



Mahatma Gandhi's Conception of Sarvodaya: A Brief Study

Dr. Shyamal Chandra Sarkar
Assistant Professor,
Dept. of Philosophy
Pramathesh Barua College, Gauripur, Assam

Introduction of Mahatma Gandhi:

The Gandhis belong to the Bania caste and seem to have been originally grocers. But for three generation, from my grandfather, they have been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawad States. Uttamchand Gandhi, alias Ota Gandhi, my grandfather, must have been a man of principle. State intrigues compelled him to leave Porbandar, where he was Diwan, and to seek refuge in Junagadh. Ota Gandhi married a second time, having lost of first wife. He had four sons by his first wife and two by his second wife. The fifth of these six brothers was Karanchand Gandhi, alias Kaba Gandhi, and the sixth was Tulsidas Gandhi. Kaba Gandhi was my father. Kaba Gandhi married four times in succession, having lost his wife time by death. He had two daughters by his first and second marriages. His last wife, Putlibai, bore him a daughter and three sons, I being the youngest. I was born at Porbandar, otherwise known as Sudamapuri, on the 2nd October, 1869.¹

Gandhi sleeps only a few hours, and his early morning meditations made him eager for active life. He and I walked up the terracotta steps, removed our shoes, and sat down cross-legged just as our host entered in his ample flowing robes. His ideas were just as ample and just as flowing. We talked of gods and men, empires and democracies, poetry and history, East and West. Tagore led the way, steering clear of details and launching out into the wider paths.²

Gandhi had taken a decision to work for the social reform of India by trying to remove such social evil as untouchability, social disparity etc. He was also convinced that his methods of non-violent Satyagraha, which had succeeded in solving smaller problems of life, could also be effectively used for solving greater problems like, 'political slavery'.³

Gandhi has taken the highest ideals of the Christian West, which we have not cared or dared to practice, and turned them against us in a new statesmanship of moral force, which is more powerful against us, doubtless, because it forged from our own yearning. He believes that love, indeed, shall rule the world.

¹ Gandhi, M.K, An Autobiography of The story of my experiments with truth, 2004, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad-14,P.p. 3--5

² Cousins Norman (Ed.), Profiles of Gandhi, 1970 & Frederick Bohn Fisher, a Statesman of Peace, Indian Book Company, Delhi06, P. 22

³ Lal, Basant Kumar, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, 1989, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi-07, P.92

What is more, he has proved that at least for a time, moral force can defeat machine guns. “Civilization,” says Gandhi, “is the conquest of one’s mind and passions. We can conquer our enemy without hating him. Moral force is not idealistically but actually greater than navies.” Gandhi realized that unorganized goodwill cannot stand up against “disciplined violence” as he called war, and have a ghost of a chance of winning. So he set about organizing his peaceful army. He must have officers for this army, trained in the essential weapons of self-control and endurance under all provocation. To train such leaders Gandhi took young men and women....for women were as important passive resisters as men; When it came to endurance they were already past-masters of the artinto his new ashram at Ahmedabad. It was in 1916 that he settled in Ahmedabad and established the ashram. An ashram is a community home—a place to seek the truth. He developed a library of many books. Regular classes were held, somewhat after the manner of the old Greek gymnasium school, with sociology economics, politics and religion emphasized. There was an eight-fold vow that all students had to take:

First---truthfulness

Second--- non-violence

Third---- celibacy

Fourth----control of the palate

Fifth---- non-stealing

Sixth---- non-possession---that is, giving up all desires of possessing things.

Seventh---swadeshi---that is, using homegrown, home manufactured goods, and being loyal to one’s own inherited culture, developing it from within, instead of becoming foreign.

Eighth---- fearlessness.⁴

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are:

- (i) To attempt to reveal the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi.
- (ii) To attempt to explain Gandhiji’s views on Sarvodaya.
- (iii) To trace the education for Sarvodaya in North East India.

Methodology:

The method of the present study is analytical in nature which is based on the primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources contain books, journals, leaflet, data collection from website documents published from research institutes. Books, particularly reveal the works of Mahatma Gandhi are supplied a greater source of information.

