth and goodwill amongst the mankind, by establishing a peaceful society i.e. Sarvodaya. The Gandhian idea of Sarvodaya refuses to be satisfied with the progress and well-being only of a particular class or nation. It advocates the good and the emancipation of all living beings i.e. 'Sarvabhutahita'. Gandhiji wanted that men should affirm the higher values within the social and political order and in the process reshape the society and the state. The objective of man's life should be in pursuit of truth. The overall transformation of the entire race of mankind at all levels of human existence is the goal of Sarvodaya's ideology. Gandhiji implies that the love of all is to share a lot with the poorest and the lowliest. He was an apostle of humanitarianism to whom the poor were 'Daridra Narayan' (God in the guise of the poor) and their services were the best worship of God. He declared that God's realization was to be achieved through the service of afflicted humanity and that is what Sarvodaya stands for.

Gandhiji's conception of society is broadly described as Sarvodaya. He envisages a society based on dharma which is free from Seven Social Evils.

- *Politics without Principles*
- *Wealth without Work*
- *Pleasure without Conscience*
- *Knowledge without Character*
- *Commence without Morals*
- *Science without Humanity*
- *Worship without Sacrifice.*

According to Gandhiji, rights flow from duties and duties confer rights. He explained that *if all simply insisted on rights and no duties, there would be utter confusion and chaos. If instead of insisting on rights everyone does his duty, there will immediately be the rule of order established among men*¹³. Gandhiji held a strong view that men are wealth, not gold and silver, and that the country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings. As he said in a famous article on the Ahmadabad industry in the Harijan newspaper, *I am not concerned with the name I call it the minimum wage, if expression sounds the sweeter, living wage to my mind is the most accurate description for the irreducible wage. And the acceptance of the principle of a living wage implies an examination of what may be included in it. They touch the very existence of labor, its efficiency depends very largely upon the right kind of living, and the greater the efficiency, the greater the possibility of enhanced profits*¹⁴. Gandhi did not want to produce a dead equality where every person becomes or is rendered capable of using his ability to the utmost possible extent, as he felt, for such a society carries with it the seeds of ultimate destruction. The Sarvodaya movement on account of Gandhiji's lead has shown some concern with the problem of trusteeship, but this concept has been little developed since Gandhiji's time except in the case of landed property. Shri. Vinoba Bhave had said *'The Bhoodan and other daan movements are only a lever. In the beginning, this is a process of liberating oneself from attachments and temptations, he states I call it Samarpana or dedication, a dedication to establish 'gram raj' and produce a picture of Sarvodaya*¹⁵. Bhoodan and Gram dan are primarily movements for changing the land system of the country i.e., abolishing private property in land and developing completely its production potential through the efforts of the community.

Gandhiji resolutely championed the freedom of his country and moral uplift. Gandhiji, therefore, is essentially a practical idealist. He was not merely a visionary. As he once said *the principle of Swadeshi and the universalizing of Khadi or the spinning wheel enable the crores of our semi-starved countrymen to live*¹⁶. Khadi has been conceived as the image of Swadeshi. He contained in himself the combination that humanity most needs, not the men of action driven by the ideas, the pragmatist, stirred by half-conscience exaltation from the idealistic, almost the mystic side of nature, but the leader who has been able to execute his vision in the higher terms of human power and knowledge. Gandhiji was a protagonist, in the concept of the common good of all. As a religious man, he believed in the spiritual unity and quality of mankind, his idea was to promote the autonomy of the village as the basic unit of the national economy, which has to be provided so that it may plan production, fully develop the resources and produce its leaders who may work for the people and be accountable to them. In short, *Sarvodaya* is not prepared to sacrifice individual liberty with the above ideas, *Sarvodaya* seeks to build up a society with a bias towards rural civilization in which industries would be as self-sufficient as possible. The call of the age is to rise into a higher consciousness from which alone man can learn to look upon and use material objects not as material in themselves, but as things instinct with the spirit.

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