

Gandhian Philosophy of Sarvodaya: A Critical Study

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Abstract: *The world has witnessed the propagation, experimentation and implementation of various socio - economic concepts and principles from time to time. We have a very fine theory of Sarvodaya born out of the rich experiences of a practical idealist Mahatma Gandhi – though it received only less applause from the world. Sarvodaya believes in the survival and development of all. It is an all around development of all people irrespective of class, creed, religion of caste.*

Keywords: Sarvodaya, Universal brotherhood, kingdom of God

1. Gandhian Philosophy of Sarvodaya : A Critical Study

The present world is full of Chaos and confusion, because everybody is interested in filling his own belly. Man is utterly selfish. Nobody has time to listen to others. The fire of hatred is burning in the world internally but it is not visible outwardly. There is tension all around.

Now the question arises as to what should be the way out of this danger of Chaos and confusion? In the words of Mahatma Gandhi there is only one way to solve this problem. That is to understand and cultivate the ideals of Sarvodaya philosophy. In other words, the happiness of human life lies in the application of the Sarvodaya ideals.

2. Notion of Sarvodaya

The germs of Sarvodaya can be found in the ancient civilization of the world. Because from the very beginning of the civilization man has given prime importance to his well-being. The Rishis and Maharshis of the past preached the well being of all. They preached that if anybody wanted to make himself happy, he should think about the happiness of others first.

Although the term ‘Sarvodaya’ was used for the first time by a Jaina thinker “Samant- bhadra, but its meaning was not very clear at that time. But Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, gave a concrete form to this movement. He is the real architect of the Sarvodaya movement. “It is an extension of the work that Gandhiji was himself doing in India, a work which was interrupted by his assassination” [1].

3. Etymology and Meaning of Sarvodaya

The word Sarvodaya is Sanskrit in origin. It is a compound of two words “Sarva” which means “all “ and “Udaya” means “Welfare” or “upliftment”. Thus the etymological meaning of Sarvodaya is the welfare of all. In the words of Gandhi, “the welfare of all should be the aim of all human activities” [2] It is our highest and the Sammaum bonum. It is the welfare not only of men but also of animals and even of the natural world. “In Sarvodaya society, there is so scope for exploitation, discrimination, inequality and violence. It

seeks for the realization of a self – sufficient social order that would put an end to economic and political dependence” [3].

Gandhi’s Sarvodaya aimed at an all – round development or welfare of man as a whole. This all - round development or welfare includes man’s social, political, economic, spiritual etc. It was really with this ideal of Sarvodaya in view, that Gandhi fought for the freedom of the Indian people. It is considered as “an unparalleled endeavour of men for the generation of human society.” [4]

4. Sources of Sarvodaya

The following sources, helped Gandhi to develop his concept of Sarvodaya. These were Ruskin’s book ‘Unto This Last’, Tolstoy’s ‘the kingdom of God is within you’, Thoreaus’ Civil Disobedience, the Bhagavad Gita, Isavesyopanisad, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam.

1) Ruskin’s Unto This Last

Gandhi was very much influenced by John Ruskin and his book, ‘unto this last’. When he was travelling from Johannesbrug to Durban, during his journey he began to read the book. He did not stop until he completed. It inspired him very much. His deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin and it transformed his whole life. From May to July 1908 Gandhi published a series of articles on the message of John Ruskin. He entitled his articles Sarvodaya. Gandhi called one of the chapters of his autobiography ‘The Magic Spell of Book’, where in he describes the effects of Ruskin’s Unto This Last.

The central teachings of Unto This Last according to Gandhi are: -

- That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
- That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barbers in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living. These ideas impressed him very much and he atonce determined to change his view of life with the ideals embodied in ‘Unto This Last’.

2) Leo Tolstoy's 'Kingdom of God is within you'

Gandhi was greatly influenced by Leo Tolstoy through his book "The Kingdom of God is within you" and his essay on "Christianity and Patriotism". Tolstoy's simplicity of life and purity of purpose influenced Gandhi very much. Both Tolstoy and Gandhi respected the instrument of love to solve all problems in their lives. In the Kingdom of God is within you Tolstoy is given great emphasis on the truth, love and non violence. Gandhi firmly believed that these virtues can establish peace on earth and good will among mankind.

3) Thoreau's Civil Disobedience

Gandhi heard an echo of his own thought in Thoreau. He was the well known American anarchist who refused to pay his taxes as a protest against slavery in America. He gave more importance to man. According to him no society can progress on a denial of individual freedom. This idea is expressed in his revolutionary essay on "Civil Disobedience". It was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi liked the classical statement of Thoreau that 'that government is best which governs the least'. This thought provoking statement furnished Gandhi and he moulded his political ideas.

4) The Bhagavad Gita

Gandhi drew his primary strength and inspiration of Sarvodaya ideal from the Bhagavad Gita. To Gandhi, the Gita is the Eternal Mother. According to him, the theme of the Gita is self – realization. It teaches the secret of non – violence. The sole aim of Gita is to establish Dharma. It wants to bring prosperity and peace to all, it also highlights the importance of all selfless service for the promotion of the welfare of the whole creation. In short, gita preaches the message of the welfare of all or Sarvodaya.

