

A Possibility in the Ecosystem of Swadeshi and Swaraj	2
Quest for an alternative vision	4
Thinking beyond the self and the other	4
Towards an Egalitarian Society	5
Overflowing love melts in others' woes	6
The Path Towards National Regeneration	8

A Possibility in the Ecosystem of Swadeshi and Swaraj

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the buzzword in the corporate world and the Government. There is an impression among some both in business and public at large that the Government, by making a law forcing the corporate and the business world to spend two percent of their profit for social betterment, has gained the ground for Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship. It is known as CSR.

Gandhi also had something to say about ethics in business. He had definite ideas about how people engaged in commerce and business should act and can contribute to nation building and forming a nonviolent harmonious society.

Gandhi had developed the thesis of trusteeship as an alternative to capitalism and communism.

Basic Argument -

- The basic and fundamental argument he made in this regard was that both capitalism and communism were founded on violence. In capitalism, wealth creation generates violence. Communism that talks about equity also recommends violence. As against both the schools of thoughts, trusteeship principle basically stands on non-violence.
- The rich man will be left in possession of wealth of which he will use when he necessarily requires and reasonably satisfies his personal needs and then act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for the society and by the society.
- The fundamental assumption regarding the theory is honesty and integrity of the trustee.
- The idea of trusteeship is based on one particular value that is embedded in Indian tradition. It is the value of *aparigraha* non-acquisitive nature of the human being that has to be developed. This *aparigraha* is the foundation of his idea of trusteeship.
- *Aparigraha* becomes the integral part of the human behaviour and this has to be considered also as a part of the behaviour of the economic man.
- The economic man has an ordinary utility, which is qualitative and comparable. *Aparigrahi*, i.e., the person who is acquiring wealth but is not acquisitive, has a variety of uses of his wealth.
- One, and also accepted by the positive economists, would be the utilisation for self-satisfaction-gratification of self-needs. This is one part of the utility; the other part of utility involves an individual deriving the satisfaction and utility by satisfying the needs of others.
- In corporate practice often there exists irrationality - value other than profit motive. If space is to be created for such value, then it is possible to create space for *aparigraha* as a value to be operational. Trusteeship is based on the premise.

- The society would need to find a way to bring down the acquisitive nature of the population. One solution lies with the introduction of the moral value of *aparigraha* into lives of the masses through education.

Trusteeship is Based on Ahimsa -

- Essentially, trusteeship is based on the ideas of ahimsa. The naturally corollary of ahimsa is satyagraha, that is, if the wealthy and the capitalist do not part with their wealth voluntarily, then the weapon of satyagraha is to be used.
- He was also asked that if the trustee fails to behave as a trustee, would the State be justified in dispossessing them. His answer was “yes”. ‘As a matter of fact, the state will take away all those things and I believe it will be justified if it uses the minimum violence’. It is thought about the role of the State too.
- A variant of trusteeship was tried out by Vinoba Bhave soon after the Independence that related to the land, which is well known as *bhoodan*. Soon after independence in 1947, in Telangana the land was being confiscated by left extremists violently by murdering the Zamindars. The Government of India also introduced a number of land reforms at the same time. They included Zamindar Abolition Act and The Land Tenancy and Land Ceiling Act. For Vinoba, violent confiscation and direct confrontation was nothing but murder and what the State was trying to do with law was *kanoon*. He started asking for land in donation and redistributed the donated land to landless farmers. He was appealing, using moral persuasion and he called this “*karuna*”.
- Hence, if the corporate world would not be ready in acting as a trustee, the practical implications would be moral persuasion followed by *satyagraha*.

