

Gandhi and socialism

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Abstract

Gandhi was not interested in developing any systematic theory. He believed in action. He expressed his views on socialism, which are suitable to Indian condition and environment. He has developed an Indian version of socialism, which is based on Indian philosophy. His socialism is for Indian population. In this research article a true spirit of Gandhi is socialism has been highlighted.

Keywords: personality, selfishness, brotherhood, dharma, god

Introduction

Gandhi has not written any technically sound and remarkable. Significant books on socialism. But no one can deny the fact that he has something original, deep, significant and contextually as well as eternally relevant to say on socialism. His thoughts on socialism are scattered in his numerous writing and speeches. In this research paper a serious effort has been made to find Gandhi's views on socialism and to see how is it different from western concept and socialism.

Gandhi's socialism is founded on Hindu philosophy. Gandhi and Marx are among the greatest lover of humanity. But there is important sources, origins, inspiration of socialism have been the western philosophy, Marx, and other western socialist thinkers on the one hand, and all the great religions of the world on the other. Gandhian socialism is independent of the conventional western thought. Gandhi has refused to accept that the socialist ideals have been bequeathed to mankind for the first time or originally by the western philosophy; it surely is not the first and last word on socialism. He was quite frank in saying that Marxism is not the only way or even the best way of achieving socialism. What is good in Marxism is not original or exclusive to it, and what is exclusive to it is not necessarily good. It is true that Marx viewed mankind as a whole and he identified himself with the cause of the poor and the oppressed toilers of the world, but he has not been alone in all this.

Gandhi has drawn his inspiration from the universal religious thought, philosophy, and ethics in general, and Indian / Vedic world-view in particular. Religion has played a very significant part in the evolution of the idea of the just society; the justice in its broadest sense has been central to the personality and teachings of Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, Mahavir, Krishna, Shankaracharya. The ethics drawn from the great religious have moderated human greed. Selfishness, violence and destructiveness, all of which are the characteristics of the unjust society. The world religions have promoted the concept of the brotherhood of man and that of the spiritual equality of all people, both of which are vitally important for creating a just society^[1].

Hindu Scriptures like Bhagavad Gita, Upanishadas, Samved

and the vast literature of the Indian saints, and the lives of these saints are the original, primeval source of socialism. These sources are universal, catholic, cosmic in their character, and they are concerned with the weal, welfare, peace, happiness of everyone in the world. These essence of Bhagavad Gita is said to be 'Saamayoga' which is a far higher idea than socialism or 'Samyavad'^[2]. All these are the sources of Gandhian socialist thought.

The concept of 'Swadhurrna' and 'Varnashram dharma' in India stress the motive of service rather than self-interest, and they had Once created a tasteless, classless, decentralized, democratic policy and social order free from antagonism^[3]. In Hindu Philosophy, 'Yarna', the God of death is the God of ultimate justice, the most judicious celestial being, the begetter of 'Yudhishtira' or Dharma, and the trader of right path and the speaker of truth. Gandhi derived his philosophy of non-violence from the sources mentioned above, and it, in turn, helped to shape his thinking on socialism. As he has said,

"My socialism came out of my unshakable belief in non-violence. No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice, no matter where it occurred."

It would be instructive to present here a few examples from some of the above mentioned Indian sources to show how the ideals of social justice and equality have been very much a part of ancient Indian heritage:

1. Ishavasyamidam Sarvam yat kin Cha jagatyam jagat ten tyakten bhunjithaha ma grudhha Kasyaswid dharma

This Sanskrit verse from Ishoparishad means: All that is in the universe is pervaded by God. Renounce first, therefore, in order to enjoy. Convet not anybody's riches.

2. Yastu sarvani bhutani Aatmnyevanu Pashyati Sarvabhuteshu chaatmaanam tato na vijugupsate Yasmin sarvani bhutani aatma evabhuda Vijaanatha Tatra ku mohaha ka shokaha ckatvam anupashyatha

These two Sanskrit verse also from Ishoparishad broadly

mean:

He who always sees all creatures in his own self and sees himself in all creatures does not become impatient at anyone or anything, he is not bored or tired by anyone or anything. The person for whom his *own* self becomes all creature and who always sees (experiences) unity (of beings) is beyond attachment and grief.

3. Samauni Va aakutihi Samana hrudayaani Vaha Samaanmastu Vo mano yatha Vaha Susahasati

This Sanskrit verse also broadly means: Let our thoughts, plans, minds and heart be similar or same or equal, let them become truthful, auspicious, and beautiful.

4. Vishanumaya jaga vaishnavacha dharma Bhedaabhed to amangala

This part of Marathi "*bhajan*" means: Our (the devotees of Vishnu, the God) religion (faith) is that this whole diverse is pervaded by Vishnu, the God, and therefore it is unsuspecting (wrong) to regard one high and the other low, or to practice discrimination, or to make a distinction against some and in favour of others,

5. Harame hareko dekha

This part of Hindi '*bhajan*' means that I have seen Him, God in every individual.

6. Sabhi bhumi Gopalki

This part of Hindi '*bhujan*' means that the whole all land belongs to Gopal, Him, God.

Meaning of Socialism

Gandhi devoted his whole life for the service of people. To him political freedom was only a step towards the freedom of masses from poverty. He wanted to establish a sarvodaya Samaj, a welfare state, based on equality irrespective of caste, class and creed. He could realize that it was easier to remove the foreign rulers from India than to uproot the social evils from the society.