5) Isavasyopanisad

The first verse of the Isavasyopanisad deals with the ideology of Sarvodaya. The first part of the verse contains the principles of equality and fraternity. And the second part reveals the idea of renunciation, non- exploitation and service to the society. In short, the Isavasyopanisad preaches the philosophy of equality and fraternity, which are the fundamental principles of Sarvodaya.

6) Buddhism and Jainism

Gandhi was highly influenced and deeply impressed by the Buddhist philosophy which preached universal love and non – violence. According to Buddha the whole world is an organism. Hence it is the duty of everyone of us to share our fellow beings. Lord Buddha spent his whole life for redeeming the miseries of the people. Jainism also teaches the elements of Sarvodaya. The welfare of all is the corner stone of the Jain thought. It teaches non – violence not only to human beings but also to non – human beings.

7) Islamic Contribution to Sarvodaya

The word Islam means peace. It is a religion of peace and brotherhood. The prophet Mohammad laid the foundation of brotherhood and equality. All these aspects influenced Gandhi to form Sarvodaya movement.

8) Christian Contribution to Sarvodaya

Jesus Christ's personal life and his sublime message, his spirit of self – sacrifice and love for the neighbor etc have become the corner stone of Sarvodaya Philosophy.

Characteristics of Sarvodaya

The word Sarvodaya itself shows that its aim is welfare or upliftment or prosperity of all. The characteristics of Sarvodaya are the following: -

- a) Sarvodaya aims for universal good.
- b) In Sarvodaya there is no barrier between man and man.
- c) The basis of Sarvodaya is that everybody should be respected and given due share.
- d) Truth, non violence, self- sacrifice and spiritual tolerance are the main pillars of Sarvodaya.
- e) Sarvodaya adopts Satyagraha as the sole weapon of social change.
- f) Freedom, justice, equality and fraternity are the part and parcel of Sarvodaya.

Qualities of Sarvodaya Workers

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, the Sarvodaya workers must learn the art of self control and self suffering. Because these two are the armour for them. Their function should be to build the nation. Sarvodayaite must inculcate the habit of humility and have firm faith in the removal of untouchability and in God. They should give up all drinks, drugs, intoxicants and such other things. They should cultivate moral virtues like Truth, Non- violence, Non – stealing, non – possession, Brahmacharya etc. Above all they should have a Firm Faith in the Goodness of men.

Social order of Sarvodaya

"Sarvodaya may well be regarded as India's distinctive contribution to social philosophy" [5]. The Sarvodaya social order, therefore, emphasizes equality at all levels. As an offshoot of his advaitic faith Gandhi's concept of equality is fundamentally different from the conventional idea of equality prevalent in mainstream sociology or political theory. Gandhi proposed structural arrangements to prevent the possibility of stratification, segregation or exploitation of any kind in the social organization of his vision. Inspired by the vision of a grand millennium and living in an atmosphere of renewed consciousness which will constantly be strengthened by an inbuilt system of moral checks and balances, every one under such a social order will hold his talents and wealth in trust and use them for the welfare of all, especially of the most needy and the down - trodden. Thus the social organization will be free from evils, and will create conditions most conducive to the total development of all its members and to the fulfillment of the ultimate purpose of self – realization.

Economic order of Sarvodaya

Gandhi rejected the idea prevalent in the modern economic thought that economics is an autonomous activity operating according to independent principles and laws derived from its own organization. So he wanted economic life and laws to be based on the values that are inherent in the quest for self realization and insisted on integrating economics and ethics. In other words, he envisaged the ethical order of the economic life of man by replacing the values of competitions, exploitation and domination underlying the

existing economic system by non – violence, co – operation and self – reliance. Based on these moral values Gandhian Economic organization emphasizes limitations of wants simplicity, self- sufficiency, de-centralized and need based production and distribution and trusteeship management. Gandhi visualized a net work of such self sufficient and autonomous communities reaching out in creative independence.

Educational order of Sarvodaya

In the educational order, the emphasis that Gandhi laid on the aspect of the transformation of the individual and his total liberation. The very definition that he accepted for education is that education is the drawing out of the best from the individual. Gandhi understood education as a process which would prepare the educands for the final goal of life. His basic education scheme had been generally acclaimed as the best programme for developing all the three dimensions of the human personality in an integrated manner. Gandhian education demonstrates an explicit pragmatism and thus qualifies to be an effective tool for social reconstruction.

5. Conclusion

The philosophy of Sarvodaya will be very important in the 21st century due to complexity of human behaviour. It is perhaps the only way to solve the problems of unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth, growing corruption in public life etc. It is a search light for us which shows the right way through which we can reach our destination, namely freedom, peace and universal brotherhood. In the words of Gandhi, if we follow the path of Sarvodaya, the Kingdom of God can establish on earth.

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