Trusteeship and Nature -

- Depletion and degradation of natural resources is comparatively recent phenomena. Natural resources and inputs are used in production process. As a corporate sector, consideration should be to minimise extraction cost or transportation cost or if there is some absolute scarcity cost of the natural resource.
- Gandhi’s opposition to machinery is well-known. He was against excessive and senseless use of machineries and technologies. His concern was sensible use of technology, in contemporary parlance it can be treated as eco-friendly technology.
- Philanthropy or *daana* is driven by *lokeshna* - desire to be known among people. After earning wealth, the Indian culture advises one to make large donations to get recognition in the society.
- Consumption has two distinct levels - personal and societal. Trusteeship at personal level is individual’s consumption requirements and needs. The theory of *aparigraha*, non-acquisitiveness, tends not to acquire and consume things which are useless to an individual. After satisfying needs for a decent livelihood, the rest of the wealth is required to be spent for the social good. A question of choice comes at this juncture.
- The current concept of CSR is to part away a share of profit for the larger society and be happy with the rest.

Quest for an alternative vision

Gandhi's **Hind Swaraj** contained, among other things, a severe critique of modern western civilisation. He diagnosed the root cause of all the disease of the modern civilisation as **violence**. It was rooted in and sustained by violence both direct and structural, and consequently, it generated and escalated more violence.

The other dangers that Gandhi identified in modern western civilisation were that it dismissed religion and morality from human life and transactions as redundant and elevated physical comfort.

Gandhi warns in **Hind Swaraj** that as modern civilisation functions on the basis of an instrumental view of physical nature and human beings, it will turn out to be a nine days wonder or even take the humanity eventually to its doom, unless checked and corrected.

Thinking beyond the self and the other

Gandhi's response to Direct Violence -

- The underlying principle of Gandhi's non-violence is *Advaita*. Thus, Gandhi does not see any separation between the self and others. Following *Advaita*, his non-violence affirms that there are no others, there is only the self, or versions thereof. Thus, violence against others is actually violence against oneself.
- Gandhi argues that one must have training in non-violence and finally one should undergo for personal suffering and sacrifice if the situation demands. As a priori, his non-violence implies self-purification of individual and he maintains that the power of non-violence is in exact proportion to the ability of the nonviolent person.

Why violence should be avoided?

- First, he observes that violence does not accept the 'essential dignity' and worth of the individual.
- Second, violence recognises no boundaries and finally becomes self justificatory in itself. The reason is that violence claims to possess the truth about right and wrong and on this basis, it also decides who should be punished and who spared.
- Third, when violence becomes habitual and institutionalised, it becomes a general means/method to settle the issue of any kind of conflicts in society.

Gandhi's response to structural violence -

- In the modern world, at the structural level, the problem of violence may be viewed in terms of concentration of power, large scale industrialisation, and exploitation of one

group by another. These have been termed as structural violence by non-violence and peace scholars.

- He recognised centralisation of power, political or economic, as violence and advocated the decentralised mode of polity (*Panchayati Raj*) and economy (*Gram Swaraj*) to minimise the structural violence in the society.
- To modern society, where ethnic or political conflict has become common, his Satyagraha offers a method of nonviolent, creative conflict transformation which results in reconciliation and removal of bitterness between or among the conflicting parties.
- On the issue of State and individual, which is a central challenge to modern polity, Gandhi regarded the individual as the centre of authority and value. According to him, the State and Government derive their existence and power from the individuals.
- Thus, when the State begins to exploit the people and impede their progress, it is the holy duty of the people to withdraw their cooperation from the State and reform the State by moral force.

Gandhi's Response to Cultural Violence -

- For Gandhi, violence is not only an act or major violent event but also a sign of deeper socio-political and economic alienation that a community or group faces or perceives.
- One must view violence in its totality and examine it in the worldview in which it emerges.
- Gandhi challenges a violent normal view and its normative design and emphasises on 'nonviolent world view'.
- To develop a nonviolent worldview, he emphasises on a new kind of socialisation through *Swadeshi* and a new type of education through *Nai Talim* in the society. In his view, implications of such ideas will nourish and foster nonviolent relations with others making our world more human.
- Gandhi's idea of non-violence attempts to eradicate the root cause of the present ecological crisis by proposing the idea similar to a notion recently termed as 'human ecology'.
- Gandhi does not see the environmental crisis in isolation. He intimately links the environment to the very nature of other human institutions as a polity, economy, health, and mode of development and calls for essential change in these fields. He strongly advocates the 'green thought' in our day to day life as well as an economy and developmental model based on natural order to save ourselves from the catastrophe.

