

## **Gandhi's Concept on Individual and Society**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this work is to assess and discuss the concept on individual and society in Gandhi's philosophy – the father of nation and one of the very rare personalities of modern times. The concept on individual and society are discussed in the light of Gandhian's thought and belief. It is tried to make this study conceptual and analytic as far as possible and also to correlate different concepts to reflect their mutual consistency. His concept of 'Sarvodaya', the ultimate goal in social welfare is discussed in length. Self-sacrifice is the essence of 'Sarvodaya'. Every individual is to be ready and willing to sacrifice happiness for the sake of others. Everyone is to follow the policy of giving and not taking. He should feel happy when he is giving and not when he is taking. He should work for others and not expect anything in return for this. According to Gandhi the service of society or the service of the whole of humanity becomes the duty of every man. We must think about everyone and show love, sympathy and kindness to all because we are basically one.

**Keywords:** Gandhian's thought, Gandhi's philosophy, society, individual

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Man by nature is a social animal. His instinctive character leads him in to society. Individual and Society are inseparable. They are necessary and complementary to each other. Individual and society are not opposite. Therefore, any discussion on society necessarily involves the problem of explaining the relationship between individual and society. Society is nothing but an entity which has been conceived, shaped and constituted by individual or group of individuals for the sustenance of life and peaceful and safe living conditions. Society does not have an essence of its own. But what seems to have a solid existence over and above the society and the individual is the material and atmospheric conditions of the natural world. Society is something which is made and created out of the infinite choices of diverse individuals.

Gandhi, believed that the happiness of the individual lead to the happiness of the society. So, for him, social welfare meant the conscious submission of the individual and a voluntary contribution of one's possession to the society. The individual contribution to social harmony is introduced in terms of Gandhi's idea of 'Sarvodaya', the greatest good of all through truth and non-violence. 'Sarvodaya' became the ultimate goal of Gandhi in social welfare. His methods of working towards this goal were different from those of many other leaders and social reformers. He took an integrated view of life and disapproved of dividing an

individual's life into different compartments. Also the individual was looked upon by him not as a separate entity but as a constituent unit of society.

### **ANALYSIS**

#### ***Individual and Society: Gandhi's Concept***

Mahatma Gandhi regarded the individual as the centre of authority and value. Society cannot exist without the co-operation of individuals.

In the present day society, mankind is facing a crisis and we have observed that there is unrest all over the human society. There is no respect for human values and as a result there are conflicts, confusion and oppression.

For solving of all problems, Gandhi tries to develop spiritual evolution. This is the way to save mankind from the present catastrophe. As Gandhi was a great social philosopher as well as a prophet of compassion and servant of the poor, he believed in spiritual evolution. Man is social by nature. He wanted to establish a new society, a society which is completely free from exploitation and oppression. Gandhi believed that, "the service of society or the service of the whole of humanity becomes the duty of every man. We must think about everyone and show love, sympathy and kindness to all because we are basically one"[1, p-44]. Gandhi thought that self development is learning to be human, a learning that is characterised by a ceaseless

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process of inner illumination and self-transformation. Ahimsa, harmony, service, duty, swadeshi self-restraint, self-sufficiency, non-possessiveness, equality, non-exploitation and decentralisation all are related with Gandhi's concept of society. In realising God an individual should fulfill his or her duties in the society.

Swadeshi of Gandhi's conception broadly involved the idea that one had a natural moral obligation towards one's neighbour to the exclusion of those remotely situated. In his own words "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use of service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote"[ 2,p- 275]. Gandhi is generally regarded as a votary of universal love and service and therefore, quite naturally it may be said that his doctrine of swadeshi in the above sense goes against that spirit of universal service. But it is not so, as Gandhi himself explained it. Gandhi believed swadeshi as the acme of universal service. Swadeshi is thus based upon the recognition of the "scientific limitation of the human capacity for service"[2,p-19]. Gandhi laid down a condition with his doctrine of swadeshi that "the neighbour thus served has in his turn to serve his own neighbour" [2, p-19]. Gandhi again added that "the logical conclusion of self-sacrifice was that the individual sacrifice himself for the community. The community sacrifices itself for the district, the district for the province, the province for the nation and the nation for the world" [2, p-275]. Gandhi's Swadeshi when properly understood doesn't go against the spirit of Sarvodaya and it is here that we can see that although his call for the national Swaraj was promoted by his Swadeshi spirit, still it was not a replica of his narrow nationalism. Christian teaching "Love thy neighbour as thyself 'is a symbol of universal love and service, similarly Gandhi's concept of Swadeshi is an example of universal service.

