

The Sarvodaya Movement

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ABSTRACT

The Gandhian Sarvodaya is an alternative to Western Socialism. It aims at the formation of a classless society and the destruction of the differences between the rich and the poor, it encourages individual labour, it encourages production by making use of manual labour and machines system of without hindrance to individual initiative and rural industries, it confirms minimum wage to all, it aims at the utilisation of private property and individual talent in excess of basic necessity as a trust for the public welfare, it is a social order in where all will work, it is a political system in which differences were resolved by discussion and it desires everyone to have faith in God and do service to people, children of God.

Keywords: Sarvodaya, Truth, Non-violence, Western Socialism, Marxian Communism, Trusteeship, Village panchayat, Industries

Introduction

The term Sarvodaya which means “The welfare of all” was coined by Mahatma Gandhi. To denote the ideal, social and economic order which he desired to be established in India, as well as in the other parts of the world. At first he used it as the title of the Gujarati translation of the book “Unto This Last” written by John Ruskin. He experimented with Ruskinian Socialism. For example he fixed the same wage for with all who worked in his farm irrespective of colour or nationality. Gandhiji was influenced by socialistic ideas coupled with his ideals of Truth and Non-violence shaped his final ideal called Sarvodaya.

“Sarvodaya” is the Gandhian alternative to Western Socialism and Marxian Communism. Like all socialists he was also against private property, inequality of income and exploitation of the weak by the Strong. But he differed from Western Socialists only in the means that are to be used in achieving the ideals. He was essentially a man of religion and so his ideals were surcharged with ethical and religious principles. He envisaged a thorough change in the existing social order, economic organisation, political system and cultural values. All these revolutionary ideas of Gandhiji are denoted by the single term Sarvodaya.

Classless Society

Gandhiji wanted to establish a classless society, in which the people would be neither poor nor rich. He was against the capitalist system where wealth is accumulated in the hands of few persons. His goal was Sarvodaya, the welfare of all and this included not only the poor and the weak but also the capitalist and the landlord. The capitalist must swear not to use his

wealth for his personal ends but to spend for the society. The landlord must voluntarily give up his lands to the poor. The weaker sections must try to change the hearts of their masters by non-violent non-co-operation. The new social order must be based on truth and non-violence.

Human Labour

Gandhiji was against the use of machinery, large scale production, industrialisation and urbanisation vehemently. In his ideal state the villages would dominate the cities. Village industries would replace large scale industries. Machines would be used in the minimum. According to him large industries lead to mass unemployment in villages any exploitation of the weak by the strong.

He was a great advocate of manual labour. According to him each one must physically work and earn his livelihood. One should take up agriculture, weaving, Spinning, carpentry, smithy or any other work which needs manual labour. No worker is inferior to the other worker. Whether one does mental or manual work, it is the same and the wages must be equal.

According to him all riches, material and intellectual, belonged only to God, and could be held by the individual as a trust. According to Gandhi “God alone is the sovereign of the material world. Humans may enjoy it as its trustees, renouncing any claim to absolute ownership”

Trusteeship Principle

It is not by violent revolution or by State coercion. Social change brought about by force will not be permanent. Therefore he advocated the principle of Trusteeship, for effecting a peaceful change. One who acquires more wealth by chance he must consider himself as a trustee of the surplus wealth, holding his riches on behalf of the poor. He could increase his wealth not for his own sake but for the sake of the nation. The state will allow him to take a commission for the services rendered to the society. After the death of a trustee, his son may succeed to his trusteeship.

If a capitalist does not behave as a trustee, the exploited people may adopt non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience to change the heart of the rich man. Thus Gandhi never adopted a hostile attitude towards emerging modern industries in India and rather advocated the concept of trusteeship wherein the capitalists were held as trustees for workers. In later years, Gandhi did try to give concrete shape to his social economic ideals by taking up the programme of Khadi, village reconstruction, welfare of Harijans, specially focusing on the abolition of evil practices of Untouchability.

New Political System

In the political field also Gandhiji had novel ideas. He was not in favour of a monolithic state with enormous powers to control the individual. He was in favour of tiny village republics. He wanted every village to be self-sufficient. He dreamt of the Panchayat Raj in which village Panchayats would administer the affairs of the village without external pressures. Villages should also settle all the cases whether civil or criminal in Panchayat Courts. The village lands must be possessed in common by the village panchayat. Every villager must work for the village and not for himself. He should get a wage which would be equal to his elemental need. The villagers should use only non-violent methods such as non-co-operation and Satyagraha to achieve orderly civil life and also defence against external forces. Small autonomous village republics with small industries and agriculture were the dream of Gandhiji.

Conclusion

Gandhiji's ideology, teachings and principles still have great relevance in socio-economic and political life of both the Indians and people across the globe by virtue of their universality and concern for the entire humanity. As contemporary society is a fragmented and polarised society with an absence of a basic consensus, in such scenario Gandhiji's prescription of tolerance and mutual respect is just more than relevant in today times. Today, when the whole world is facing crisis in terms of social, economic and environmental challenges such as poverty, racial discrimination, social disharmony, violence, terrorism, conflict, crime, religious bigotry, ethnic discord, communal frenzy, environmental degradation, pollution, global warming, and so forth, Gandhian philosophy can emerge as a game changer to provide equitable solution to all these issues and help in the providing an effective panacea for eliminating and eradicating the ills and evils of all these social and economic challenges that afflict contemporary societies and politics throughout the world. Through Gandhian techniques of Sarvodaya and decentralisation, the moral compass of today's degenerated politics can be effectively shifted back in the righteous direction of equitable and sustainable development along with good governance. It, therefore, seems that Gandhian philosophy is more relevant today than yesterday and will continue to have relevance throughout the coming ages.

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