

# THE GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF SARVODAYA (SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY) IN SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** Gandhi had a wide view of a society. The meaning of the term *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) makes it clear to us. That means he never wants to bring welfare to particular people of society instead his welfare includes all the people. His concept of *Sarvodaya* society is not rapidly formed in his mind but it is outcome of his understanding of society and values from *Bhagavad Gita*, Leo Tolstoy and other religions. I think that Gandhi can be described as a social scientist in the light of this chapter. As scientist uses various methods for scientific activity, in the same way, understanding the condition of society he introduces certain methods to transform Indian society onto *Sarvodaya* society. And it is the same case with the all nations. So Gandhi is a social scientist to some extent. Apart from this, we see how a society should be developed economically, socially, politically, religiously, and morally. He viewed the function of existing state as evil which would hardly permit a new social order of his dream. He wanted to have eradication of social evils. He opined for a cooperative federation of village republics. He pointed the role of majority and minority as well. He viewed his class less society with welfare of all sections of people, the poor, the downtrodden, the exploited, and the least. He had the ideal of *Sarvodaya* of social uplift, economic emancipation and moral resurrection for all.

**1. Introduction:** This paper is all about ideal society of *Sarvodaya*<sup>1</sup> by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It mainly deals with condition of Indian society during the time of Gandhi. We also see the way that Gandhi tried to bring an end to those troubles through his concept of *Sarvodaya*, the welfare of all. We would get a general understanding of meaning and starting of *Sarvodaya*. At the same time, we come across those factors which influenced Gandhi deeply in various ways. This paper ends with Gandhian understandings of *Sarvodaya*. Under this title, we can see the way he forms his view of ideal society of *Sarvodaya*. Gandhi has his vision of the future India that vision is a new social order which is different from the capitalist, socialist, communist order of society. That is a non-violent society, a society based on love and human values, decentralized self government, non-exploitative, cooperative society, and finally Gandhi gives the name to it that is *Sarvodaya* society which mainly aims at welfare of all.

**1.1 Gandhian understanding of *Sarvodaya*:** Gandhi can be understood as social reformer because he knew the way that a society could be developed. The progress of any society depends upon economic equality, the equality of women, the eradication of discrepancy between urban and rural areas etc. more than that, for him education was an important factor for development. For Gandhi, *Varna* system, eradication of untouchability, equal status of women, universal brotherhood were the foundations of social and cultural order in a society. In following pages, we deal with them in detailed manner. *Varna* is a Sanskrit term derived from the root 'vr' which means to cover and it literally means colour. As I mentioned earlier, Gandhi was against *jati* or caste. For him *Varna* is predetermination of the choice of man's profession. *Varnashrama* system is all about equality, dignity, and it wipes out distinction of high and low. Gandhi wanted to have such system for establishment of welfare of all in a society. As a result there would be division of labor, cooperation and social consciousness among the people. The untouchability is a greatest evil that has entered into Indian society as well as Hinduism. Socially it has arisen from the desire of the so-called superior classes to isolate themselves from those whom they regarded as inferior.

<sup>1</sup> The word *Sarvodaya* means 'welfare of all' which will be explained in detail in section 1.3