Primary data collected by the meeting of some social workers and also in interview with renowned persons helped fruitful analysis and authenticity of the topic. Secondary datas are mainly applied in this topic.

⁴ Cousins Norman (Ed.), Profiles of Gandhi, 1970 & Frederick Bohn Fisher, Ibid., P.p.23-25-26

Mahatma Gandhi's Conception of Sarvodaya:

'*Sarvodaya*' etymologically means 'the betterment of all', and that precisely it is. Usually Sarvodaya is compared and contrasted with Utilitarianism. Sarvodaya is based on 'love', it proceeds on the faith that a sarvodayi will also be prepared for maximum possible self-sacrifice for the good of others. The end of all activities, social or political, has to be nothing else but the upliftment of everybody. This can be possible only when no individual is neglected or overlooked, and this, in its turn, will be possible only in the panchayat system, which, through its small village units will be able to pay attention to every individual of the village.⁵

The word '*Sarvodaya*' is a combination of two words, namely, 'Sarba' and 'Udaya' which taken together mean the uplift or welfare or good of all. The inventor of this principle of universal uplift without the distinction of caste, colour or creed or without the distinction of high or low is the Indian who is more or less known throughout the world as Mahatma Gandhi. During the first quarter of this century, while in South Africa fighting against colour prejudice, he read John Ruskin's book 'Unto This Lust' and was profoundly influenced by the doctrine inculcated in this book. He not only accepted the principle contained in this book but confirmed his daily life to the norms laid down in this book.⁶

Gandhiji wanted to have an ideal society of his imagination in which he wanted to have complete decentralization of authority by strengthening Panchayat Raj system. He wanted to have a society in which there was all love and no hatred and persuasion for the rich to give their surplus to the needy. The movement started in April, 1951 when at a Sarvodaya Sammelan held at Shiva Rampali where some landless untouchables approached Vinoba Bhave for land and the Acharya appealed to the landlords of the area to donate him some land. Sri Ram Chandra Reddy of the area responded to the appeal and donated a hundred acres of land to Vinobaji and thus, the movement got a start. It gradually spread to other parts of the country but its most real impact was felt in Talengana where the relations between the owners and cultivators were strained due to the refusal of land owners to distribute their land to the landless tillers. This philosophy created a sort of revolution in the minds of the people of that area.⁷

Sarvodaya today has assumed the dimension of power of a movement and is a social force of great potentialities and power. It has been regarded as a dynamic philosophy which can make possible the advent of a radical transformed humanity. Sarvodaya, as an ideal, seeks to build a new society on the foundations of the old spiritual and moral values of India. Its philosophy is integral and synthetic in character. It takes up the Gandhian synthesis of the ideas of Vedanta, Buddhism, Christianity, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau and tries to incorporate his ideas at more critical and analytical levels. Besides Gandhism, It has also taken some of its ideas from the socialist philosophy. Thus, Sarvodaya represents a synthesis of Gandhian and socialist philosophy, a synthesis of theoretical abstractions and political and economic generalizations. Vinoba, a true Gandhian, and J.P. Narayan, a true socialist are the two main leaders associated with Sarvodaya movement.⁸

Sarvodaya is another Indian philosophy which aims at attaining social, moral and economic independence. This philosophy is very close to Gandhian philosophy. In fact, it is a part of that philosophy. Whereas the followers of political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi were satisfied with achieving political independence those who were the true followers of Gandhiji were ready to struggle for achieving social,

⁵ Lal, Basant Kumar, Ibid., P. p. 150-151

⁶ Chakravarty Sibnath, & Anup Chakrabarti (Revised), An Introduction To Politics, 1997-98, Modern Book Agency Private LTD, Calcutta-73, P. p. 256-257

⁷ Mukhi, H.R., Political Thought, 2001, S B D Publishers' Distributors, Delhi-06, P. p. 452-453

⁸ Sachdeva & Gupta, A Simple Study of Modern Political Thought, 1985-86, Ajanta Prakashan, Delhi-06, P.p. 355- 356

economic and spiritual independence. Mahatma Gandhi, in his lifetime, himself wanted to work in this direction and he wanted to express his ideas by convening a small conference of his spiritual followers at Wardha but the object could not be achieved due to his assassination.⁹