Towards an Egalitarian Society

Bread Labour -

- The simple meaning of the principle of bread labour is that one must work to live. In other words, what entitles a man to have his bread is the physical labour. He might be

engaged in any kind of mental work, but he has to put in some amount of physical work to earn his bread.

- It was the Russian leader, TM Bondarek who first propounded this principle. Later, Tolstoy popularised it.
- Gandhi made it a part of Ekadash Vrata. Gandhi also associated this principle of bread labour with *Jajna* concept of Bhagvad Gita. It is said there that anyone who partakes food without performing some sacrifice (Jajna) is nothing short of being a thief.

Principles of bread labour concept -

- One, a certain amount of physical labour is needed for maintaining good health by any individual.
- Two, the scourge of the superiority of the mental work over the physical labour could be easily abolished by following this principle of bread labour.
- Three, the rich would come to consider themselves as the trustees of their property by following the principle of bread labour and as such the existing conflict between capital and labour could be easily taken care of.
- Fourth, he considered self-scavenging as the best form of the bread labour, as it would automatically eliminate the scourge of untouchability and lead to the state of social equality of all men.

Sparsh Bhavana (Elimination of Untouchability) -

He launched one of the most vigorous campaigns to eliminate the scourge of untouchability from the soil of India. He had set up Harijan Sevak Sangh and published a journal called *Harijan* with the same purpose.

- One, he considered it a sin to look at some people as untouchables based on their births in a particular family.
- Two, it was never an integral part of Hinduism.
- Three, as everyone comes from the same source (God), hence, all are equal, he further asserted.
- Four, it is nothing short of the practice of love and *ahimsa*.
- Fifth, the elimination of untouchability amounts to removal of barriers between man and man.

Overflowing love melts in others' woes

Truth -

- Truth, for Gandhi, is the basis of life, and it is in the practice of Truth, as he did that one unravels the peace he expounded.
- For him, Truth is God, the End and the very purpose of life.

Life -

As a pragmatic idealist, Gandhi explained life as the closest manifestation of Truth or God. Hence, the only way to find the all-encompassing Truth or God is to see Him in his creation and be one with it. This can be done by service to all.

Non-violence -

- While Truth for him was the end, Gandhi held non-violence as the undisputed means. Gandhi proposed, anything that protects, promotes and preserves life are also attributes of Truth. He called such acts non-violence.
- Non-violence is not a mere individual virtue, but a method of collective living.
- As a pragmatist, Gandhi's search for truth blossomed into such vibrantly nonviolent concepts as *swaraj* (conscientious living by individuals), *sarvodaya* (searching one's welfare in the welfare of all), *swadeshi* (neighbourhood organic relationship), *khadi* (mutual/reciprocal sustenance), communal harmony (tolerance towards diversity) and *nayee talim* (learning the art of inclusive living).

Peace - An experience of life -

- In this sense, for Gandhi, peace is an experience of life. In our day-to-day life, it is recognised through attributes such as satisfaction, joy, happiness, comfort, relief (attributes of impact of human action); sharing, cooperation, mutual aid (attributes of human action), love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance (attitudinal attributes), understanding, realisation and consciousness (cognitive attributes); All these, together as well as independently, refer to the experience of peace.
- Peace of life is more of a dynamic experience which is termed as 'positive peace'. Peace is experienced through creative, constructive and sustaining instances pertaining to life. For example, a man with headache experiences peace when treated with palliatives. For Gandhi, Peace is having a truth-centric life. While acts of eating, construction or a hug give us a sense of happiness and fulfillment, they will be termed an experience of peace only if they comply by the norm of nature, i.e. promoting, preserving and protecting life.