For Gandhi, it can be removed from our society in two ways. One of them is to change the heart of the people. And latter one is possible through force of law by the government. Economic equality is another factor for wiping this discrimination. So untouchables should be educated and given training to start industries so that they may be lifted up and realize their strength and stand on their own legs. For him, rejection of Hinduism is not at all a solution for removing untouchability, because it is not part of Hinduism. Above all, Gandhi believes that the real cure lies in the change of the heart of the people. In fact Gandhi realized it deeply and addressed the untouchables as *Harijans*. Gandhi had been well aware of the need for improving the status of women in Indian society. He described women as the incarnation of *Ahimsa* which meant infinite love. Gandhi also views female sex as nobler sex and not as the weaker sex. She as mother shows greater capacity for love than man and is embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, faith and knowledge. In his view no woman should be treated as an object of sexual pleasure and a child manufacturing machine. He was critical about child marriage, enforced widowhood, dowry system, *sati* etc. because they devalue women and perpetuate their subordination. He was in support of women in remarriage. He had a well understanding of Sarvodaya in the educational and political fields. In the case of education, Gandhi aimed at integral human development. So it is a process from one's birth to death. He also believes that education draws out the faculties of the student so as to enable him or her to solve correctly the problems of life. It also provides opportunities for self expression and growth as well. He also suggests 'a new education method' which falls into three stages.<sup>2</sup> It is all about the way how a child is to be educated. This method consists of education as play (first stage), basic education and division of school education, learning by doing that aims at dignity of labor, self-respect, self-reliance (second stage) and adult education that helps citizens to be responsible persons in society and work for the welfare of society (third stage). Therefore we can assume that Gandhi had an excellent insight of education that is person oriented and his vital development. Gandhi wanted to have universal brotherhood. That is why for him love has no boundary his nationalism includes love of all nations of earth irrespective of creed. He envisaged a world society in which people live in love and friendship and the goal of *Sarvodaya* is actualization of universal brotherhood and friendship. In Gandhian view, *Sarvodaya* society promotes national integration, religious coexistence, universal brotherhood and world peace.

Gandhi was a politician par excellence and regarded political activity as a part of the effort of *moksha* or a stage in his journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace.<sup>3</sup> He also had a mental picture of a politician who identify himself with people by being with them and work for them. This is what he meant by democratic spirit of brotherhood in politics. The *Sarvodaya* political order is based on certain fundamental assumptions. It refers to equality of all people, being custodians of the state, decentralization of political power, self rule and work for welfare of all. Above all, *Sarvodaya* society is based on two fundamental principles namely truth and non-violence. In politics, he rejected democratic principle of majority rule and supported the minority as well. In political field his aim was to establish *swaraj* (self rule) in India.<sup>4</sup> It is of two types: personal and national. By personal rule we mean ruling over one self and it is necessary condition to attain self government on national level. National self rule means possessing fitness by nation to rule over itself like an individual is fit to eat and so on. Gandhi's *swaraj* also stands for poor man's *swaraj* where there is no discrimination and partialities. This kind of *swaraj* is called *purna swaraj* by Gandhi. In politics, He advocated the theory of Panchayat Raj that stands for a village republic where full powers are exercised by the people. It also aimed at democratic decentralization of economic and political powers into grass root level and all round development of village. Gandhi visualizes every village would be republic or Panchayat having full powers.

Gandhi was not an economist but he had awareness of socio-economic condition of Indian society. So he wants to formulate an economic constitution for India and world where no one suffers from lack of basic needs. Gandhian economic understanding is all about simplicity of life, self sufficiency, cooperation, self sufficient village unit, nationalization on basic industries, *swadeshi* and theory of

<sup>2</sup> Paul Vellarackal, *Sarvodaya*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010), 100.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Vellarackal, *Sarvodaya*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010), 105.

<sup>4</sup> K.M. Rathnam Chetty, *Sarvodaya and Freedom*, (Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1991), 69.