Man is a social being, his all sided development depends totally on the atmosphere of the society. But what was the condition of the society at that time? Hundreds of years of slavery had already sucked the life force of the society, what remained was only the ashes of the piles. The poverty stricken people were not in a condition to meet the primary needs of their life. The village industries had already been destroyed. From political point of view they were living in an unjust atmosphere having no freedom of their own. From religious point of view, having lost the real meaning of religion they embraced the dogmas and blind faith as their own religion life became stagnant and miserable. Gandhiji came forward with a new social order based on justice and equality to establish lost dignity of the people. he has rightly told,

"to me Political Power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life^[4].

Gandhiji was an optimist thinker for him the disease was chronic but curable. The deadening inequality, devouring

poverty, intolerable injustice and casteism were the *dangerous* various destroying the root of the society. Hence his first aim was to establish a classless society based on justice and equality. It was real socialism according to him.

Now the question is what Gandhiji meant by socialism. Is it similar to the socialism and communism existing in the western country? Gandhiji's idea of socialism has its uniqueness in itself. Like all other ideas, his views on socialism also have been deserted from the moral and spiritual principles. Gandhi sharply reacted to the brutal exploitation of man under capitalism. His deep concern for the down-trodden and exploitive humanity made him to condemn and denounce the exploitive nature of capitalist society. He championed the cause of the poor and semi-starved millions of India and wanted to provide them a decent and high standard of living. He used to judge any economic system or institution on the basis of common good or human welfare. He viewed the property relations from a moral point of view and said,

"I suggest that we are thieves in a way, If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use, and keep it, I steal it from somebody else..."

Thus Gandhi opposed capitalism purely on moral grounds. He realized the fact that change in the existing economic system is a necessary step for improving the living conditions of the poor. He wanted to put an end to the rule of the capital. He not only opposed the British imperialist for imposing poverty upon Indian masses, but also condemned the exploitation of the poor by the Indian Capitalists. It is his craze for the purity of means that prevented him to accept the forcible overthrow of capitalism. He observed:

"Socialism is as pure as crystal. It, therefore, requires crystal, like means so achieve it impure means result in an impure end. Hence prince and the peasant will not be equalized by cutting of the prince's head ... only truthful, non-violent and pure-hearted socialists will be able to establish a socialist society in India and the world^[5]."

Gandhi was influenced by the famous saying of Christ that man cannot live on bread alone. But it is also a fact that he cannot live without it either. However, superior the spirit may be than matter, the spirit manifests itself in man through his flesh. Though Gandhi pleaded for limitation of wants. He recognized that human life needs some amount of material goods for a decent life. He accepted the necessity of a certain degree of physical harmony and comfort and said, "No one has ever suggested that grinding pauperism can lead to anything else than moral degradation". But he opposed for an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them. At the same time, he denounced the enforced grinding poverty of the masses since it morally degrades them. Thus Gandhi regarded that possession of wealth and material things beyond certain limits would make man unhappy and enslavement instead of good life one should, therefore, limit his wants to the basic necessities of life.

Gandhi believed that capitalists and labourers depend on each other. For producing wealth cooperation among these two groups is essential. Gandhi stated that production of wealth is

a collective effort of community and society. It must be divided equally among its members. No one should be deprived of the basic necessities of life. He even suggested that basic needs of life must be free to everyone. No Nation or group of individuals should claim ownership on these resources. He argued:

“Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if everybody took enough himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world; there would be no man dying of starvation in this world”

Gandhi found a close relationship between economics. True economics for Gandhi, stands for ‘social justice’ and moral values. The economic without moral values is untrue. The aim of economics is to promote the good of all and provide good life to all. Thus he said:

“I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore sinful”

Gandhi never believed in the theory that “end justifies the means” rather for him pure end can only be attained by pure means. Truth and Ahimsa — these are the two means of socialism. Gandhi said, “Only truthful, non-violent and pure-hearted socialists will be able to establish a socialistic society in India and the world. Knowledge there is no country in the world which is purely socialistic without the means described above the existence of such a society is impossible [6].”

Truth and non-violence are the moral weapons for that can bring success to him. Gandhi’s antipathy to violence and his aversion to the coercive power of the state made him as an anti-communist. In spite of his admiration to the spirit of sacrifice of his communist friends, he could not agree with their method and said,

“They frankly believed in violence and all that is in its bosom”.

As a prophet of non-violence he believed that economic justice could be attained only through non-violent means. He wanted not to destroy capitalists, but only capitalism. He complained that Western socialists believed in the necessity of violence for enforcing socialist doctrine and said.

“... my socialism was natural to me and not adopted from any books. It came out of my unshakable belief in non-violence... unfortunately Western Socialists have, so far as, I know, believed in the necessity of violence for enforcing socialist doctrines [7].”

Gandhi frankly admitted -that he was not well acquainted with scientific socialism, but he regarded that is not applicable to our country in its original form. He wanted to solve the same problem which the scientific socialists are trying to solve, but his approach is always and only through unadulterated non-violence. “If communism comes without any violence it

would be acceptable to him”. He assumed that Western Socialism and communism are based on the conception that human nature is essentially selfish. Speaking on his conception of socialism, Gandhi said:

“..... our socialism or communism should be based on non-violence and on harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant [8].”

Conclusion

The above analysis helps to conclude that:-

1. Gandhi’s socialism is having a great impact of humanism.
2. It is heavily dependent on moral and ethical values.
3. Only ‘truth’ and ‘non-violence’ are the accepted means to achieve the socialist and best society.
4. Gandhi favors the preservation of individualism in a socialist society.
5. In his socialism ‘law of love’ is stronger than any other law. This law only can help to establish a peaceful and best society.
6. Gandhi was not in favor of nationalization, taxation or distribution of wealth of any individuals to others against his will.

These it is clear that Gandhi was a true socialist. No one can match Gandhi his concern for the weak and downtrodden of the society.

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