Crisis Management Technique -

The wrong impedes life (the truth), hence it has to be resisted; while the wrongdoer is a reality (part of the Truth) hence to be endeared. This scientifically tempered surgical analysis (doctor fights against the disease to save the patient, even when both the disease and the patient have come as one package), is attuned to the larger reality of the Truth. In this sense Gandhi often reiterated, "hate the sin and not the sinner." And he called that methodology, '*Satyagraha*'.

The Path Towards National Regeneration

Background -

- Gandhi travelled all across India, as suggested by his political Guru Gokhale. Gandhi's understanding of India convinced him of its 'degenerating' status. He realised that the suppressive foreign rule for quite a long time had made the Indian people deeply divided, caste-ridden, fearful and lacking in social conscience and civic virtues.
- Unless the country is reconstructed, it could neither win nor sustain its independence. Therefore, Gandhi chalked out a comprehensive programme for national regeneration, which he called the Constructive Programme.

18-point programme -

Gandhi's 18-point programme may be broadly classified as -

- **Social** (Communal Harmony, Removal of Untouchability, Prohibition, Women, Students, Kisan, Labour, Adivasis and Lepers);
 - **Economical** (Khadi, Other Village Industries and Economic Equality);
 - **Education** (Basic Education, Adult Education, National Language and Provincial Language);
 - **Health** (Village Sanitation and Hygiene and Health).
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- **Communal Unity** - Peace and Communal Harmony are the backbone of national unity and it is the foundation for development. Mutual trust will be automatically established only if we renounce the use of force under all circumstances for enforcing what we consider our right or preventing the abuse of what the opponent considers his right.
 - **Removal of untouchability** - Gandhi emphasised that there was no religious sanction for practicing untouchability and the causes and origin of this inhuman custom has to be rooted out. English treated Indians inhumanly and considered them as inferior people, 'coolie'. It will not be justifiable if we do the same treatment to our own people. Therefore, everyone should treat others equally.
 - **Prohibition** - Gandhi felt so strongly about this addiction because it not only affects the social and economic condition of the families but destroys the moral fibre of the society which is essential for nonviolent struggle. He once declared that if he was made dictator for a day, he would first close down all the liquor shops without giving any compensation.
 - **Khadi** - Khadi symbolises self-reliance, self-sufficiency and swadeshi. Charkha became the symbol of the independence movement and Khadi became the identity of nationalism. India witnessed a shift from colonial power to people's power.
 - **Other village industries** - Gandhi conceived Khadi as centre, like Sun in the Solar System, and other Village industries revolving around it like other planets. Self-reliant village republics were his vision of India. Therefore, village industries are essential to keep the rural workforce engaged in economic activities, which will in turn support the sustainable development of the rural economy.
 - **Village Sanitation** - Gandhi observed that English people treated Indians as 'dogs' and 'pigs' because of the sanitary condition of their living quarters. He further said, we should 'make our villages models of cleanliness in every sense of the word'.
 - **New or Basic Education** - He started his experiments in education among the children of Phoenix Settlement in South Africa. During the British period, the English system of

education rooted out the people from their own civilisation and educated people despised their own culture. Gandhi said that the new education, “develops both the body and the mind, and keeps the child rooted to the soil with a glorious vision of the future.

- **Women** - He said women should not be called weaker sex; actually they are very strong in their own field, in which men are very weak. He also said that men and women are not equal but complementary to each other. He believed that women's empowerment will give them rights and honourable position in the society and lead to development of the nonviolent social order.
- **Economic Inequality** - Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the leveling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semistarved naked millions on the other.
- **Kisans** - In Gandhi's scheme of village swaraj, agriculture is the centre of all activities and it should support the farmers to lead a decent living.
- **Labour** - Labour force should be organised not to disturb the development but for the overall development of all stakeholders.
- **Adivasis** - To protect the Mother Nature, we need to protect the Adivasis and their traditions.