trusteeship. For Gandhi, everyone should lead a simple life. He not only said but also practiced it in his life by wearing dress like the poorest person and advocating the use of *khadi*.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi never mind what a person has instead what a person is. Thus we see currently people run after money and material things failing to understand who they are. By simplicity he never means poverty or asceticism, rather simplicity of life is not to be luxurious and pompous. In his view, by giving up unnecessary expenditure, having a simple life style, washing one's own clothes are means to simplify one's life. *Sarvodaya* economic system runs on cooperative living. For him there is sweetness in cooperation, there is no one who is weak or strong among those cooperates; there is no feeling of mine or thine. And they all are cooperators. Gandhi wanted to have cooperative effort in agriculture. Such farming would be bringing large scale of production and a mean of removing poverty and laziness from the people. By economic equality, Gandhi means equal sharing of good to fulfill the basic needs of every individual. Through this he aimed at equalization of social status of all as well. In short, we can say that Gandhi wants everyone to have enough to meet his or her needs. Before the arrival of industry civilization or factory civilization, India maintained equality with agricultural economy. Gandhi was against it because the use of machinery creates a lot of problems especially unemployment of the poor. But he was in favor of industrialization if only it utilizes man-power fully. So we can say that Gandhi stands for production by the mass rather than mass production and it should give importance for human beings and human values. The word *swadeshi* comes from two words *swa* and *desh*. *Swa* means one's own and *desh* means the total cultural and natural environment of individual so it means to belong to one's own country.<sup>6</sup> Through *swadeshi* he aimed at revival of home industries and handicrafts of village in India. Trusteeship is a theory proposed by Gandhi. A trustee is a person who manages the property of a community. This theory is all about the voluntary sharing of riches, as a solution to the unequal distribution of wealth. There are four ethico-economic principles of trusteeship as the basis for all economic organization. They are non-possession, non-exploitation, bread labor, and equality of rewards. Philosophically, it is economic conscience by which an individual takes into account not only his own interest but also the interests of others. His doctrine points to fact that human beings are all trustees of God's creation and natural resources must be used for the needs of all. God alone has the right to absolute ownership. He has entrusted His things to us to be utilized to serve needs of everyone. Thus we can state that the universal distribution of the goods of the earth is the main principle of his theory.

Gandhi introduces *Satya* and *Ahimsa* as fundamental moral principle of human actions. In order that an act is moral one, he suggests five moral principles. Among them *Satya* and *Ahimsa* are most important ones. The Sanskrit word *Satya* means 'truth' and Gandhi understands it as essential vow to attain God's realization. The word truth comes from Sanskrit word, *sat* which means 'being' thus, truth means 'that which exists'. According to him, truth is a law operating in the universe. And God alone is that law which governs all life. So we can say that Gandhi identifies God with truth. *Satyagraha* means, holding on to truth. It is a moral weapon to convert the opponent. Its goal is to overcome evil by good, hatred by love, untruth by truth and violence by non violence. *Satyagraha* also consists of non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, boycott, *hartal*, strikes, and *hijarat* etc. thus we can say that *Satyagraha* is action oriented. *Ahimsa* means non injury. The positive meaning of it is love which includes love or the evildoers. It is greatest love for all beings shown in one's thoughts and actions. For him power of *Ahimsa* is greater than the power of intellect so it is self acting force which comes from inner soul of person. It is the greatest force known to humankind. So we can say that *Ahimsa* includes not injuring any living beings physically, mentally in thoughts, speech or actions. In the case of religion, we see that Gandhi was concerned firstly with defending the individual's right to believe in his own faith as long as it comes conflict with morality.

For him, *Sarvodaya* society is centered on God or it is Theo-centric in nature. God is the *summum bonum* of human life. That is why he says "a man may live without eating for days on end he doesn't live

<sup>5</sup> The word *khadi* means hand-spinning, hand-spun cloth. Paul Vellarackal, *Sarvodaya*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Vellarackal, *Sarvodaya*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010), 90.

without worship for a single minute.”<sup>7</sup> Only God believing individuals can give birth to a *Sarvodaya* society. And belief in only one God is cornerstone of *Sarvodaya* society. He also gives importance for all human beings because God dwells in all human beings. Now we can understand that Gandhi sees human beings not with physical eye, but with a divine insight or new vision. So the ultimate goal of human *Sarvodaya* society is anthropocentric because it aims integral welfare of all, in mutual acceptance, respect and sharing. In his view religion is a way of life that means it should influence all realms of human beings such as spiritual, mental, emotional and cultural realm of life. Since all religions aim at moral elevation man based on certain ethical principles, Gandhi considers morality as essence of all religions. For Gandhi, law of love (*Ahimsa*) is the supreme moral law. Since *Ahimsa* is the love of others, and love is manifested in service so, in Gandhian view we can say that the highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind. Religious understanding of Gandhi can be sum up in this way. He identified ultimate reality with truth his approach was all-pervasive rather than compartmental.

#### References:

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2. Vellarackal, Paul, *Sarvodaya*, Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010.

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Vellarackal, *Sarvodaya*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2010), 114.