Gandhi wanted to do well of all, a Sarvodaya Samaj. In this connection, it may be noted here that Gandhi was not the author of the idea of Sarvodaya. He borrowed the idea as well as the term from Ruskin, and Ruskin also borrowed this idea from the Bible. But the credit of Gandhi lies in fact that he devoted his entire life to a creation of a new society, a society based on the principle of Sarvodaya. As Gandhi was very much influenced by Ishopanishad and Bhagavad Puranas, his ideas of socialism and Sarvodaya were also very much influenced by his study of the Upanishads and Puranas. The philosophy of Sarvodaya is an organic whole where the difference between the individual and the group disappears. Individual is considered as a group of individuals. Man is a living principle and society is dynamic. Man is the nucleus of the entire society and the society is the organic whole. The synthesis between man and society is creative. The establishment of Sarvodaya Samaj is more than this synthesis. Sarvodaya Samaj teaches us a comprehensive view of life. Its

ultimate goal is the welfare of the entire human race. Individual is important for society. So Gandhi said, "The Gandhian alternative is Sarvodaya, or the welfare of all, a classless society based on destruction of the classes but not on the destruction of the individuals who constitute the classes, a system of production that does not fail to make use of science and technology for creating an economy of abundance but does not in the process either kill individual initiative or freedom for development nor create a psychology of ceaseless striving for more and more of material goods, a system of distribution that will ensure a reasonable minimum income for all and while not aiming at a universal equality of an arithmetical kind, will nevertheless ensure that all private property or talent beyond the minimum will be used as a trust for the public good and not for individual aggrandisement, a social order where all will work but there is no inequality, either in status or in opportunity for any individual, and a political system where change is the result of persuasion, differences and resolved by discussion, and conflicts by love and recognition of mutuality of interest"[3,p-47]. The basic conditions for reconstructing society according to Gandhi is only by remaking man himself. The Sarvodaya movement aims at the eradication of untouchability. It aims at a classless society, a society which is free from oppression and ill will. Gandhi believed that spiritual perfection of the individual is the ultimate end of society. It cannot be considered as a means to any other end. Every individual's supreme efforts will have to be directed towards the realisation of the Real which is Sat-Cit-Ananda. This ideal, therefore, is common. The pursuit of this would mean happiness to all. A society, if it is to survive, must regularly fulfil the supreme value of personality. Sarvodaya is closely connected with spirituality. Gandhi's humanism gave rise to the principle of Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya stands for the emancipation, the uplift and the elevation of all. Sarvodaya is not opposed to the concept of social and economic equality. Sarvodaya is not merely a theory of ethical justice. "The philosophy and sociology of Sarvodaya is based on the insights and experience of Gandhi and is a reassertion of the valuation and moral approach to the problems of mankind which has been a part of ancient Indian culture for ages. The philosophy and sociology of Sarvodaya can add the moral tonic to Indian civilisation. The greatest contributes of Sarvodaya lies in the reassertion of the Gandhian moral approach to the problems of man" [4, p-135]. Gandhi believed that the real individual is an immortal spiritual entity. So he said that the individual is a divine spark. Gandhi emphasised on the necessity of constant efforts for the moral and spiritual remaking of man. He accepted the creative power of self-suffering human individuals by his philosophical notion of incessant efforts for the perfection of individuality. Gandhi thought that even social betterment depends upon individual efforts for self-purification. The word 'Sarvodaya' is a compound

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of two words 'Sarva' and 'udaya'. Thus it means the welfare or upliftment of all" [1, p-112]. Sarvodaya aims at creating a high moral atmosphere in the country. That is to be achieved by following the Gandhian principles of truth, nonviolence and purity of means. The power of the people called 'Lok Shakti' is to be developed.