Gandhi's Sarvodaya has its roots in the *Vedantic* concept of the spiritual unity of existence and the *Gita- Buddhist* concept of *sarvabhutahita* or the good of all living beings. Its wide comprehensive idealism, thus, is opposed to the Lockean theory of majoritarianism, the Marx-Gumplowicz concept to class and racial struggle and the Benthamite formula of the greatest good of the greatest number. Just as in Plato's writings, his ethereal idealism is brought out in the *Republic*, while the *Statesman* and the *Laws* show concessions of the realistic demands of human nature and the social structure, so also in Gandhi there is a realistic theory which was meant for immediate application for winning the freedom of India and for possible application in the near future as well as a more transcendent theory which postulates a radical transformation of human nature and a more perfect incorporation of the moral techniques in the corporate life of mankind. Gandhi considered the state as an organization of violence and force. Being an apostle of non-violence he was repelled by the coercive character of the state. He postulated that in the ideal state of Ramarajya or the Kingdom of God upon Earth there will be the sovereignty of the moral authority of the people, and the state as a structure of violence would be extinct. But he was not for immediate ending of the state power. The increasing perfection of the state should be the immediate goal although the ultimate aim is philosophical and moral anarchism. In an article in the *Young India* (9th March, 1922), Gandhi draws a distinction between the ideal society and Swaraj. In the ideal society there will be no railways, no hospitals, no machinery, no army and navy, and no laws and law courts. But he emphatically states that under Swaraj these five categories will function. Under Swaraj laws and law courts will, however, be the custodians of people's liberty and not the bureaucratic instruments of oppression. It is possible to note down certain events and factors which might have generated hostility towards the state in Gandhi's mind:

- (a) Brutalities perpetrated by the South African Government upon the poor defenceless Zulus,
- (b) Betrayal by Smuts during the South African Satyagraha movement,
- (c) Atrocities perpetrated by the British imperialistic power in India. It could be legitimately inferred that from these experiences Gandhi came to regard not a particular government as such but the entire structure of the state with hostility. He, however, did not contemplate the deliberate destruction of the state machine, but visualized the final end of the coercive state by increasing observance of non-violence in political action. He visualized that in the future independent Indian State soldiers will form a national militia and would be used not for offensive but defensive and protective purposes.¹⁰

Gandhian Sarvodaya conceives of a society in which everybody works not only for his own good but for the good of all. In such a society, the principle of equality reigns supreme. Violence, exploitation, chicanery and fraud are conspicuously absent in such a society. The positive aspect of such a society is the duty to voluntarily work and to respect the equal rights of others and the negative aspect is not to practice violence in relation to other members of the society.

Gandhian Sarvodaya lays great importance to self- abnegation for collective good. In such a society, each person, to whatever station of life he may belong, is required to do his duty with a religious zeal. Sarvodaya society is established through moral means and continues in existence on a moral basis.¹¹

⁹ Srivastava, L. N., *Political Science Theory*, 1993, SBD Publishers' Distributors, Delhi-06, P. 497

¹⁰ Varma, Vishwanath Prasad, *Modern Indian Political Thought*, 1991, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, Agra-3, P. 351

¹¹ Chakravarty Sibnath, & Anup Chakrabarti (Revised), *Ibid.*, P. 257

A Sarvodaya Economic Conference was then held in December, 1949 which aimed at establishing a Sarvodaya society. The new society found leadership and exposition of its philosophy in the writings of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. The followers wish to establish a new society which will modify the existing one. In their ideal society:

- (i) There will be social economic equality and none will stand in the path of progress of others.
- (ii) There will be full freedom for the development of personality of all.
- (iii) The society will provide equal opportunities for work and progress.
- (iv) The Society will work on this basis of mutual co-operation and there will be love for all.
- (v) Efforts will be made to raise moral standard of the people because a moral man alone can make the society moral.
- (vi) There should be decentralisation of authority because centralization is bound to result in tyranny and corruption.
- (vii) In the economic field they want to have a cottage and village industry set-up.
- (viii) The authority of the state will be reduced to the barest minimum and there will be no distinction between the ruler and the ruled. All will be treated as human beings and have equal status in the society.
- (ix) Rural and urban small communities will manage the society. In the ideal society there will be no place for coercion because it brings hatred. If at all there will be any coercion that will be that of love. It will be a moral force which will bind all to each other.

