

Social philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi

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The Social Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is a radically transformed humanity to reconstruct human society with a positive socio-economic force. It is a new dynamic philosophy popularly known as '*Sarvodaya*' seeks to build a society having based on the foundations of old spiritual and moral values of India and attempts to meet the challenge of the contemporary problems. It envisages a well balanced development of the nation and there will be no difference between privileged and under-privileged. There is no any dogmas in this philosophy. "The philosophy of *Sarvodaya* is not a set of dogmas, in its essence, it is compatible with an attempt of the spirit to prevail over matter and to socialize itself."¹ It is a symbol of Platonic detachment and Gita's Anasakti. ¹

Gandhi found the idea of '*sarvodaya*' from the Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Gita and Koran and extended its meaning and application. After the death of Gandhi his followers known as '*Sarvodaya school*' decided to form an organization named '*Satyagraha Samaj*'. The central figure of this school of thought was Vinoba Bhave and its philosophy was known as *sarvodaya* Philosophy.² The word '*Sarvodaya*' is originated from Sanskrit which is comprised of '*Sarva*' means all and '*Udaya*' means rising. This means welfare of all or the rising of all living beings.³ The word '*Sarvodaya*' appeared in the form of a title of John Ruskin's book '*Unto The Last*'.⁴ It was a title of series of nine articles written by Gandhi and it was published in *Gujrati* in 1908.⁵ *Sarvodaya* includes all people irrespective of caste, class, creed and religion. According to Acharya Vinoba Bhave, *Sarvodaya* means making all people happy by removing poverty and suffering of the people with the help scientific knowledge. It is a state or order full with divinity, kindness, and equality. *Sarvodaya* means welfare and prosperity of all and all must progress without collision of interest.⁶ *Sarvodaya* is a concept stands on self-sacrifice and self-less service. Gandhi had immediate inspiration from Ruskin's book '*Unto the Last*' which means uplift of the last and received the ideals of human welfare.⁷

Gandhi was deeply influenced by Leo Tolstoy's book 'The Kingdom of God is Within You' and his essay 'Christianity and Patriotism'. Tolstoy and Gandhi both firmly believed that the force of love is the solution of all human problem. According to them Non-violence could cure all social maladies and establish peace on the earth. The ideology of *Sarvodaya* has a higher significance as the idea is derived from the ideal of '*Niskam karma*' of the Bhagabat Gita. Gandhi says: 'self-realization' and its means is the theme of the Gita'⁸ The Gita preaches the message of the welfare of all through '*sarvadharma*' and '*sarvabhutahita*' –the good of all beings. The first verse of *Isavayopanishad* deals with the principles of equality and fraternity, non-exploitation, non-acquisitiveness and service to the society. Gandhi accepted this ideology from *Isavayopanishad* --the Universal brotherhood of all living beings.⁹

Gandhi was highly influenced by the Buddhist philosophy which preached universal love and the end of all sufferings through the adoption of '*majjhim pantha*' and in pursuance of eight folded path. Lord Buddha stressed on purity of means and Gandhi constantly maintained relationship between pure means and noble end.¹⁰ The main principle of Jainism is the welfare of all creatures through the adoption of '*ahimsa*'. Gandhi was influenced by the Jain philosophy in establishing *sarvodaya*. The holy Koran convinced Gandhi and he declares, 'the point of brotherhood is manifested in no other religion as clearly as in Islam'. According to him the basis of Islam is not violence.¹¹

Gandhi attempted to make synthesis of the essence of Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity and the teachings of the great prophets and the *sarvodaya* was the implication of their ideas at more critical and analytical levels. 83. In *Sarvodaya* society there will be no exploitation, discrimination, inequality and violence. *Sarvodaya* society is considered by Gandhi to be free from evils like 'politics without principle' 'wealth without work' 'knowledge without character' 'commerce without morals' 'science without mankind' and 'service without sacrifice'.¹² A good social order could be established if every individual is imbued with the spirit of love, tolerance, kindness, fearlessness, non-violence as all these are individual and social virtues. Every individual should follow the principle of giving not taking and should be ready to sacrifice happiness for the sake of others. In this way a new social order based on equality, freedom, justice, fraternity could be established. A sense of social obligation could be developed through proper education. Gandhi had set up his first *Sarvodaya* community on a farm near

Durban and called it Phoenix in 1904 and another in Johannesburg named after Leo Tolstoy. According to Gandhi non-violence is the law of life. Self sacrifice for the happiness of others is the foundation of an ideal society. A society built on complete *ahimsa* is the purest anarchy. 13

An Ideal society will be marked by the following characteristics. 14

1. There should be no coercive state power and social cohesion should be maintained through the citizens' sense of social obligation.
2. The villages or rural settlements are self sufficient in which wants are few. In social, civil and economic activity co-operation, conservation and decentralization are the norms of social governance.
3. All products should be agriculture based and they should be based on cottage industries. There will be a craft in the center of education and learning by doing should be given much importance.
4. There should be three ruling principles namely, Village self sufficiency, bread labour (winning one's bread through work done by one's body labour), and non-possession (acquiring or using the minimum consumption of articles).
5. Village Panchayat should deal with the disputes or conflicts arising out of power, property or possession.

On his arrival in India from South Africa Gandhiji started his constructive work programme. The programmes are khadi, Communal amity, removal of untouchability, promotion of village industries, village sanitation and basic education. Some organizations were established for these constructive work. they were: All India Harijan sevak Sangh, Hindustani Pracheer Sabha, Hindustani tamili Sangh, All India spinners association and Akhil Bharat Sewa Sangh. According to Gandhiji an ideal Society is the sarvodaya society though an ideal is never fully realized in life. 15

The political order of an ideal society is 'Lokniti' instead of 'Rajniti'. 'Lokniti' in the sense of a way of life indicates self regulation of individual conduct and good habit on one's initiatives for the well being of all. Gandhian social order envisages the freedom of action of man and least interference of police and military. People are the custodians of the supreme power in the state. Man's freedom of action will bring a desired social change.⁸⁸ All people must train themselves for self-rule, believe in the divinity of every individual strive for the welfare of all people.¹⁶

Gandhi tried to adopt an integral approach to solve human problems . He wanted to reduce economics to terms of morality, religion and spirituality. According to him economics of a society is not a different entity to morality . Economics should not hurt moral well being of people . without morality the economic order of a society is immoral and sinful.¹⁷ True economics of a society “ stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest and is indispensable for decent life”¹⁸ Gandhian social order based on some economic values. It is based on sanctity of labour, self sufficiency, Human values, swadeshi, decentralization, and nationalization of basic industries. According to Dr. Rajendra Prasad Gandhian social order represents an aspiration “ towards a society based on truth and non-violence in which there will be no distinction of caste or creed , no opportunity for exploitation and full scope for development both for individuals as well as groups.”¹⁹

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