Self-sacrifice is the essence of Sarvodaya. Every individual is to be ready and willing to sacrifice happiness for the sake of others. Everyone is to follow the policy of giving and not taking. He should feel happy when he is giving and not when he is taking. He should work for others and not expect anything in return for this.

The concept of Sarvodaya seems to be a direct outcome of Gandhi's philosophy of truth and ahimsa. Gandhi took truth as the end and ahimsa as the means. By truth he actually meant God himself and as God is absolutely one. Truth is also absolutely one. But there is various refraction of manifestations of God or Truth. Everyone of which represents truth in its own partial way. A seeker after truth and a votary of ahimsa cannot work for the good of a few, leaving aside others. Gandhi remarked:

A votary of ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and will die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions [5].

He saw beauty in truth and ugliness in evil. The harmonious world is the manifestation of God. Gandhi felt an admiration for the harmony of nature and saw the divine beauty in it. Gandhi said that, "I find in it deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolises true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and form, declares to us, as it were, with a million tongues, the greatness and glory of God" [6, p-258]. Gandhi believed that beauty is truth and truth is life. Life is the real field for cultivation of the highest values- Truth, Good and Beauty (Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram). Gandhi attributed these three values of life to God who is true, good and beautiful.

So it is clear that by "Sarvodaya" Gandhi meant all round development. Here 'all' means not only human class but it includes subhuman sphere of

existence including animals, plants, etc. as well as the inanimate nature. Modern civilization attaches too much importance to the material satisfaction and bodily welfare as the real object of life and neglects the importance of religion and morality. Man forgets that the secret of happiness lies in ramification. Gandhi said that, "Those who are intoxicated by modern civilization are not likely to write against it. Their care will be to find out facts and arguments in support of it, and this they do unconsciously believing it to be true. A man whilst he is dreaming believes in his dream, he is indecisive only when he is awakened from his sleep. A man labouring under the bane of civilization is like a dreaming man" [2, p-34-35].

Gandhi was so optimistic about human nature that he believed that man was always going higher and higher both materially and spiritually. Along with the change in everything, human nature was also changing, it was changing for the better. All men were acting towards the realization of the inner spiritual unity of mankind.

## CONCLUSION

Today, the entire mankind is facing a crisis in human history. There is unrest all over the world. There is no respect for mankind, people do not realise the importance of human values. There are conflicts, chaos, confusion, oppression, exploitation and subordination all over the world. The bigger nations are trying to swallow smaller nations. In order to achieve this end, they sometimes indulge in wars.

Modern man, spent most of his energy trying to steady himself in a hostile and unstable environment. He had neither the inclination nor the ability to slow down the tempo of his life, but alone with himself, look inwards, reflect on his pattern of life, and nurture the inner springs of energy. Modern civilization neglected the soul, privileged the body, misunderstood the nature and limits of reason and fails to appreciate the role of the individual. Morality is seen not as an expression and realisation of human dignity. In such a horrible situation Gandhi's role of the individual and his dealings to the society is undoubtedly most relevant.

There are different shades of opinion about Gandhi - the man - his philosophy, and his sociopolitical activities. Gandhi has been regarded as a great leader of freedom struggle and a tool of the British, as a mahatma and also a shrew's political manipulator as a muddling politician and also as accomplished strategist and political innovator. He has been variously described as a liberal, a sociologist, a radical, a communist, a philosopher anarchist, a revivalist, a conservative and non-violence revolutionary where many of the opinions are rarely based upon deep knowledge and understanding of the

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life and work of Gandhi, most of the above characterisation about him are true, although taken together they appear paradoxical. This is because of the fact that Gandhi is a multi- dimensional personality. Above all he was an individualist. The individual was his supreme consideration. He maintained that the individual is an end in itself. The state exists for the individuals. It is the means for the development of the personality of the individual. He was an advocate of individual freedom. The individual is prior to the state. But his individual is not the solitary and isolated one. He is a social being, whose welfare is linked with the welfare of other individuals in the society. He is the individual who has duties only but little rights, one whose actions are meant for the welfare of other member of the society.

#### **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

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