There will be no distinction between mental and manual labour and all labour will be properly rewarded. Socially useful labour in all forms, and by all means, shall be honoured.¹²

Gandhiji's Sarvodaya is mainly intended for the uplift of the rural-folk who constitute the bulk of the population and who have been the object of oppression, repression and exploitation for a long time. He wanted to improve the lot of these toiling and starving masses through the establishment of a system of society in which the people rule themselves through village Panchayats elected freely and not on party basis. It will be a rule of all by all—a rule analogous to Rousseau's rule by the General Will, Sarvodaya in the last analysis, implies a society in which the guiding principles are duty to work, service to the people, equality and above all self-sacrifice. Such a society is free from all sorts of meanness like hatred, sectionalism and fanaticism.

Sarvodaya is to be sharply distinguished from the utilitarian doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. But Gandhian Sarvodaya aims at the good of all and not of the numerical majority. Sarvodaya also differs from utilitarianism in this that it rests whole on a moral basis.¹³

Education for Sarvodaya in North East India:

Modern India as well as future *mustopia* believes in *Sarvodaya*, the doctrine of development favoured by Mahatma Gandhi. Sarvodaya is very much concerned with the verdict of total analysis that combines value analysis with engineering system analysis concerned with the feasibility and profitability studies. Any development which does not promote the well-being of the poorest of the land can wait. In North East India, since average income and standard of life is low, there is no accumulation of capital, no educated middle class and poor facilities for developing useful skills, the primary concern would be literacy and practical instruction in traditional skill like weaving and wood carving. The NEI has the advantage of

¹² Srivastava, L. N., Ibid., P. p. 497-498

¹³ Chakravarty Sibnath, & Anup Chakrabarti (Revised, Ibid. P. 257

widespread familiarity with the English language, an international language of industry, medicine and management. Literacy would mean elementary education in English too.

Development of the rural folk follows the guaranteed remunerative work to all. Such guarantee is already applicable to certain districts of the Punjab. Physical welfare, peace and easy communications like telephone connection for every village or stack of villages and easy availability of electrical power are necessary. In Soviet Russia, the slogan for development was electrification. At least diploma level education in engineering must become widespread. The teaching can be in the local languages provided the technical and scientific vocabulary is bodily lifted from English. The students and teachers must resolve to contribute some work to the fruition of Sarvodaya efforts. The living costs for students can be quite low and met by the stipends that most of them will get and by restarting the youth dormitory system. This will also make health and hygiene education easy and at practically no cost.

Sarvodaya includes care of women especially through a sense of gene equality. Gene partiality has been usually in NEI as in the rest of India. The diploma courses particularly for women can be started around silk and weaving. Men, women and children should benefit from the application of computers to all business and management.¹⁴

Conclusion:

Finally, we come to the decision that Sarvodaya (Sanskrit) stands for development of everyone. Mahatma Gandhi used this term to emphasize that he was not for the development of any particular class like labour, farmers, dalits, or Brahmans or merchants but for development of all citizens irrespective of gender, caste or creed. Sarvodaya lays stress on spiritualism of Gandhian philosophy. It has found exposition in the work and writings of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. They wish to have a society in which there will be: Equality (ii) Freedom, (iii) Equal opportunities (iv) Mutual Co-operation (v) A good moral standard (vi) Decentralisation of authority (vii) Development of cottage industries (viii) Reduction in state functions (ix) Rural and urban small communities and (x) No distinction between manual and mental labour.

Gandhi disagreed with the belief of communists in class war or the fanatics of every breed who cared only for their favourite groups. His politics was mixed with his piety and life strong faith in humanism of human beings. He found a good person in every man or woman and had sympathy and best wishes for all.

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¹⁴ Nanda, J.N., North East India Globalization and Sarvodaya, 2008, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi-59, P.p. 59-60

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